

Meins G.S. Coetsier

Towards a Theology of Prison Ministry

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Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Coetsier, Meins G. S.

Towards a Theology of Prison Ministry /

by Meins G. S. Coetsier.

Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin, Ireland

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Church work with prisoners.
2. Rahner, Karl, 1904-1984.
3. Catholic Church – Doctrines
4. Freedom (Theology).

This doctoral thesis in theology has been typeset with a typeface especially suitable for use in the humanities.

Jacket photograph (Hünfeld Prison) by Meins G. S. Coetsier.

Jacket design by Meins G. S. Coetsier

Printing by University Press

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To

You

Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin, Ireland

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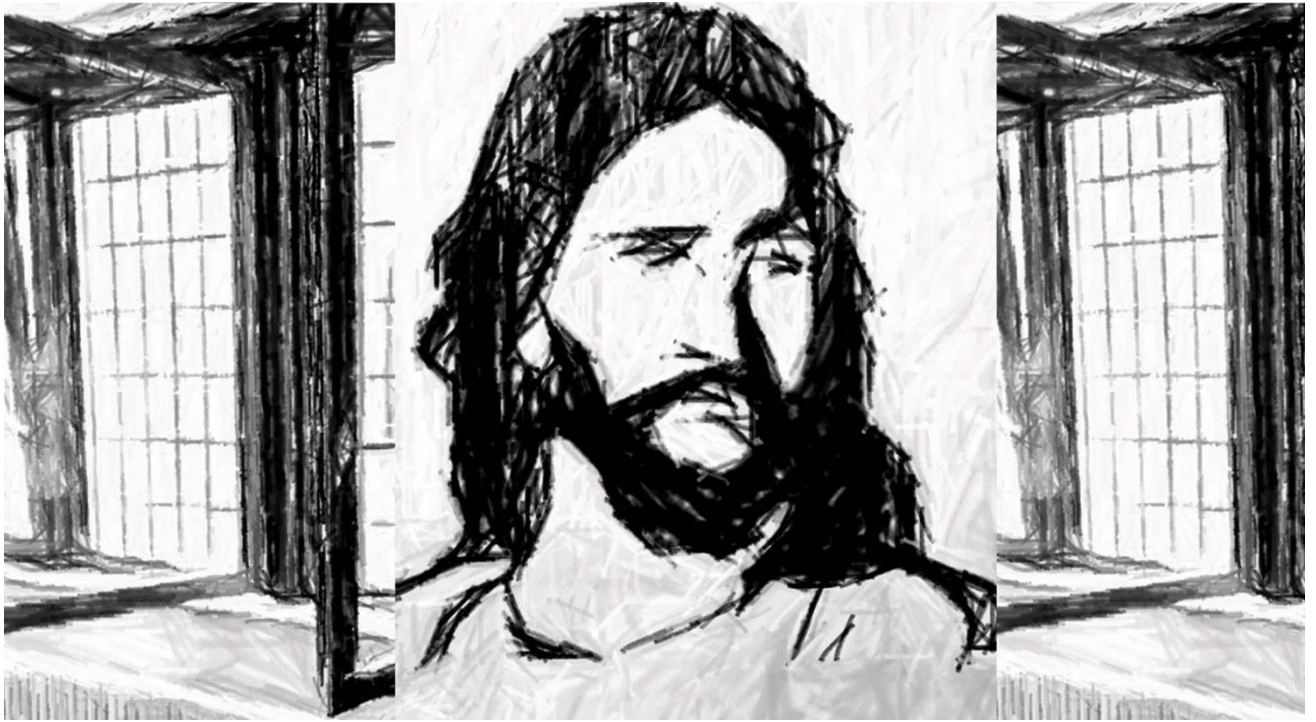
The research for this study was funded by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Fulda in Germany.



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin



KATHOLISCHE
KIRCHE
BISTUM FULDA



Portrait of Jesus in jail, made by a German prisoner (private collection).

Towards a Theology of Prison Ministry

A dissertation for the degree of
Doctor in Philosophy

2021

Meins G.S. Coetsier
Trinity College Dublin

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and that it is entirely my own work.

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Meins G.S. Coetsier

*“It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul.”*

Nelson Mandela’s empowering prison verse,
“Invictus” by William Ernest Henley

In Memory of
Rinus Ter Weijde (1920-2014)

SUMMARY

As incarcerated populations suffer from pervasive feelings of meaninglessness, the prison pastorate must have a working blueprint for dealing with the existential needs, pain, and suffering in the lives of prisoners. The thesis argues that Karl Rahner's views on prison ministry, although valuable and of significance in their context, are not adequate to deal with the more complex needs and demands of prison ministry in the twenty first century. A greater pastoral appreciation is necessary of the traumas, conflicts and suffering experienced by prisoners, prison pastors, prison staff and, indeed, in the wider world. The subjective world of the prisoner also needs to be addressed in an effort to engage with his/her innate human desire for meaning and fulfilment. Consequently, a more contemporary approach to prison ministry is required today which will draw on concrete experience of the above-mentioned traumas and conflicts and which will be sensitive to and inspired by the search for meaning as experienced by prisoners/facilitated by prison pastors. Such an approach leads to a theology based on empowerment that can be found through a creative and meaning-centred response to suffering, as illustrated by the lives of Viktor E. Frankl, Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, and Etty Hillesum.

The thesis presents a practical approach to the existential frustration encountered in prisons together with an analysis of how this may be addressed by engaging prisoners in a search for meaning. The study combines Rahner's pastoral theology with the timeless insights of Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn, to work out a *theology of empowerment* that supports both chaplains and inmates by confronting the oppression of incarceration and seeking to reverse its effects. Where Rahner's theology considered how prison pastors themselves are to find God in prison, the thesis thinks through how prison ministry is to be made fruitful and beneficial for those entrusted to our care: the prisoners. Reality for them is seriously different, especially when viewed through the lens of a prisoner. This was something Rahner's theology bypassed from the outset.

To move towards a more contemporary theology of prison ministry, the study has three main objectives: (i) to review and critique Rahner's theology of prison ministry; (ii) to identify areas where this theology fails to meet the pastoral challenges of today; and (iii) to develop an empowering theology of prison ministry. The situation faced by prisoners today in the German prison system and the suffering likely to be experienced by them is an important background to this thesis. The work will first offer an exposition of what a traditional theology of prison ministry based on Rahner's reflections has to offer in this situation and where it may fall short. It will then proceed to outline the elements of a theology of empowerment which it will be argued support a more contemporary and pastoral approach to prison ministry, one more able to meet the needs of prisoners today. Moreover, the fact that no extensive Rahner-study has been done before in relation to his theology of the prison pastorate, this thesis about his understanding of pastoral ministry in correctional facilities creates and advances the comprehension of a theological foundation for further scholarly analysis of a timely and imperative subject.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis in theology was funded by the Catholic Diocese of Fulda in Germany. I am extremely grateful to Bishop Dr. Michael Gerber, Bishop emeritus Heinz Josef Algermissen, auxiliary Bishop Professor Karl-Heinz Diez, Vicar General Christoph Steinert, Vicar General emeritus Professor Gerhard Stanke, and their team at the *Generalvikariat* for their faith and trust in me, and for their ongoing moral support. This thesis couldn't have been written without their generous assistance.

I would like to thank the Loyola Institute of Trinity College Dublin, in particular its former director, my PhD supervisor, Professor Fáinche Ryan. I am grateful for her continued guidance, her clarity of thought and her patience throughout the process of trying to intellectually grasp Karl Rahner and the rigour of his theological arguments in the midst of my daily work as a prison chaplain in two German prisons.

In the confusing, existentially tough, and challenging times of doing a part-time PhD overseas along with prison ministry, I have been blessed in both the emotional as well as intellectual support and in the knowledge and expertise I have received from those around me during the course of this thesis. In addition to Professor Ryan there are a number of people who deserve specific mention.

Particular thanks go to my predecessor, the prison chaplain Heinrich Schöning and to our colleagues Fr. Franz Hilfenhaus and Dr. Andreas Leipold at Hünfeld Prison for their encouragement, reflections and good humour which were most invigorating. Furthermore, meeting all of the staff at the JVA Hünfeld and JVA Fulda, and encountering *Supervisorin* (DGSv) Silvia Möller, the musicians Addi Haas and Tilo Zschorn, the prison chaplains Michael King and Michael Kullinat, and numerous prisoners from different countries from all over the world, was of enormous value to me in more respects than I can mention here.

I would like to thank Professor Cornelius J. Casey for his patience and good humour, for our regular discussions about Rahner's theology, and for his TCD classes which transmitted the kind of Christian hope that prison ministers need today. A heartfelt thanks go to Dr. Gabriel Slattery, Fr. Brendan Duddy SJ., and Professor Brendan Purcell, for their unparalleled lifelong support, and for their philosophical and theological knowledge, which they gave freely over the years, and above all for their unfailing enthusiasm and humour. I would especially like to thank Professor Purcell for his careful suggestions and his insightful book *Where is God in suffering?* (Dublin: Veritas, 2016).

David Tuohy, John Gahan and his wife, and Professor Ciaran McGlynn and his family have been an inspiration and strength to me over the years. Their willingness, kindness and generosity of care at difficult moments in my research career was encouraging and at times most refreshing.

At the turn of the new millennium, it was Professor David Bernard McLoughlin of Newman College (now Newman University, Birmingham) who introduced me to theology. Moreover, it was the Society of Jesus in my life, the ‘men of Loyola,’ that opened up to me a new scholarly and intellectual world in philosophical and theological thought. This is the moment to specially thank all of my teachers and companions on the academic-spiritual pathway: Professor Jim Corkery, Professor Raymond Moloney, Professor Finbarr Clancy, Professor Bill Mathews, Professor James (Séamus) Murphy, Professor Fergal Brenner, Professor Kevin O’Higgins, Bishop Alan McGuckian, Professor Michael Hurley (co-founder, Irish School of Ecumenics), Professor Cathal Doherty, Fr. Brendan Comerford, Fr. Laurence Murphy, Fr. Timothy Hamilton, Dr. Joe Munitz, Dr. Brian O’Leary, among others. The love of learning they evoked in me, transformed my life’s journey significantly.

The conversations with Dr. Thomas Brenner allowed me to reconsider my theological arguments from a German ecumenical perspective, which simultaneously developed my Christological understanding of prison ministry. The library of the Fulda Faculty of Theology gave me free and full access to Karl Rahner’s works in the original German. A special thank-you must go to Fr. Markus Blümel, Fr. Thomas Meyer, Deacon Michael Huf, and to Professor Richard Hartmann, who kindly agreed, after my colloquium in Fulda, to give me their support at the start of my PhD research.

I would like to thank my friends and colleagues at home and abroad for their friendship and intellectual camaraderie over the years – particularly Gundel-Maria Busse, Dr. Wolfgang Hartmann, Sr. Mary Lalor, Sr. Michele O’Kelly, Sr. Paula Tielemans, Kenneth McCabe, Manuel Wijffels, Dr. Guido Suurmeijer, Dr. Jan Walstra, Dr. Joachim Yesaya, Dr. Johannes Corrodi-Katzenstein, Dr. Marja Clement, Dr. Denise Decosta, Dr. Joe McCarroll, Professor Klaas Smelik, Professor Jurjen Wiersma, Professor Ronald Commers, Professor Pierre Bühler, Professor David Walsh, Rev. Dr. Victoria Campbell, the Fulda community of deacons with Dr. Stefan Ohnesorg, Thiemo Glomb, Andreas Müller, Ludwig Wagner, and others who should have been mentioned here.

I would also like to thank my wife Dorothea, our kids and my family who were there at the beginning of the thesis and who will continue to support me, even after this thesis – finally published and bound – has landed on one of those unknown long forgotten dusty bookshelves at the back of Trinity library. Go raibh maith agat, a Dhia – *Dank sei Gott*.

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| CHRONOLOGY | | |
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The Second Vatican Council

- VCII* *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P.
GS *Gaudium et Spes*
RRGS “The Redaction and Reception of *Gaudium et Spes*: Tensions within the Majority at Vatican II,” by Joseph A. Komonchak

Karl Rahner

- MG, 3* *Mission and Grace: Essays in Pastoral Theology, Volume 3*, tr. Cecily Hastings
SG *Sendung und Gnade: Beiträge zur Pastoraltheologie*
SW *Sämtliche Werke*, eds. Karl-Rahner-Stiftung: Karl Lehmann, Johann Baptist Metz, Albert Raffelt, Herbert Vorgrimler and Andreas R. Batlogg SJ.
- | | | | |
|------------------|---|------------------|--|
| <i>SW, 4</i> | <i>Hörer des Wortes</i> | <i>SW, 22/1b</i> | <i>Dogmatik nach dem Konzil Ib</i> |
| <i>SW, 5/1</i> | <i>De Gratia Christi</i> | <i>SW, 22/2</i> | <i>Dogmatik nach dem Konzil II</i> |
| <i>SW, 8</i> | <i>Der Mensch in der Schöpfung</i> | <i>SW, 23</i> | <i>Glaube im Alltag</i> |
| <i>SW, 9</i> | <i>Maria, Mutter des Herrn</i> | <i>SW, 24/1</i> | <i>Das Konzil in der Ortskirche I</i> |
| <i>SW, 10</i> | <i>Kirche in den Herausforderungen der Zeit</i> | <i>SW, 24/2</i> | <i>Das Konzil in der Ortskirche II</i> |
| | | <i>SW, 25</i> | <i>Erneuerung des Ordenslebens</i> |
| <i>SW, 12</i> | <i>Menschsein und Menschwerdung Gottes</i> | <i>SW, 26</i> | <i>Grundkurs des Glaubens</i> |
| | | <i>SW, 27</i> | <i>Einheit in Vielfalt</i> |
| <i>SW, 13</i> | <i>Ignatianischer Geist</i> | <i>SW, 28</i> | <i>Christentum in Gesellschaft</i> |
| <i>SW, 14</i> | <i>Christliches Leben</i> | <i>SW, 30</i> | <i>Anstöße systematischer</i> |
| <i>SW, 16</i> | <i>Kirchliche Erneuerung</i> | | <i>Theologie</i> |
| <i>SW, 17/1</i> | <i>Enzyklopädische Theologie I</i> | <i>SW, 31</i> | <i>Im Gespräch über Kirche und</i> |
| <i>SW, 17/2</i> | <i>Enzyklopädische Theologie II</i> | | <i>Gesellschaft</i> |
| <i>SW, 19</i> | <i>Selbstvollzug der Kirche</i> | <i>SW, 32/1</i> | <i>Ergänzungen</i> |
| <i>SW, 21/2</i> | <i>Das Zweite Vatikanum II</i> | <i>SW, 32/2</i> | <i>Register</i> |
| <i>SW, 22/1a</i> | <i>Dogmatik nach dem Konzil Ia</i> | | |

Prison Pastors from a German-Speaking Context

- BWS* *Beyond the Walls of Separation: Christian Faith and Ministry in Prison*, by Tobias Brandner
- GG* *Gottesbegegnungen im Gefängnis: Eine praktische Theologie der Gefangenen-seelsorge*, by Tobias Brandner
- VVV* *Verknackt, vergittert, vergessen – Ein Gefängnispfarrer erzählt*, by Rainer Dabrowski
- HBG* *Die Haftfalle: Begegnungen im Gefängnis*, by Christine Hubka
- DESL* *Denen, die im Elend leben – seine Liebe. Eindrücke aus dem Gefängnis*, ed. Georg-D. Menke
- BG* *Bibliographie Gefängnisseelsorge: Studien und Materialien zum Straf- und Maßregelvollzug*, by Peter Rassow

Viktor E. Frankl

- MSM* *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*
- TJL* *Trotzdem Ja zum Leben sagen: Ein Psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager*
- ZB* *De zin van het bestaan: Een psycholoog beleeft het concentratiekamp & een inleiding tot de logotherapie*, tr. Liesbeth Swildens

Etty Hillesum

- Het Werk* *Het Werk*, eds. Klaas A.D. Smelik, Gideon Lodders and Rob Tempelaars
- E.T.* *Etty: The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1941–1943*, ed. Klaas A.D. Smelik, tr. Arnold J. Pomerans

Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn

- GA, 1* *The Gulag Archipelago Volume 1: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*
- GA, 2* *The Gulag Archipelago Volume 2: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*
- GA, 3* *The Gulag Archipelago Volume 3: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*

Dorothee Sölle

GPOP “God’s Pain and Our Pain,” in: *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutiérrez*, eds. Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

DBW 8 *Widerstand und Ergebung*, Vol. 8, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*, 17 Vols., eds. Eberhard Bethge, et al.

DBW 16 *Konspiration und Haft 1940–1945*, Vol. 16, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*, 17 Vols., eds. Eberhard Bethge, et al.

DBWE 8 *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Vol. 8, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, 17 Vols., ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr.

DBWE 16 *Conspiracy and Imprisonment: 1940–1945*, Vol. 16, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, 17 Vols., ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr.

LPP *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, tr. Reginald H. Fuller, Frank Clark et al; additional material by John Bowden

Other Sources

ATAL *A Theological Aesthetics of Liberation: God, Art, and the Social Outcasts*, by Vicente Chong

HDWH “How Deep Are the Well-springs of Hope?”, in: *Doctrine & Life: Religious Life Review*, by Cornelius J. Casey

KGH *Katholische Gefängnisseelsorge in Hessen: Grundlagen Arbeitsweisen Alltagspraxis*, ed. Michael Kullinat

LR *Logotherapy Revisited: Review of the Tenets of Viktor E. Frankl’s Logotherapy*, by Maria Marshall and Edward Marshall

SGKS *Seelsorge im Gefängnis, Norddeutsche Konferenz der katholischen Seelsorger bei den Justizvollzugsanstalten*, eds. Heinz-Bernd Wolters, et al.

WWSM *Würde: Was uns stark macht – als Einzelne und als Gesellschaft*, by Gerald Hüther

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Karl Rahner presented his theology of the prison pastorate within the theological self-understanding and the narrow confines of the Catholic priesthood in the 1950s. Greater pastoral appreciation is necessary, however, for today's ministry and charitable work of lay people in prisons as well as for the role prisoners play as contributors in their own right to the process of rehabilitation. The argument being made in this thesis is that Rahner's views on prison ministry, although valuable and of significance in their context, are not adequate to deal with the more complex needs and demands of prison ministry in the twenty first century. Since no extensive study of Rahner's understanding of prison ministry in correctional facilities has been undertaken before, the thesis lays a theological foundation for further scholarly analysis and advances our existing knowledge of a timely and imperative subject.¹

Rahner's theology of the prison pastorate is rooted in his theological anthropology. It has a lot to offer, and continues to be a good resource. Yet, the thesis argues that a greater pastoral awareness is needed of the traumas, conflicts and suffering experienced by prisoners, prison pastors, prison staff and, indeed, in the wider world. The subjective world of the prisoner, something Rahner omits to mention, also needs to be addressed in an effort to engage with his/her innate human desire for meaning and fulfilment. The research aim of this study determines the contemporary relevance of Rahner's theological views on prison ministry primarily in the German-speaking context.² It will set

¹ As far as I am aware, Rahner's contribution "Gefängnisseelsorge" ("The prison pastorate") has been occasionally referred to but not studied or analysed in detail. See the works of: Billy Farrell, "The Pastoral Care of Prisoners," *The Furrow* Vol. 30, No. 3 (Mar., 1979): 168-173 [with a reference to Rahner on p. 173]; Wolfgang Hartmann, *Existenzielle Verantwortungsethik: eine moraltheologische Denkform als Ansatz in den theologisch-ethischen Entwürfen von Karl Rahner und Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005) [with a reference to Rahner's *Gefängnisseelsorge* on p. 258]; Paul Eppe, *Karl Rahner zwischen Philosophie und Theologie* (Münster: LIT Verlag 2008) [with a reference to Rahner's *Gefängnisseelsorge* on p. 189]; Andrew Skotnicki, *The Last Judgment: Christian Ethics in a Legal Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016) [with a reference to Rahner's "The Prison Pastorate" on p. 6].

² In this thesis, I speak of 'the prison pastorate,' of 'prison ministry' and 'prison chaplaincy.' These terms refer to the emotional, social and spiritual support in prisons that can be subheaded under the wider category of 'pastoral ministry,' 'pastoral care,' and 'spiritual care' (where 'pastoral' is more broad, 'spiritual' is more specific). In clarifying the wider usage of terms in this study, it is important to mention that "pastor," "pastoral" and "pastorate" are mainly used in relation to Rahner's theological understanding of the "Prison Pastorate." A pastor, in Rahner's sense of the word, is an "ordained priest," a "man," and a "leader" of a Catholic congregation. A person who gives advice and counsel, and maintains a careful watch for the spiritual needs of his people. Pastors in Rahner's understanding are to act like "shepherds" by caring for the flock, and this care includes teaching (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1; 1 Pet. 5:2). The term "chaplaincy" or "chaplain" is used in this thesis in a more modern institutional sense, referring to "a cleric" (such as a minister, priest, pastor, rabbi, or imam), or "a lay representative" of a religious tradition, who is attached to a secular institution such as a prison, hospital or military unit. It refers to men and women, representatives of the Christian faith as

out to explore the foundations of his reflections based on his appeal that we must “read the words of Christ, his incredible, provocative, thrilling words” in Matthew 25: 34-40: “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was in prison, and you came to see me.”

Rahner cited this passage, among his four thousand books and articles, in a relatively small and unnoticed piece on “The Prison Pastorate” (*Gefängnisseelsorge*) that was eventually published in 1966 in Volume 3 of the collected works *Mission and Grace (Sendung und Gnade: Beiträge zur Pastoraltheologie)*. As a lecture and meditation it served as the beginning of a meeting of prison pastors in Austria in the late 1950s. However, its spiritual intensity and depth of theological thought have provided essential religious and ecumenical statements and universal insights for pastoral care in general up to this day.

The study examines questions that arise from Rahner’s theological treatise on Matthew 25, his central Scripture meditation, and from his theoretical views on “finding Christ” and on “finding ourselves” in the context of reformatory experience. Prison ministry in the twenty-first century, however, discloses a more practical and nuanced light. It confronts us with the immanent and concrete limitations of the text that presents his one writing on the topic. A central part of the argument is that significant pastoral aspects of prison ministry have been disregarded by Rahner. Consequently, a more contemporary approach to prison ministry, one which isn’t solely based on Matthew 25, is required today which will draw on concrete prison experience of traumas and conflicts and which will be sensitive to and inspired by the search for meaning as experienced by prisoners.

To move towards a more contemporary theology of prison ministry, the study has three main objectives: (i) to review and critique Rahner’s theology of prison ministry; (ii) to identify areas where this theology fails to meet the pastoral challenges of today; and (iii) to develop an empowering theology of prison ministry. The situation faced by prisoners today in the German prison system and the suffering likely to be experienced by them is an important background to this thesis. The work will first offer an exposition of what a traditional theology of prison ministry based on Rahner’s

well as to people of other religions or philosophical traditions. In recent times, lay people can receive, e.g., professional training in prison chaplaincy. The term “ministry” or “minister” (Latin: “servant”, “attendant”), however, is broader and represents the persons who are authorised to perform functions (e.g., leading services such as weddings, baptisms or funerals); and who provide spiritual guidance to the community. A German prison minister, for instance, who visits the inmates on a weekly basis may not necessarily be the official chaplain of that prison. So roughly said: “chaplain” refers to the position, “minister” to the direct performance, and “pastor” to the leading of the flock.

reflections has to offer in this situation and where it may fall short. It will then examine the perspectives of one-time prisoners Viktor Frankl, Eddy Hillesum and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and their search for meaning. From there it will proceed to outline the elements of a theology of empowerment which it will be argued support a more contemporary and pastoral approach to prison ministry, one more able to meet the needs of prisoners today. It also demonstrates that the process of the inmates' rehabilitation and reinstatement in society must arguably include the search for a theology of prison ministry that strengthens (*Stärkung*) and defends the dignity (*Würde*) of the prisoners in their pain and alienation – that is, a theology of healing and hope.

Again, the thesis shows that Rahner's work is valuable and of significance on its own terms, but limited in confrontation with the complicated development of our rapidly changing secular European communities. The questions as to how and why this research project is important, then, evolve from an urgent desire to respond to the human dilemmas of today's conflicts and traumas experienced by both prisoners and those working in the field. Chaplains have to find new and meaningful ways of strengthening and communicating with the inmates, with the prison staff, and with the world outside the prison walls. Accordingly, we reflect on Rahner's theological anthropology, the anthropology of *Gaudium et Spes*, his notion of the anonymous Christian, and on "The Prison Pastorate."

Rahner's views on the human person in the context of prison ministry are significant to the research topic in the sense that they lay the theoretical foundation for further reflections on what is a challenging, existential and at times horrific pastoral reality. The study also relates to the existing theories and chaplaincy testimonials of prison realities in the German-speaking world. It takes seriously into account the actual pastoral meeting with the incarcerated as well as the encounter with God's pain and God's helplessness in prisons.

The work consists of five chapters. The first gives an overview of Rahner's theological anthropology, of his influence on *Gaudium et Spes* and of his notion of the anonymous Christian. Chapter Two attempts a careful analysis and description of Rahner's lecture-meditation on "The Prison Pastorate." The third chapter identifies the possible limitations and responds to Rahner's views on prison ministry with the pastoral perspectives of prison ministers in the field. Chapter Four examines the perspective of prisoners and their human needs during confinement, focusing on the inmate's search for meaning as demonstrated in the works of Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn. The final chapter will go beyond Rahner with these pastoral experiences and insights of those in prison. It will recapture the situation of prisoners today and the need for a theology of empowerment, articulating what a contemporary ministry for the incarcerated in the German context might look like by focusing

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

on the seven elements of a theology of empowerment (*Theologie der Stärkung*): dignity, meaning, transformation, liberation, creativity, hope, and community.

The thesis demonstrates the theological challenge and value of engagement with the prison system. The research will contribute, on the one hand, to the relevant Rahner literature and to the debates concerning his theological anthropology. On the other hand, it will enrich the scholarly literature on the theology of prison ministry, especially within the European context. Since no detailed scholarship has previously been done on Rahner's "The Prison Pastorate," it should be particularly relevant and of importance to the experts in the field – that is, to prison chaplains and pastoral theologians alike.

Rahner's theological manuscripts in the original German are linguistically profound, highly nuanced and thoughtfully laid out. It is for this reason, having analysed Rahner from within his own language, that we will give for each translated English citation the original script of the *Sämtliche Werke* in the footnotes. The original German of the pastoral accounts of the prison ministers in the field can also be found in the footnotes; the same applies for the Dutch and German references of the works of Hillesum and Frankl. If and where there is a significant difference in translation, the reader will be alerted.

CHAPTER ONE

KARL RAHNER'S ANTHROPOLOGY AND *GAUDIUM ET SPES*

Introduction

This chapter will explore the theological anthropology of Karl Rahner, which offers a careful analysis of the human person.¹ It will also investigate *Gaudium et Spes* in the context of Rahner's role as strategic contributor and thinker in the theological deliberations before and during the Second Vatican Council.² This is particularly relevant in tracing the underlying theological foundations of his reflections on the prison pastorate, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

Rahner's theological views are grounded in his understanding of the person of Jesus Christ.³ In his theological anthropology Rahner explores the mystery of the human person in light of the "divine self-communication" (*die Selbstmitteilung Gottes*) through Christ and the Spirit. Our aim is to show how and in what way Rahner's theology is grounded by his engagement in thinking about Christ. Rahner is convinced that we best speak of God and so of Christ by engaging in anthropology. This means that the question of God, while a theological one "points directly and self-evidently to

¹ For Texts in the original German: *Karl Rahner Sämtliche Werke*. Herausgeber: Karl-Rahner-Stiftung unter Leitung von Karl Lehmann, Johann Baptist Metz, Albert Raffelt, Herbert Vorgrimler (†) und Andreas R. Batlogg SJ. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1995-2018. Henceforth abbreviated: "SW." For "theological anthropology" (*theologische Anthropologie*) in the collected works see esp.: SW, 8 (*Der Mensch in der Schöpfung*): 4 f., 9, 11 f., 16 f., 22 f., 24, 31, 35, 42 f., 44, 130-511, 525, 530; SW, 12 (*Menschsein und Menschwerdung Gottes*): 113 f., 311 f., 319, 353-488; SW, 13 (*Ignatianischer Geist*): 280-282; SW, 14 (*Christliches Leben*): 103 f.; SW, 17/1 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie I*): 120-129; SW, 17/2 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie II*): 901-908; SW, 19 (*Selbstvollzug der Kirche*): 181-196; SW, 22/2 (*Dogmatik nach dem Konzil II*): 3-204, 799; SW, 30 (*Anstöße systematischer Theologie*): 70 f., 111 f., 179 f., 371-507, 550, 604, 635-636, 641 f. [Cf. SW, 32/2 (*Register: Anthropologie, Theologische A.*)]

² Johann Baptist Metz is convinced that "Karl Rahner has renewed the face of our theology. Nothing is quite as it was before him. [...] Even those who criticize him or reject him still live on his insights, his acute and sensitive perceptions in the world of life and faith." Cf. Johann Baptist Metz, "Learning and Teaching the Faith. A Thanksgiving to Karl Rahner," in: Herbert Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner: An Introduction to his Life and Thought* (London: SCM Press, 1986).

³ For Rahner's "consciousness of Christ" cf. Chapter Seven, "Some Catholic Theologians," in: Raymond Moloney, *Knowledge of Christ: Problems in Theology* (London/New York, NY: Continuum, 1999), 82-106, esp. 82-86. Moloney's study traces "the shifting opinions on the knowledge of Christ in the New Testament and medieval periods—a period during which there was a consensus against ignorance in Christ." Moloney examines how thinkers such as Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Bernard Lonergan, "have questioned this consensus."

anthropology as the horizon and presupposition of theology.”⁴

The research aim of this first chapter is to understand the basis of Rahner's ideas. The study is divided accordingly into three parts:

- (i) Karl Rahner's Theological Anthropology
- (ii) The Anthropology of *Gaudium et Spes*
- (iii) Anonymous Christianity

No one of these three steps can be omitted if we want to have a good foundation for setting up a basic framework for our further analysis of Rahner's pastoral insights on prison ministry in the following three chapters.

1.1. Karl Rahner's Theological Anthropology

1.1.1. Theological Anthropology: *Hearer of the Word (Hörer des Wortes)*

Why Karl Rahner on prison ministry? Karl Rahner, SJ (1904-1984) is the person, together with Bernard Lonergan, SJ (1904-1984),⁵ who is usually credited with 'the turn to the subject' in Catholic theological thought.⁶ With a clear anthropological vision, he is considered as one of the most

⁴ See Anton Losinger, *The Anthropological Turn: The Human Orientation of Karl Rahner* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2000).

⁵ Cf. Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1978 [1958]); *Method in Theology* (New York, NY: Seabury Paperback edition, 1979).

⁶ The modern "turn to the subject" has inspired theological reflection and pastoral action ever since (e.g., liberation theology) and continues to shape theology today. Karl Rahner can be located in relation to philosophical trends from Descartes (*Cogito ergo Sum*) and Immanuel Kant (*Copernican Revolution*) onwards where the "turn to the subject" originated. A lot of Rahner's ideas and categories seem to be based on Kant. Rahner drew from contemporary philosophical thinkers of his time. Theology never takes place in a vacuum but always in relation to (and sometimes in opposition with) the thinking of one's intellectual and cultural world. This is why our study in the last two chapters relies on the thinking of writers/philosophers/theologians who have been through a prison experience themselves. For a careful study of the influence of Kant on Rahner see Karen Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), esp. Chapter Three "Transcendental," 32-48. Kilby analyses Rahner's "Transcendental arguments" and writes: "One of the ways in which the word transcendental is used of Rahner [...] is to point to a link to the thought of Immanuel Kant and the approach to philosophy inaugurated by Kant" (p.37). For Immanuel Kant, see especially *Critique of Judgment, Including the First Introduction*, tr. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis/Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987); *Critique of Practical Reason*, tr. Mary Gregor, (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015); *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. Werner S. Pluhar, (Cambridge: Hackett publishing Company, 1996). See also Otto Muck, "Thomas – Kant – Maréchal: Karl Rahners transzendente Methode," in: Harald Schöndorf (ed.), *Die Philosophischen Quellen der Theologie Karl Rahners* (Quaestiones disputatae 213) (Freiburg: Herder 2005), 31-56. Losinger, *The*

significant Catholic theologians of the 20th century because he focuses on the concrete experiences of human beings of his time.⁷ In *Knowledge of Christ: Problems in Theology*, Raymond Moloney SJ writes,

The story of our subject in the contemporary period begins with the work of Karl Rahner, since he was the one within Catholic theology whose challenge to the medieval synthesis on the topic has had the greatest impact [...] *The fundamental Rahnerian principle is the experience of grace offered to every human being in the depths of one's own consciousness.* This principle helped to validate the notion of experience, on which much of the truth in modernism was centred. *It also gave Rahner his basic analogy for approaching the knowledge and consciousness of Christ.*⁸

With his focus on the “knowledge and consciousness of Christ,”⁹ Rahner holds the conviction that humans are questioning and hearing creatures: beings who are constituted to receive God’s self-communication. Moloney explains that Rahner’s “whole Christology is sometimes described as a ‘consciousness Christology.’”¹⁰ That is to say, as conscious persons in the world, we can hear and know about God – about “Christ” – because our human nature is orientated towards the divine. Moreover, as “hearer of the Word” (*Hörer des Wortes*) we are free, Rahner believes, to respond reflectively to this historical process of divine-human communication.

Anthropological Turn: The Human Orientation of Karl Rahner, 12. See also John R. Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity: Basic Christian Anthropology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991); Johann Baptist Metz, *Poverty of Spirit* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998).

⁷ According to Charles H. Henkey, Rahner is “a scrupulously correct theologian. He refers to his writings as ‘contributions’; in fact, they are always thought-provoking and at times offer startlingly new insights.” See Charles H. Henkey, Review of “Karl Rahner, SJ, *Sendung und Gnade: Beiträge zur Pastoraltheologie* (Innsbruck-Vienna-Munich: Tyrolia, 1959), pp. 561,” in: *Theological Studies*, 21.3 (1960): 487-490, esp. 489. Cf. Pádraic Conway and Fáinche Ryan (eds.), *Karl Rahner: Theologian for the Twenty-first Century* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010). Karen Kilby, *The SPCK Introduction to Karl Rahner: A Brief Introduction*. London: SPCK Publishing, 2007 [1997]. Philip Endean, *Karl Rahner: Spiritual Writings*, Modern Spiritual Masters Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005). William V. Dych, *Karl Rahner*, Series Outstanding Christian Thinkers (London/New York, NY: Continuum, 2000 [1992]). Robert Kress, *A Rahner Handbook* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982). Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons (eds.), *Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews 1965-1982* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1986).

⁸ Moloney, *Knowledge of Christ: Problems in Theology*, 82 [*italics my emphasis*].

⁹ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 83. Moloney points to one of the first conclusions from Rahner’s approach that “consciousness is multi-layered.” He continues: “By this statement he [Rahner] had in mind, in the first instance, the two levels of consciousness just distinguished. The point also provided Rahner with a basis for giving new life to an observation already found in the medieval theologians, and one that is really central to the entire debate, namely that a person might know something on one level while being ignorant of it on another. This realization was also in line with the findings of another discipline altogether, namely the levels of the conscious and subconscious as studied in empirical psychology.”

1.1.1.1. *Historical Word of God (geschichtliches Wort Gottes)*

In his work “Hearer of the Word” (*Hörer des Wortes*), Rahner draws on Thomas Aquinas and his understanding of the human soul (see Aquinas’ commentary on Aristotle’s *De Anima*).¹¹ For Rahner, it follows that persons are capable of hearing and receiving God’s word, while maintaining the fundamental option to freely accept or reject the self-communication of God.¹² Of course Rahner is aware that there can be various biological factors and cultural influences that sway personal decisions (e.g., the influence of crime and so on, as we will see in the next chapters).¹³ Karl Rahner examines the foundations of theology with a “sentire cum ecclesia” and strongly focuses on the “hearer of the Word.” He describes human beings in their “openness to a meaning from history” (*Offenheit für eine Sinnzusage aus der Geschichte*) – that is, *in* the human word. Rahner speaks of an anthropological openness of human consciousness that receives and contains “the word of revelation” (*das Wort der Offenbarung Gottes*).¹⁴ For him, the interaction between anthropology and theology is indispensable.¹⁵ He noticed that all sciences are principally *anthropological*, that is to say they have their origin in human enquiry.¹⁶

Theology, however, is an exception. All disciplines, independent of their focus, belong to the “things” of the human mind (*Dinge im Geiste des Menschen*).¹⁷ Theology alone exists because there is a “historical Word of God” (*geschichtliches Wort Gottes – Logos Gottes*) that addresses humans directly. Theology has its origin in revelation which is God’s self-communication.¹⁸ Thus, Rahner

¹¹ *SW*, 4 (*Hörer des Wortes*). See also Thomas Aquinas, *A Commentary on Aristotle’s ‘de Anima’* (*Yale Library of Medieval Philosophy*), tr. Robert Pasnau (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999); *Ibidem, Aristotle’s De Anima with the Commentary of St. Thomas Aquinas*, tr. Kenelm Foster, O.P., and Sylvester Humphries, O.P. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1951). Linus Kpalap, “Rahner and Lonergan on the commitment to St. Thomas Aquinas,” *Verbum Analecta Neolatina*, VI/2 (2014): 435-449.

¹² *SW*, 4 (*Hörer des Wortes*).

¹³ *Ibid.* Cf. Jennifer E. Beste, “Karl Rahner’s Theological Anthropology: The Role of Freedom and Grace in the Construction of the Human Self,” in: *God and the Victim: Traumatic Intrusions on Grace and Freedom* (Oxford: University Press, 2007), 17-36.

¹⁴ See the German description of Volume *SW*, 4 (*Hörer des Wortes*).

¹⁵ Losinger, *The Anthropological Turn: The Human Orientation of Karl Rahner*, 12.

¹⁶ See Patrick Burke, *Reinterpreting Rahner: A Critical Study of His Major Themes* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2002). A key to understanding Rahner’s wide-ranging theological anthropology is what Burke calls a “‘dialectical analogy’ – a unifying concept that helps Rahner hold in distinction the traditional antinomies of Christian thought: God and the world, spirit and matter, grace and nature.” In his study, Burke examines “the dialectic of each of the major themes” of Rahner’s theological anthropology, showing that “it is an indispensable key” to his thought. Burke also exposes “a very real tension within the system that threatens the complex balance of Rahner’s theological vision.”

¹⁷ *SW*, 4 (*Hörer des Wortes*): 259.

¹⁸ *SW*, 4 (*Hörer des Wortes*): 259. Cf. in this Chapter, 1.2.2. “Recognising Christ our Brother in the Persons of all Men

uses anthropology to point beyond itself, beyond the scope of the human to God, to the Transcendent, to *the Other*.¹⁹ This point will become evident in Chapter Four in relation to what Frankl and, in particular, Hillesum and Solzhenitsyn are also trying to do in their writing – the difference being they are doing it from within the concrete lived experience of being imprisoned. They are, in Rahner's words, being addressed by the "historical Word of God" through writing and through their personal search for meaning.²⁰

1.1.1.2. A Twofold Moment

Karl Rahner observes an overall dynamic with this "historical Word of God," a "twofold moment" (*doppelter Moment*) that can be distinguished as: (i) "the simple listening" (*das einfache Hören*) to the message of God and; (ii) the "systematic elaboration" of what has been "heard" (*systematische Erarbeitung des Gehörten*).²¹ In a certain sense, the "heard message of God" (*die gehörte Botschaft Gottes*) for Rahner becomes gradually a human "thing" (*Sache*) on which we are cognitively able to reflect.²² The consequence of such a theological enterprise, as we will see in Chapter Two, is a self-motivated movement and responsibility toward the other (e.g., finding Christ in prisoners).

Rahner's theological anthropology shows that the human person as "hearer of the Word" (*Hörer des Wortes*) is inclined to reflect and reach out toward the other, toward the infinite, through love which itself is "rooted in God's self-giving."²³ For Rahner, theological anthropology is not merely a part of the content of theology.²⁴ There is a "theological" anthropology 'built into' the fabric of theology, in

and Women." [GS 17. VCII, 179. Par. 17, "De praestantia libertatis."]

¹⁹ For the 'Other' in Karl Rahner's writings see Sylvie Avakian, *The 'Other' in Karl Rahner's Transcendental Theology and George Khodr's Spiritual Theology: Within the Near Eastern Context*, Internationale Theologie / International Theology, Band 16, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012). Avakian's study shows that "salvation" is "possible for the 'Other' – Christ is the horizon of every human yearning for love and freedom. The 'Other' in this sense is the symbol for divine presence in one's life. It is the very recognition of God, seeing God in the face of the 'Other.'"

²⁰ See Geoffrey Kelly (ed.), *Karl Rahner: Theologian of the Graced Search for Meaning* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992).

²¹ *SW*, 4 (*Hörer des Wortes*): 259.

²² *SW*, 4 (*Hörer des Wortes*): 259-260.

²³ Ingvild Røsok, "The Reality of Love: A Critical and Constructive Analysis of Karl Rahner's Theology of Love" (PhD Dissertation, MF Norwegian School of Theology, 2015), 17, 25, 29, 31, 42-61, esp. 180. Retrieved online from: Det teologiske Menighetsfakultet (MF Norwegian School of Theology) [<http://www.mf.no/en>]. Cf. Ingvild Røsok, *The Reality of Love* (Eugen, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2018). Michael Purcell, *Mystery and Method: The Other in Rahner & Levinas* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1998).

²⁴ *SW*, 4 (*Hörer des Wortes*): 261: Es gibt somit eine theologische Anthropologie: nicht bloß in dem eigentlichen und strengen Sinn, daß Gott selbst in seinem Logos dem Menschen die letzte Struktur seines eigenen menschlichen Wesens erschließt, so daß also eine theologische Anthropologie ein Stück des *Inhalts* der Theologie ist sondern [...]

the sense that our “unreflective human self-understanding” (*unreflektiertes Selbstverständnis des Menschen*) is the condition and our consciousness the *sensorium* of the possibility of theology itself.²⁵ For him, the hearing of God’s “Word” and the acceptance of divine “revelation” presupposes a “definite elementary constitution of the human person” (*bestimmte Verfassung des Menschen*) itself.²⁶

This means that in so far as we are dealing “with humans” (*vom Menschen*), Rahner argues, we can speak of “an anthropology.”²⁷ It is a “theological” anthropology insofar as we understand the human person as the being who, in his/her own history, “has to listen freely to the possible message of the free God.”²⁸ Finally, it is a “fundamental theological” anthropology insofar as “this self-understanding” that human beings have of themselves is “the prerequisite for being able to hear factual theology at all.”²⁹ Subsequently, he describes a historical process of anthropological receptivity.

1.1.2. *Theological Anthropology: Historical Perspectives*³⁰

If one places Rahner’s theological anthropology in a more “historical” (*geschichtliches*) perspective, one could argue that humans are free to receive God’s revelation *within* particular cultural and historical contexts. The Word of God, in order to be heard intelligently, is a *human* word in history. As we have seen this presupposes, according to Rahner, the particular constitution of the human person. He thus argues that theology must presuppose a “theological” anthropology.³¹ Rahner presents four significant historical phases which now have an “irreplaceable dwelling in theology” (*unübersetzbaren Platz in der Theologie*): the biblical revelation of God, patristic theology, medieval theology, and the modern period.

²⁵ *SW*, 4 (*Hörer des Wortes*): 261: [E]s gibt auch eine “theologische” Anthropologie in dem Sinn, daß ein – wenn auch naives – unreflexes Selbstverständnis des Menschen die Bedingung der Möglichkeit von Theologie selbst ist.

²⁶ *SW*, 4 (*Hörer des Wortes*): 261.

²⁷ *SW*, 4 (*Hörer des Wortes*): 263: Was wir trieben, ist eine Anthropologie insofern wir vom Menschen handelten [...]

²⁸ *SW*, 4 (*Hörer des Wortes*): 263: Was wir trieben [...] ist eine “theologische” Anthropologie insofern wir den Menschen begriffen als das Wesen, das in Freiheit in seiner Geschichte auf die mögliche Botschaft des freien Gottes zu horchen hat [...]

²⁹ *SW*, 4 (*Hörer des Wortes*): 263: [S]ie ist eine “fundamentaltheologische” Anthropologie, insofern dieses selbstverständnis, das der Mensch von sich hat, die Voraussetzung dafür ist, daß er die faktisch ergangene Theologie überhaupt zu hören vermag.

³⁰ *SW*, 17/1 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie: Die Lexikonbeiträge der Jahre 1956-1973*): 120-129.

³¹ *SW*, 4 (*Hörer des Wortes*): 261.

1.1.2.1. *The Biblical Revelation of God (die Offenbarung Gottes)*

The “revelation of God” (*die Offenbarung Gottes*) in the Old and New Testament says something about human beings (biblical anthropology), something that would otherwise have remained hidden from humankind.³² For Rahner, the biblical accounts show that humans in their world are unique and incomparable (*unvergleichlich*). The human person (*der Mensch*)³³ is described by Rahner as “the subject, as the partner of God” (*als Subjekt, als Partner Gottes*), as distinct from “everything else” (*gegenüber allem anderen*).³⁴

He speaks of subjectivity as “spirit” (*Geist*), “freedom” (*Freiheit*), “eternal individual meaning” (*ewige individuelle Bedeutung*) and so on.³⁵ Rahner refers to the human ability to work *with* God in a “covenant” of sincere dialogic communication (*in einem echt dialogischen bundesfähigen Verhältnis*).³⁶ From a biblical anthropological perspective, Rahner sees human beings as persons who are able to respond (*Reaktion*) to God (*auf Gott trotz seiner Allwirksamkeit*). The biblical narrative reveals that they are capable of a close “face to face” (*Angesicht zu Angesicht*) relationship with their Maker by means of a certain participation in the intelligibility and manifestation of the divine nature (*Teilnahme an der göttlichen Natur*).³⁷

For Rahner it follows that a theological statement of what the human person is (*die Aussage, was der Mensch ist*), is not the statement of a particular discipline, but the “statement of the whole” (*die Aussage des Ganzen*) – that is, of all that is to be said about divine-human reality. In this way, there

³² See Bernhard Blankenhorn, “God Speaks: Divine Authorship of Scripture in Karl Rahner and Pierre Benoit,” in: *Angelicum* Vol. 93, No. 3 (2016): 445-462.

³³ For “a renewed understanding of the theological notion of the human person” see Gregory Brett, *The Theological Notion of The Human Person: A Conversation between the Theology of Karl Rahner and the Philosophy of John Macmurray* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013)

³⁴ *SW*, 17/1 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie*): 120. Note: this is rather different to today’s cosmological view which emphasises the view of the human person as *part of*, *in relation to*, and *one with*, all of creation. Perhaps only indirectly relevant to the thesis but I think it is reasonable to show how much Rahner’s thinking is of its time and may be out of date for our use today. In their attention to the world around them, the giftedness of nature, art, music, relationships and the revelation inherent in all of this, Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn are more in line with our thinking today.

³⁵ *SW*, 17/1 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie*): 120. Cf. Paul D. Molnar, Chapter Two, “Incarnation and Resurrection in the Theology of Karl Rahner,” in: *Ibidem, Incarnation and Resurrection: Toward a Contemporary Understanding* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), 45-80. See also Molnar’s *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2017), esp. Chapter 5, “Experience and the Theology of the Trinity: How Karl Rahner’s Method Affects His Understanding of Revelation, Grace and the Trinity,” 207-362.

³⁶ *SW*, 17/1 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie*): 121.

³⁷ *SW*, 17/1 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie*): 121.

is no realm of objects (*kein Gegenstandsbereich*), at least since the incarnation of the Logos, that is not formally (and not indirectly and reductively) integrated in theological anthropology. This is the peculiarity, he believes, of such an anthropology: it is simultaneously the whole of theology (*sie ist auch das Ganze der Theologie*).³⁸ However, the revelation of radical subjectivity as originally specified in Scripture is by no means an anthropology as we know it today, because it is still missing the differentiation of a grounding “reflective system” or “systematisation” (*einer reflexen Systematik*).³⁹ For Rahner, the biblical account of the human story has definite anthropological strength and significance but its narrative is not a theoretical and methodological anthropology in itself. Hence, he finds the first outlines of a systematic consistency and theoretical coherence in patristic theology.⁴⁰

1.1.2.2. Patristic Theology (*patristische Theologie*)

Karl Rahner sees in patristic theology the first signs of, and a gradual evolution towards,⁴¹ a theological anthropology with efforts towards systematisation (he mentions Tertullian's *De anima* as a starting point).⁴² Thus, he argues there is an attempt to develop more tangible, uniform and systematic basic principles, for example, the idea of the human being as the “image of God” (*Gottebenbildlichkeit*) but also the notion of the history of mankind as a “history of divinisation” (*Geschichte der Vergöttlichung*), and the Pneumatisation of the world, and so on.⁴³

Nonetheless, Rahner observes in patristic theology a permanent, latent “danger” (*Gefahr*) in the poles of opposition between the divine and the human. Moreover, God who communicates himself to persons cannot be translated into another categorial schema because “the last secret of being human” (*das letzte Geheimnis des Menschen*) is the “unimaginable God” (*der unüberschaubare Gott*) himself. Rahner is for that reason highly critical of the tendency towards categorial reduction in patristic theology. Notwithstanding the positive elements in these earliest theological concepts which

³⁸ *SW*, 17/1 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie*): 121.

³⁹ *SW*, 17/1 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie*): 121.

⁴⁰ *SW*, 17/1 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie*): 121.

⁴¹ For Karl Rahner on “patristic theology and spirituality” see Brandon R. Peterson, “Karl Rahner on patristic theology and spirituality,” in: *Philosophy & theology*, Volume 27, Issue 2 (2015): 499-512.

⁴² *SW*, 17/1 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie*): 121. For the early Christian author Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus oder short “Tertullian” (150-220 C.E.), see Jan Hendrik Waszink, *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani De Anima*, Vigiliae Christianae, Supplements 100 (Leiden: Brill, 2010) [Originally published: Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1933].

⁴³ *SW*, 17/1 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie*): 121: [D]ie Idee des Menschen als Bild und Gleichnis Gottes (Gottebenbildlichkeit) [...] und der Pneumatisierung der Welt [...]

assert that human beings are historically part of a divine-human process and are created in the image and likeness of God, for Rahner these efforts were no more than the primary indications of a more systematic theological and anthropological way of thinking.⁴⁴

1.1.2.3. Medieval Theology (*mittelalterliche Theologie*)

In medieval theology, Rahner argues, no solid systematic theological anthropology has yet been developed because of the strong focus on the objective contents only. There is no indication at this particular stage, he explains, that a “decisive progress” (*entscheidenden Fortschritt*), with regard to an independent theological anthropology has been convincingly made.⁴⁵ The reason lies in the fact that humans in the medieval period “skip” their “subjectivity” (*Subjektivität überspringend*). They know and see themselves as one of the “creatures” (*die Geschöpfe*) “among others” (*neben anderen*) of whom in turn they “naively” make their statements without realising that they essentially speak of themselves. They speak of their “own secret” (*eigenes Geheimnis*): namely, of “God himself” (*nämlich Gott selbst*).⁴⁶

Rahner thinks therefore that the kind of “objectivism” we find in medieval theology does not do justice to a solid anthropology of divine-human reality.⁴⁷ Medieval thinkers like to start, for instance, with “paradise” (*dem Paradies*) which is not necessarily helpful, he argues, for ultimately saying something systematic about “our [human] situation” (*unsere eigene Situation*). For Rahner, such a practice of theological thinking at the time is not yet effective. Moreover, he sees it as evident that in medieval thought there is a great lack of theological and philosophical reflection on the human history of salvation (*die Heilsgeschichte*).⁴⁸

For instance, “the existential human description of the process of justification” (*die existentielle Deskription des Rechtfertigungsvorgangs*) is missing. What medieval thinking lacks, Rahner believes, is “the existential analysis of the human” (*Existentialanalyse der menschlichen Handlung*). He reasons that it does not actually arrive at the factual theological analysis of human “basic experiences” (*Grunderfahrungen*), of “fear, joy, death, etc.” (*Angst, Freude, Tod usw.*). The human

⁴⁴ *SW*, 17/1 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie*): 121-122.

⁴⁵ *SW*, 17/1 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie*): 122.

⁴⁶ *SW*, 17/1 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie*): 122.

⁴⁷ *SW*, 17/1 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie*): 122.

⁴⁸ *SW*, 17/1 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie*): 122.

individual (*der Einzelmensch*) in medieval thought, according to Rahner, is still too much a “case” of the “general idea of man” (*ist noch zu sehr „Fall“ der allgemeinen Idee Mensch*).⁴⁹ This view on the human person radically changes with the modern period.

1.1.2.4. The Modern Period (*die Neuzeit*)

The development of thought concerning the human person in the modern period (*die Neuzeit*) is for Rahner a century-long process: from Descartes to Kant, to German idealism, to today's existential philosophy.⁵⁰ This ‘anthropological’ process and gradual turn is marked by the growing self-understanding of the human person as a subject (*Prozeß der Selbsterfassung des Menschen als Subjekt*). Rahner argues that this particular growing self-understanding is also present in the works of thinkers, who are primarily inclined to reject such an understanding of the human, as in Heideggerian philosophy.⁵¹

Rahner refers to a major historical-theological process and goes back to the “fall of man” (*Sündenfall*): the transition of the first humans from a state of innocent obedience to God to a state of guilty disobedience. He points to a similarity with “the radicalised religious subjectivity before God” (*radikalisierte religiöse Subjektivität vor Gott*) in modern thinking: the isolated human being who refuses the incarnation of God, and rejects the Church, and so on. The modern period reflects the radical tendency to a more individualistic and closed subjectivity. Rahner speaks of a subjectivity

⁴⁹ *SW*, 17/1 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie*): 122.

⁵⁰ Note that in reading Rahner you also meet the influences of thinkers that existed before him, such as for instance Thomas Aquinas, Augustine of Hippo, Ignatius of Loyola, Immanuel Kant, Ludwig Feuerbach, Martin Heidegger, among others. See Thomas Sheehan, *Karl Rahner: The Philosophical Foundations*, Series in Continental Thought (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1987). For a comparative study on Rahner and Heidegger see Peter Joseph Fritz, *Karl Rahner's Theological Aesthetics* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2014).

⁵¹ *SW*, 17/1 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie*): 123. Heideggerian philosophy concentrates particularly on the philosophical concept of “Being” – on *Sein* and *Dasein*. In his Chapter “Karl Rahner and the Turning Point in Catholic Theology,” Gaspar Martinez claims that one point became increasingly relevant in Rahner's thought: “the existential centeredness of Being in Heidegger.” Martinez argues that for Heidegger, “the entry into the question of Being is *Dasein*, the being for which its very being is a matter of concern, and that understands that being on the basis of its being-in-the-world, in a horizon of comprehension that is essentially determined by temporality.” Martinez continues by saying: “This leads Rahner in the direction of ‘existentiell/existential analysis,’ following the close reading of life or existence in Heidegger, in terms both of actual determination and of structural constitution. Eventually this kind of analysis will allow Rahner to formulate his famous thesis of the supernatural existential, which can be considered the peak of his transcendental anthropology.” Gaspar Martinez, “Karl Rahner and the Turning Point in Catholic Theology,” in: *Ibidem, Confronting the Mystery of God Political, Liberation, and Public Theologies* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2002). For Martin Heidegger, see especially *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2006 [1927]), translated by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson as *Being and Time* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 2008 [1962]).

that becomes independent and dramatically unsettling. Instead of persistently transcending towards God, many humans now dwell in a perpetual state “between despair and idolisation” (*zwischen Verzweiflung und Vergötzung*).⁵²

Rahner observes a similar process of the turn to radical subjectivity in the development of the Church(es) and in the “consciousness of faith” (*Glaubensbewußtsein*). It displays itself further, for instance, in the course of ecclesiastical life. The question of God, for instance, who is ever “gracious to me,” a sinful human being, is now profoundly raised. In the Christian tradition we find religious thinkers such as Ignatius of Loyola and Francis of Sales as well as Martin Luther, who place the human person directly in the presence of God. Rahner finally points to the development of a significant spiritual and “existential logic of cognition” (*existentielle Logik der Erkenntnis*) where the concrete and unique will of God “for me” (*je für mich*) is thematised (e.g., in spiritual exercises).⁵³

Although the human person in the modern period is more and more placed at the centre, a tangible and constructive anthropology is not yet available according to Rahner. He argues that ‘anthropology’ at this point still depends strongly on individual treatises. In other words, it lacks the proper reflective elaboration and the systemic foundations of an anthropology as a whole. At this stage, Rahner still considers anthropology an unfulfilled task of theology. In the modern period, Catholic theology was not able to develop a compact anthropological methodology.⁵⁴ That is, a method that evolves from the knowledge of the human person as “subject,” and the exploration of the many related questions and answers that would evolve from such a starting point.⁵⁵ In his own theological quest, therefore, Rahner sees it as a God-given assignment to provide such an overall theological anthropology for the Catholic tradition.

1.1.3. *Theological Anthropology: Foundational Explorations*

Rahner’s theological anthropology is strongly characterised by a movement towards the divine. It also clearly focuses on human individuals who seek God consciously or otherwise. Together they make up the Church of Christ. Our togetherness as a community of believers and the nature of the

⁵² *SW*, 17/1 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie*): 123.

⁵³ *SW*, 17/1 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie*): 123-124.

⁵⁴ For Rahner’s methodology see Anne Carr, *The Theological Methodology of Karl Rahner* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977).

⁵⁵ *SW*, 17/1 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie*): 124.

Church today therefore depends on “what the human person is” (*was der Mensch ist*)⁵⁶ and what humans could become through the “salvation” (*Heilsvermittlung*) that the Church proclaims.⁵⁷

For Rahner, a “human being is a *being*” (*der Mensch ist ein Wesen*) rich in diversity, a person who truly and genuinely has to *be*.⁵⁸ That is to say, “everything that humans *have* and *are*” (*alles, was der Mensch ist*) is not simply one and the “same” (*dasselbe*).⁵⁹ This is so with respect to the understanding of the human person as a whole. As humans, we must endure the “multiplicity of the given” (*Vielheit des Gegebenen*) which is to be found in the divine mystery of our human existence and within the “hidden unity” (*verborgene Einheit*) that is concealed within us (*im Geheimnis unseres Daseins*).⁶⁰ He argues that the salvation proclaimed by the Church in word and sacrament addresses the “individual human person as a whole” (*den einen und ganzen Menschen*). Salvation is given to each unique human being and so to the whole person in whom the secret of God is historically unfolding.⁶¹

1.1.3.1. *Being Human as a Reference to the Mystery of God*⁶²

The human person is called by God to be the “temporal-bodily partner of God” (*weltlich-leibhaftige Partner Gottes*).⁶³ It is an intimate partnership through the mystery of the Word. Rahner writes that it is, however, not an “equality of relationship” (*keine Gleichheit der Beziehung*) on both sides; rather a human is a being “called” (*aufgerufen*).⁶⁴ Human beings have “inevitably” (*unausweichlich*) to do “with God Himself” (*mit Gott selbst*). In this relationship, humans become aware of who they are and of who or what God is. Consequently, as persons we can involve ourselves in this historical event and say something about our human experiences of the divine and of being partners with God. This is what Ety Hillesum does in her letters and diaries which will be explored and examined in Chapter Four.

⁵⁶ See in this Chapter: 1.1.3.2. *What is the Human Person? (Was ist der Mensch?)*.

⁵⁷ *SW*, 19 (*Selbstvollzug der Kirche: Ekklesiologische Grundlegung praktischer Theologie*): 181. [Viertes Kapitel: “Anthropologische Voraussetzungen für den Selbstvollzug der Kirche: Grundentwurf einer theologischen Anthropologie”]

⁵⁸ See Anthony Mellor, *Karl Rahner, Culture and Evangelization: New Approaches in an Australian Setting*, Theology and Mission in World Christianity, Band: 13 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2019).

⁵⁹ *SW*, 19 (*Selbstvollzug der Kirche*): 181-182.

⁶⁰ *SW*, 19 (*Selbstvollzug der Kirche*): 182.

⁶¹ *SW*, 19 (*Selbstvollzug der Kirche*): 182.

⁶² *SW*, 19 (*Selbstvollzug der Kirche*): 185.

⁶³ *SW*, 19 (*Selbstvollzug der Kirche*): 185.

⁶⁴ *SW*, 19 (*Selbstvollzug der Kirche*): 185.

By “partnership” (*Partnerschaft*) Rahner means something profound, namely a “God-given-relationship” or “the inevitability of God-directedness” (*die Unausweichlichkeit der Gottverwieseneheit*) throughout history that can be accepted as sanctifying mystery or be rejected. This relation signifies the “ultimate cause of the historicity” (*Grund der Geschichtlichkeit*) of human beings. He speaks of the history of salvation, revelation, and the “self-communication of God” (*Selbstmitteilung Gottes*) in which this partnership is radically and profoundly experienced. The divine-human relationship is therefore not only constituted by God, Rahner believes, but also formed by grace that touches our lives.⁶⁵

The mystery of grace in this partnership is genuine because human beings do not enter this partnership on their own accord; rather, they are “called” (*die „Gerufenheit“ der Partnerschaft*). Rahner thinks that everything is interconnected and constituted by God’s Word. Humans in themselves and as partners of the divine *are* the unity of what we call “creation and grace” (*Schöpfung und Gnade*). For Rahner, the highest radicalisation and fulfilment is: “the self-communication of God” (*die Selbstmitteilung Gottes*).⁶⁶ This is the ultimate constituent of the concrete essence of the person in terms of grace: “being human as a reference to the mystery of God” (*Menschsein als Verweis auf das Geheimnis Gottes*).⁶⁷

1.1.3.2. *What is the Human Person? (Was ist der Mensch?)*

Karl Rahner asks “what is the human?” (*Was ist der Mensch?*).⁶⁸ As far as his answer is concerned, he is clear: “the human person is the question to which there is no answer.”⁶⁹ Why? While it is true that everyone in the course of life has a lot of experiences and thus knows something about himself, nevertheless, the human person at the inner core of his/her own being remains a God given mystery.⁷⁰ As a Jesuit-trained theologian,⁷¹ Rahner regards and focuses on the human person as a

⁶⁵ *SW*, 19 (*Selbstvollzug der Kirche*): 185.

⁶⁶ *SW*, 19 (*Selbstvollzug der Kirche*): 185.

⁶⁷ *SW*, 19 (*Selbstvollzug der Kirche*): 185.

⁶⁸ *SW*, 22/2 (*Dogmatik nach dem Konzil: Theologische Anthropologie und Ekklesiologie: „Was ist der Mensch?“*): 39-47.

⁶⁹ *SW*, 22/2 (*Dogmatik nach dem Konzil*): 39: Ich meine: der Mensch ist die Frage, auf die es keine Antwort gibt.

⁷⁰ *SW*, 22/2 (*Dogmatik nach dem Konzil*): 39.

⁷¹ Entering the Society of Jesus in 1922, Rahner began his formation in the North German Province. His Ignatian background as a Jesuit gave him the tools to discern the movement of the Spirit both in his life and in his teachings. He was deeply affected by the spirituality and humanity of Ignatius of Loyola. The influence of *The Spiritual Exercises* on Rahner’s anthropology, on his study of the human as it relates to God, becomes clearer and clearer upon each reading. Cf. Joseph Munitiz and Philip Endean, *Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Personal Writings* (London/New York, NY: Penguin Books, [1996] 2004); William A. Barry, *Finding God in All Things – a Companion to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*

creature. We are created (*der Mensch ist geschaffen*) and this should not be misunderstood.⁷² He does not refer to a general reality meaning anyone and everyone. Instead, it directly concerns *me* personally, otherwise “the other things” (*die übrigen Dinge*) may not really be seen at all. It is “I,” it is “me” (*ich*) that is meant here and nobody else. There are others like me, that is true, but only in a certain sense. Rahner says that every human being must embrace the responsibility of the “great and terrifying” (*das Großartige und Erschreckende*) task of standing alone in front of God with the daunting realisation that he or she “exists only once” (*nämlich, daß es ihn nur einmal gibt*).⁷³

Therefore, Rahner claims that the individual person should not hesitate to take courage to live his or her own life. We cannot “flee back into the anonymous crowd” (*in die Menge zurückfliehen*). As humans, we can not “hide ourselves” (*hineinverstecken*) in the multitude and rely on what is apparently meant for all. The “human person” (*der Mensch*) stands as “me alone” (*ich ganz allein*), as much as it is true that everyone else who is human would have to say the same.⁷⁴

What we say of ourselves as humans is not simply the “general” (*Allgemeine*). Rahner holds that the universal must be heard, read, experienced, and accepted in our absolute individual “aloneness” (*Einsamkeit*) before God – that is, in *my* existence, in my own personal life. Rahner is very clear on this: when we speak of ‘people,’ of ‘human beings,’ of ‘humans,’ ‘individuals’ or ‘persons,’ then we must read “I” or “me” (*ich*). When I say “I” (*ich*), everything else has to step back into the circle of “other things” (*übrigen Dinge*) to which I am “the unique, incommensurable” (*der Einmalige, Inkommensurable*) one. The only and last partnership I have is with God, so that when I am afraid in my uniqueness, experiencing the “dizziness and fear” (*den Schwindel und die Angst*) of this aloneness, I “can only flee to God” (*nur zu Gott fliehen*).⁷⁵

(Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1991); Michael Ivens, *Understanding The Spiritual Exercises* (Herefordshire, England: Gracewing, 1998); Philip Endean, “Spirituality and Religious Experience: A Perspective from Rahner,” in: Declan Marmion (ed.), *Christian Identity in a Postmodern Age: Celebrating the Legacies of Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan* (Dublin: Veritas, 2005), 201-218; *Ibidem*, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001); *Ibidem*, “Moral Theology, Karl Rahner and the Ignatian Exercises,” *The Way Supplement*, 88 (Spring 1997), 55-65.

⁷² For “De Deo create” (*Über Gott den Schöpfer*) cf. *SW*, 8 (*Der Mensch in der Schöpfung*): 46-262.

⁷³ *SW*, 13 (*Ignatianischer Geist: Schriften zu den Exerzitien und zur Spiritualität des Ordensgründers. Teil C. Einübung Priesterlicher Existenz*): 280.

⁷⁴ *SW*, 13 (*Ignatianischer Geist*): 280.

⁷⁵ *SW*, 13 (*Ignatianischer Geist*): 280. For human experiences of “dizziness and fear” (*den Schwindel und die Angst*), *anxietas* (“fear” or “anxiety”), *Angest* (“dread”), or “fear of death,” see also the works of Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, ed. & tr. Reidar Thomte (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980); *Fear and Trembling: Repetition*, ed. & tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983). Eric Voegelin, “Reason: The Classic

The human person is created. This must be seen as a statement in the present. Rahner explains that "I" was not created once. I am created as a human being right now (*ich bin jetzt der Geschaffene*). In the present moment. Yes, *now* it happens: again and again I am being (re-) created. So it must be, Rahner argues, that I am "the creature" (*die Kreatur*) – now – that is "unique" (*einmalig*) and singly formed. Moreover, I am "the one known to myself" (*der mir Bekannte*) who directly carries this "immediate awareness" (*unmittelbarer Bekanntheitscharakter*) from which I can achieve everything else. At the same time, I happen to be "unknown to myself" (*der mir Unbekannte*). I am "with myself" (*bei-mir-sein*), I am "freedom" (*Freiheit*).⁷⁶

According to Rahner, "I am" (*ich bin*) means: I am "inevitable" (*unausweichlich*), I am the "beginning" (*der gesetzte Anfang*) who can not go back behind him-/herself and this beginning is "there" (*da*). If I killed myself today, if I would object to my own existence, even if I wanted in Ivan Karamazov's [Dostoevsky's] words to return my ticket to this world, I would once again confirm "my own existence" (*mein Dasein*). I would once again be confronted, Rahner believes, with this absolute wall that "I am" (*ich bin*) and that "I am not not I" (*ich nicht nicht bin*).⁷⁷

"I am present as a creature" (*ich bin als Kreatur da*). This means, for Rahner that I am "finite" (*endlich*) and I know it. In me, this finitude eventually comes to awareness of itself and only in me becomes radically finite. So as a human person "I am suffering" (*ich erleide mich*), and know "my limits" (*meine Grenzen*). I transgress, go over my limits but keep them at the same time. Nevertheless, Rahner states: "I am" (*ich bin*), meaning that I am neither "an illusion" (*bloß Schein*) nor merely a delusion or an inauthenticity that could be surpassed. I am who I am – a human being.⁷⁸

1.1.3.3. Human Suffering (*Leid*), Moral Evil (*moralisches Übel*) and Love (*Liebe*)

How can a good God allow for suffering and evil? Does God have a role in the drama of human sorrow and malevolence? Human misery and moral evil are clearly not the same thing: a person may suffer because of someone else's morally evil act or natural disasters. Furthermore, we shouldn't

Experience," in: *Published Essays 1966-1985*, ed. Ellis Sandoz, Vol. 12 of *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1999 [1990]) 265-291, esp. 275-279.

⁷⁶ *SW*, 13 (*Ignatianischer Geist*): 280.

⁷⁷ *SW*, 13 (*Ignatianischer Geist*): 280. Note that we must realise that Rahner is coining a phrase here, so one could suggest, for instance, 'I am not not I.'

⁷⁸ *SW*, 13 (*Ignatianischer Geist*): 280.

confuse human suffering and illness with evil itself.⁷⁹ Karl Rahner deals with this in Volume 30 of the Collected Works (*Sämtliche Werke*), *Anstöße systematischer Theologie: Beiträge zur Fundamentaltheologie und Dogmatik* (“Impetus for Systematic Theology: Contributions to Fundamental Theology”), asking the question: “Why does God let us suffer?” (*Warum lässt uns Gott leiden?*).⁸⁰

This is the question Rahner wrestles with in his theological anthropology. For him, the problem of suffering is most fundamental to our human existence, which can hardly be disputed. Most humans will know what is meant, having had to face various expressions of suffering in their own personal lives. No one can escape from this human existential quest that touches on the innermost core of the person. Rahner argues that we should avoid treating this question of human suffering too lightly with either “sentimental poetry” (*sentimentaler Lyrik*) or with “compulsive curiosity” (*mußige Neugierde*).⁸¹ Instead, it is with great care and with depth that we should face “the bitter worth of this question” (*die bittere Schwere dieser Frage*).⁸² Rahner therefore wants to understand who “God” is, and what “suffering” and “evil” actually mean.⁸³

In the face of human “suffering” (*Leid*) Rahner’s theological anthropology acknowledges the ultimate “inextricable intertwining of the most diverse realities in our world” (*unentwirrbare Verflechtung der verschiedenartigsten Wirklichkeiten in der Welt*).⁸⁴ He argues that we have to make the distinction between (i) the suffering that already exists *through* and *within* the “free guilt of the human person” (*der freien Schuld des Menschen*); and (ii) all “the forms” (*den Vorkommnissen*) of sorrow, suffering, misery and woe that are present in our daily lives without being able to be traced back to this “free human guilt” (*schuldhafte Freiheit des Menschen*), and who nevertheless make up the “greater part of suffering in the world” (*den größeren Teil des Leidens in der Welt*).⁸⁵

Rahner continues that these daily varieties of “forms” (*den Vorkommnissen*) of human suffering are clearly the “co-cause and the presupposition” (*Mit-Ursache und Voraussetzung*) of “moral evil”

⁷⁹ Cf. Richard Rohr, *What Do We Do With Evil?* (Albuquerque, NM: CAC Publishing, 2019). Rohr claims that “evil is subtle and the evils that are killing us all are usually well-disguised.”

⁸⁰ *SW*, 30 (*Anstöße systematischer Theologie: Beiträge zur Fundamentaltheologie und Dogmatik. Warum lässt uns Gott leiden?*): 373-384: Die Frage nach der Zulassung des Leidens [...]

⁸¹ *SW*, 30 (*Anstöße systematischer Theologie*): 373.

⁸² *SW*, 30 (*Anstöße systematischer Theologie*): 373.

⁸³ *SW*, 30 (*Anstöße systematischer Theologie*): 373-375.

⁸⁴ *SW*, 30 (*Anstöße systematischer Theologie*): 375.

⁸⁵ *SW*, 30 (*Anstöße systematischer Theologie*): 375.

(*moralischen Übels*) in the world, which subsequently means again more human “suffering” and misery.⁸⁶ This creaturely “guilt” (*Schuld*) that exists out of our “human freedom” (*kreatürlicher Freiheit*), however, is never absolute. It is intrinsically entwined with other forms of suffering and evil in an inseparable and indefinable manner.

Rahner argues that the various forms of suffering and evil do not necessarily explain themselves. They all refer to “the mystery of God and to the mystery of others” (*das Geheimnis Gottes und das Geheimnis anderer*): to those who suffer innocently (*schuldloses Leid*). Moreover, referring here to other creaturely forms of freedom, such as that of the “angels” and “demons,” Rahner states, ultimately does not help in our analysis, even if it would be justified in itself. This is why Rahner’s basic anthropological approach to this question – “How can God let us suffer?”⁸⁷ – is profound: it summarises and includes all forms of human suffering and evil, without denying any of the nuances and/or differences in human life.⁸⁸

To include the dimensions of human suffering and evil, Rahner points out that we shouldn’t confuse human sorrow and illness with a simple view of “the devil at work” (*der Teufel am Werk*).⁸⁹ In many instances in life, one observes nothing else but “sick people” (*kranke Menschen*), who suffer grievously. The psychological diseases of men and women in prison, for instance, have nothing to do with the devil or pure evil but everything with mental illness and human suffering.⁹⁰

Where more evil exists, however, is in my own heart. When I “look into my heart” (*in mein Herz hineinblicken*), Rahner argues, I discover “more wickedness” (*viel ernsthafteres Böses*) and hatred, with which I have to seriously wrestle with than when I see sick people, or mentally ill prisoners behind walls.⁹¹ When we look into the world, we can discover “serious expressions of evil” (*sehr viel ernsthafteres Böses*), even then, Rahner believes, under some circumstances, we may discover a

⁸⁶ *SW*, 30 (*Anstöße systematischer Theologie*): 375.

⁸⁷ *SW*, 30 (*Anstöße systematischer Theologie*): 375: Wie kann Gott uns leiden lassen?

⁸⁸ *SW*, 30 (*Anstöße systematischer Theologie*): 375.

⁸⁹ See his reflection *Das Böse im Menschen und der Teufel an der Wand* on two films concerning exorcism and the devil. *SW*, 22/2 (*Dogmatik nach dem Konzil*): 181. Cf. Reinhold Iblacker SJ, “Exorzisten – Psychiater – Theologen: Gespräch mit Professor Karl Rahner, München,” *Orientierung (Katholische Blätter für weltanschauliche Information)* 38, Heft 17 (1974): 177, 180.

⁹⁰ *SW*, 22/2 (*Dogmatik nach dem Konzil*): 181. For a recent study on incarcerated women see: Jada Hector (ed.), *Women and Prison* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2020).

⁹¹ For “illness” (*krankheit*) and theological anthropology cf. *SW*, 12 (*Menschsein und Menschwerdung Gottes: Studien zur Grundlegung der Dogmatik, zur Christologie, Theologische Anthropologie und Eschatologie*): 353-476, esp. 415-420 [*Bewährung in der Zeit der Krankheit*].

“living faith relationship with God” (*eine lebendige Glaubensbeziehung*) in faith, hope, and love.⁹²

Rahner's theological anthropology on human suffering is summarised by the concrete way in which we *accept* God and let God *be* in our human condition rather than to blame “the devil” or “Satan” for every form of our suffering. For him, this means that we accept human suffering without directly expecting a definite and suitable answer, acknowledging the “incomprehensibility of God” (*Unbegreiflichkeit Gottes*) as well as the freedom that is lived in our divine-human partnership. The “incomprehensibility of suffering” (*Unbegreiflichkeit des Leidens*), and of evil, according to Rahner, is simply something humans have to learn to cope with.⁹³

At the same time, however, we must take into account that suffering and pain can cause humans to grow in ways they would never have chosen and which we can often only see in hindsight. As we will see in Chapters Four and Five, this is where Frankl, Hillesum and Solzhenitsyn but also Bonhoeffer⁹⁴ and Sölle go further than Rahner, seeing suffering as a reality that accomplishes something necessary in our human journey and for our salvation. The way Rahner encompasses both moral evil and naturally occurring evil/suffering is the groundwork for Chapter Four, where we look at the similarities and distinctions between our three thinkers and prisoners who are actually guilty of something. Ultimately, it all comes down to *one's own heart*, as Hillesum's journey – “the thinking heart of the barracks”⁹⁵ – illustrates, and the journey one makes there. As Rahner says, what we encounter in our own hearts will probably be far more difficult and existentially agonising to confront and whether we are guilty of some crime or whether we suffer unjustly, we are always going to be faced with our own heart and the journey to which it calls us, that is, a journey to which God – Christ – calls us.

Rahner refers to Walter Dirks who tells of his visit to Romano Guardini, who was already marked by

⁹² *SW*, 22/2 (*Dogmatik nach dem Konzil*): 181. Cf. Karl Rahner, *Grundkurs des Glaubens: Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums* (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 1976); *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Ideas of Christianity* (New York, NY: Crossroads, 1978).

⁹³ *SW*, 30 (*Anstöße systematischer Theologie*): 384.

⁹⁴ The quotations in this thesis from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's writings are taken from: *DBW* Vol. 8. *Widerstand und Ergebung*, eds. Christian Gremmels, Eberhard Bethge, and Renate Bethge with Ilse Tödt (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998); *DBWE* Vol. 8. *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. John W. de Gruchy (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010). Abbreviated as: “*DBWE* 8” and “*DBW* 8.” Cf. *Letters and Papers from Prison*, The Enlarged Edition, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1997). Hereafter: “*LPP*.”

⁹⁵ E.T., 515. *Het Werk*, 545: Het denkende hart van de barak. This phrase is used as title for a collection of Hillesum's letters published in 1982: *Het denkende hart van de barak: Brieven van Etty Hillesum*, ed. Jan G. Gaarlandt (Haarlem: De Haan, 1982).

illness, suffering, and approaching death. Guardini holds that no book, no given dogma or magisterium, no 'theodicy' or theology is able to give you the true answer to the question why human beings suffer in the face of God, and why God, for the salvation of humankind, lets the innocent, the guiltless one, suffer evil. Guardini is right, Rahner affirms, in holding that we will find no final answer to this question. The answer to suffering and to moral evil that Rahner sees lies in the "unconditional worship and givenness of love" (*in bedingungslos anbetender Liebe*), by which "we give ourselves away to God as an answer" (*uns selber an Gott als Antwort weggeben*).⁹⁶

We learn to surrender, to live the question, to 'stand under' it rather than seeking to understand it, we allow the Mystery to live us, with Jesus we say 'thy will be done.' It is only when we are faced with what we cannot escape, when, like Peter, a belt is put around us to lead us where we would not choose to go, that we come to this place of "giving ourselves away." Prison, of course, is the quintessential experience of being faced with what we cannot escape and therefore it provides a unique opportunity to undertake (or as chaplain support someone to undertake) this journey of surrender/giving ourselves away in love. Again this is very similar to the ideas we will explore in Chapter Four and, particularly, to Solzhenitsyn's idea of "ascending." Of course, if this opportunity of Rahner's *uns selber an Gott als Antwort weggeben* is not taken, it can easily lead to the despair, he believes, something which today's chaplains will affirm and frequently encounter in prisons.

Finally, Rahner writes that where we do not accomplish "this love" (*diese Liebe*) that forgets itself in the human relationship with the divine (*die sich selber über Gott vergißt*), or better: where we do not allow for this love, the only thing that remains is the "naked despair" (*nackte Verzweiflung*) over the "absurdity" of evil, and of our "human suffering" (*Absurdität unseres Leidens*). This despair and experience of absurdity is the actual and only form of atheism that theologians must take seriously, he writes.⁹⁷ That's why Rahner concludes by saying: "There is no blessed light that illuminates the depths of the darkness of human suffering other than God Himself. And we only find Him, when one affirmatively says yes to the incomprehensibility of God Himself, without which He would not be God."⁹⁸

⁹⁶ *SW*, 30 (*Anstöße systematischer Theologie*): 384. For a "critical appraisal of the theology of Karl Rahner with particular attention to the account of the phrase "God is love," see Mark Lloyd Taylor, *God is Love: A Study in the Theology of Karl Rahner* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986). Taylor uses "process philosophy to define God as 'essentially love of others.'"

⁹⁷ *SW*, 30 (*Anstöße systematischer Theologie*): 384.

⁹⁸ *SW*, 30 (*Anstöße systematischer Theologie*): 384: Es gibt kein seliges Licht, das die finstere Abgründigkeit des Leidens erhellt, als Gott selbst. Und ihn findet man nur, wenn man liebend Ja sagt zur Unbegreiflichkeit Gottes selbst, ohne die er

1.1.3.4. *Grace (Gnade) and Freedom (Freiheit)*

Karl Rahner writes in his theological anthropology about the intimate connection between nature, God's grace and human freedom.⁹⁹ This emphasis on human experience and on nature, grace and freedom is found in his essay *Ursprünge der Freiheit* ("Origins of Freedom"), where he characterises the human person as a free individual,¹⁰⁰ who is able to receive God's grace. Rahner does not see any reason why there still should be a dispute today between the Christian Churches and the various confessions in relation to the fact "that humans are free" (*den Menschen als Freiheitswesen zu charakterisieren*).¹⁰¹

In Catholic theology at least, Rahner states, there is a clear experience and teaching today that says that God must be understood as *the* "All-Effective-One" (*Gott als der Allwirksame*). The all powerful one bestows on us, he writes, the aptitude of freedom and our good actions, that is, by God's own "indivisible and irrepressible grace" (*unableitbare und unerzwingbare Gnade*). Nothing of this "grace" is the result of our own efforts: we receive this experience of "grace" 'passively,' not as a consequence of our own actions; it is infused by the direct action of God. We cannot obtain it or retain it, nothing the like either precedes in or is influenced by humans themselves (*der nichts im Menschen vorausgeht*), Rahner argues: we are all dependent on and in need of this grace to be good and to be free.¹⁰²

As human persons, Rahner claims, we are trapped in egoism with a "natural" freedom that makes us guilty (*im Egoismus gefangene, schuldige Freiheit*), because it cannot accept the self-communication of God. It is a state of being, where we cannot allow God to be God. For Rahner, then, God's grace – that is, God himself – must liberate us humans towards the freedom of God, essentially to let the God

nicht Gott wäre.

⁹⁹ Charles H. Henkey states that Rahner's work "is not an ivory-tower theology for a few technicians of a highly specialized field of human knowledge. His theological anthropology is full of a strong, penetrating realism, which never loses contact with the daily problems of Catholic existence in the crisis of the modern world." Charles H. Henkey, Review of "Karl Rahner, SJ, *Sendung und Gnade: Beiträge zur Pastoraltheologie* (Innsbruck-Vienna-Munich: Tyrolia, 1959), pp. 561," in: *Theological Studies*, 21.3 (1960): 488.

¹⁰⁰ *SW*, 22/2 (*Dogmatik nach dem Konzil*): 73-90. See also his essay *Theologie der Freiheit* in *SW*, 22/2 (*Dogmatik nach dem Konzil*): 91-112.

¹⁰¹ *SW*, 22/2 (*Dogmatik nach dem Konzil*): 75.

¹⁰² *SW*, 22/2 (*Dogmatik nach dem Konzil*): 75 [D]aß also Gottes Gnade, das heißt schließlich er selbst, die Freiheit zu Gott hin befreien muß [...]

within, receive and liberate God (*Gott von Gott durch Gott zu empfangen*). Rahner encourages us to embrace this “truth” (*Wahrheit*) in which our true human freedom is predicated.¹⁰³

Accepting this liberation of freedom by “God’s grace” (*Gnade Gottes*), Rahner holds, is what makes us human. Thus, for him, on the one hand, the theological doctrine of freedom is a proclamation of the grace of God. On the other hand, the “natural” freedom of the human person is nothing but the presupposition that God has created to have the possibility to bestow his love on us, on each human being individually. If we understand God’s freedom and grace from this anthropological perspective, Rahner thinks, there is no need for controversy concerning this theological subject.¹⁰⁴

Emphasising human freedom, Rahner saw the human person “as a finite centre which reaches out toward the Infinite.”¹⁰⁵ Rahner speaks of the freedom by God’s grace that happens precisely in the sphere of the unattainable, in the realm of the Infinite (*in das Unverfügbare hinein*).¹⁰⁶ The freedom about which Rahner writes is to be understood as having always been *there* in terms of salvation “under the secret call of grace” (*unter dem geheimen Anruf der Gnade*). With this he means the grace by which “God manifests Himself” (*in der Gott sich anbietet*). And only the Gospel, Rahner is convinced, reliably shows where the leap of freedom goes to, namely towards an encounter with the Infinite, with the Transcendent. He continues by saying that the human person “meets God’s

¹⁰³ *SW*, 22/2 (*Dogmatik nach dem Konzil*): 75-76.

¹⁰⁴ *SW*, 22/2 (*Dogmatik nach dem Konzil*): 76. Note for instance that Rahner never developed an overall Hegel-like system nor articulated a particular method. Cf. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines, *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3.

¹⁰⁵ John Macquarrie, *On Being a Theologian*, ed. John H. Morgan (London: SCM, 1999), 137. Cf. Steven G. Ogden, *The Presence of God in the World: A Contribution to Postmodern Christology based on the Theologies of Paul Tillich and Karl Rahner* (New York, NY: Peter Lang), 217, esp. n. 15. Cf. Thomas F. O’Meara, *God in the World: A Guide to Karl Rahner’s Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007).

¹⁰⁶ Rahner’s understanding of “grace” regarding the realm of the Infinite was one of the significant contributions renewing Catholic theology at the time. Rahner, who carefully reflected on the works of Thomas Aquinas, believes that the human person is open to “the supernatural”: “Without transcendence open to the supernatural there is no spirit; but spirit itself is already meaningful without supernatural grace. Its fulfilment through grace is not, therefore, an exigency of its nature, although it is open to this supernatural fulfilment. [...] We can only fully understand the human person in his/her “undefinable” essence if we see him/her as *potentia oboedientialis* for the divine life; this is his/her nature. His/her nature is such that its absolute fulfilment comes through grace, and so nature of itself must reckon with the meaningful possibility of remaining without absolute fulfilment.” Karl Rahner, “Nature and Grace,” in: *Nature and Grace and Other Essays*, tr. D. Wharton (London, UK: Sheed & Ward, 1963), 40-41. Cf. “An Investigation of the Incomprehensibility of God in St. Thomas Aquinas,” in: *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 16, tr. D. Morland (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1979). Jean-Pierre Fortin, “Grace in Auschwitz: A Glimpse of Light in Utter Darkness” (PhD Dissertation, University of St. Michael’s College and the Toronto School of Theology, 2014), 216. Retrieved online from: University of Toronto [<https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca>]. Edited and published as book under the title: *Grace in Auschwitz: A Holocaust Christology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016).

forgiving grace" (*dem Gott der vergebenden Gnade begegnet*), realising that he is enabled and authorised (*ermöglicht und ermächtigt*) only by God.¹⁰⁷

The Second Vatican Council strongly advocates the universal accessibility of God's grace.¹⁰⁸ Rahner conceives of grace as being made available and offered to all. So, in the light of his theological anthropology one could claim that all human existence is unfolding through grace and through the divine concern with our fate as human beings within the context of God's presence with a "love that impels human freedom toward self-transcendence."¹⁰⁹

1.2. Anthropology of *Gaudium et Spes*

1.2.1. Karl Rahner and *Gaudium et Spes*

We now turn to Karl Rahner's influence on *Gaudium et Spes*, to identify and to show the important teachings that relate to this study on prison ministry and can be detected to be Rahnerian. Being heavily involved in the Second Vatican Council, Rahner became one of the most influential contributors of all the experts during this twenty-first ecumenical council and perhaps the most influential contributor to any council in the history of the Church.¹¹⁰ As a forward-thinking

¹⁰⁷ *SW*, 22/2 (*Dogmatik nach dem Konzil*): 76.

¹⁰⁸ See also *Nostra Aetate*, "Vatican II, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," in: *VCII*, 569-574, esp. 569, par. 1. Note: Speaking of the "universal accessibility of God's grace," we like to refer in our study to the *accessibility* to God. In English, however, accessibility means 'being easy to approach' or 'enter.' So a building may be accessible. In the context of our relationship with God, when we say 'accessibility to God,' one could hear it as our 'being open to God,' our 'being easy for God' to enter or approach. Perhaps a simple word like *openness* to God might work better for our purposes though it may not fully capture what Karl Rahner and *Gaudium et Spes* are getting at. As it includes something *more active* on the part of human beings, we could also speak of 'our ability to find God,' 'connect to Him,' 'approach Him' and so on. In that case, the word to be used should perhaps be *access* to God. This refers to God being approached by us rather than the other way around. However, that is not ideal either as 'access to God' speaks of something that is already happening, something that can be taken for granted. One could argue that the best phrase would be something like *our ability to relate to God*. All these possibilities are quite subtle and nuanced, and Rahner speaks of human beings as being constituted so as to 'receive God' and 'be open to God' so perhaps *accessibility* is after all the word that best says what Rahner means.

¹⁰⁹ Jean-Pierre Fortin, *Grace in Auschwitz*, xxvi, esp. n. 38. See Roger Haight, "Sin and Grace," in: *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, Vol. 2, ed. Francis S. Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 122.

¹¹⁰ Pope John XXIII appointed Rahner an "expert advisor" (*peritus*) to the Second Vatican Council, so he received the opportunity to share his theological insights with the other participants of the council. His influence in Rome gradually grew and was widespread. Subsequently, he was elected with six other theologians to develop *Lumen Gentium*, a dogmatic exposition of the doctrine of the Church. The reason that the council showed an openness and receptiveness towards the problems of the world had to do with Rahner's active participation in developing the document. His views on religion and on other religious traditions helped the Church in developing the perspective of God's universal and salvific revelation to all. Similarly, the council's desire to support and encourage the ecumenical movement was reinforced by

theologian, the most important contribution to the council and particularly to *Gaudium et Spes*, was his fundamental theological understanding that grace is offered to humans universally. The overarching theological anthropology of grace marked *Gaudium et Spes*, and opened the door to an acceptance of the existence of key insights in the non-Christian religions. Jean-Pierre Fortin refers in *Grace in Auschwitz: A Holocaust Christology* to Rahner's argument that

every human being is elevated by grace in his transcendental intellectuality in a non-explicit manner. This entitative divinization, which is proffered to freedom, even if it is not freely accepted in faith, involves a transcendental divinization of man's fundamental subjective disposition, the ultimate horizon of man's knowledge and freedom, in the perspective of which he accomplishes his life. Consequently, for absolutely every human being this supernatural existential itself constitutes a revelation of God through his self-communication in grace.¹¹¹

Fortin also makes clear that both Rahner's account and the vision of the Second Vatican Council must be read today with great thoughtfulness: To say anything constructive in the twenty-first century about a theology of "nature and grace," especially after the atrocities of the great tragedy of the twentieth century, the Shoah, one must be aware of the depth of the *tragedy* of grace, which does not necessarily fit every theological category.

As one of the Church's leading theological voices of his time the relationship and the intimate connection between Karl Rahner's theological anthropology and *Gaudium et Spes*, one may suggest, is manifested in the way in which the document of the "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" bears the marks of 'Rahnerian inspiration' as analysed in this section of our study. Rather than to imply that it was all due to Rahner alone, however, we need to take into account all those cooperating in the writing of *Gaudium et Spes*, including Karol Wojtyla.¹¹²

Rahner's influence. Cf. Austin Flannery, O.P., ed. *Vatican Council II. The Basic Sixteen Documents: A completely Revised Translation in Inclusive Language: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations* (Dublin: Dominicans Publications, 2014 [1996]). Hereafter abbreviated as: "VCI." For *Lumen Gentium*, see VCI, 1-96. See also Austin Flannery, O.P., ed. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, 1981 Edition (Leominster: Costello Publishing Company, 1980).

¹¹¹ Jean-Pierre Fortin, *Grace in Auschwitz*, xxvi, esp. 39. Karl Rahner, "Revelation: Theological Interpretation," in: *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, Vol. 5, ed. Karl Rahner, et al. (New York, NY: Herder & Herder, 1970), 350.

¹¹² See Andreas R. Batlogg et al., *Encounters with Karl Rahner: Remembrances of Rahner by Those who Knew Him*, Marquette studies in theology (Marquette University Press, 2009).

Brandon Peterson argues that Rahner was aligned with “the reform-minded majority at the council.” He was involved with the early drafts of *Gaudium et Spes* in 1963, “[y]et he became,” Peterson states, “highly critical of the document in the last year of the council, penning a sharp critique of its penultimate draft.”¹¹³ One major concern for Rahner was the document’s genre: “a pastoral constitution.” The emphasis itself, on the “signs of the times” and on the “pressing concerns of the day,” was not so much the problem. Rather, Rahner was worried, Peterson argues, that “it was not made clear exactly how the Catholic faithful, who had primarily known councils to define dogmas and to anathematize, were to process this pastoral constitution.”¹¹⁴

Rahner’s own direct contributions to *Gaudium et Spes* were eventually diminished but he offered nonetheless to evaluate the results in writing.¹¹⁵ The fruit of this evaluation was a highly critical 20-page commentary that though never published, was widely circulated among the council fathers and ended up having a substantial impact in several respects on the promulgated version of *Gaudium et Spes*.¹¹⁶

1.2.2. *Recognising Christ our Brother in the Persons of all Men and Women*

In *Gaudium et Spes*,¹¹⁷ the “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” (*Constitutio pastoralis de ecclesia in mundo huius temporis*),¹¹⁸ the Church speaks of human accessibility to God

¹¹³ Brandon R. Peterson, “Who Is He to Judge? Magisterial authority in the modern world.” Retrieved from: <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/who-he-judge>. This online article also appeared in print, under the headline: “Who Is He to Judge? Magisterial Authority in the Modern Age,” in: *America* magazine, Vol. 231, no. 18 (7 December 2015): 19-22.

¹¹⁴ Peterson, “Who Is He to Judge? Magisterial authority in the modern world.”

¹¹⁵ The drafting commissions went through a series of reorganisations, during which Rahner’s enthusiasm for the text began to wane. Moreover, he was not able to attend the meeting in Ariccia in January 1964 at which the main contours of *Gaudium et Spes* as we know it now took shape.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Peterson, “Who Is He to Judge? Magisterial authority in the modern world.”

¹¹⁷ GS 1-93. *VCII*, 163-282, par. 1-93. For the original Latin text, I used the Vatican archives (see <http://www.vatican.va>). For scholarship on the genesis and formulation of the Council documents cf. Giuseppe Alberigo & Joseph A. Komonchak (English version), eds. *History of Vatican II*, Volumes 1-5 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 1996-2006) [Vol. 1, *Announcing and Preparing Vatican II*, 1996; Vol. 2, *The Formation of the Council’s Identity, First Period and Intersession, October 1962-September 1963*, 1997; Vol. 3, *The Mature Council, Second Period and Intersession, September 1963-September 1964*, 2000; Vol. 4, *Church as Communion, Third Period and Intersession, September 1964-September 1965*, 2002; Vol. 5, *The Council and the Transition, Fourth Period and the End of the Council, September 1965-December 1965*, 2006]. Peter Hünemann & Bernd Jochen Hilberath, eds. *Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, Volumes 1-5 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2009).

¹¹⁸ GS 1. *VCII*, 172-173. See n.1. of Part One, “Preface,” in *Gaudium et Spes*, for the following explanation: “Although it consists of two parts, the Pastoral Constitution “The Church in the World Today” constitutes an organic unity. The Constitution is called “pastoral” because, while resting on doctrinal principles, it sets out the relation of the church to the world and to the people of today. In Part I, therefore, the pastoral emphasis is not overlooked, nor is the doctrinal

and expresses its solidarity with “the whole of humanity,” “with the whole human family” (*cum tota familia gentium*).¹¹⁹ The divine-human outreach is formulated as follows: “The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well.”¹²⁰ Karl Rahner writes:

In *Gaudium et Spes*, in an action of the entire Church as such, *the Church as a totality becomes conscious of its responsibility for the dawning history of humanity*. Much of the Constitution may be conceived in a European way, as far as details go, but the Third World is truly present as part of the Church and as object of its responsibility. The sensitization of the European Church to its world responsibility may move ahead only with painstaking slowness. But this responsibility, our political theology, can no longer be excluded from the consciousness of a world Church.¹²¹

Aware of human sinfulness and the Cross, the Council clearly focuses on accessibility to God, that is, on “a message of salvation for all of humanity,”¹²² which importantly, in the context of this thesis, includes those human beings behind bars. Rahner’s theological anthropology of grace shines through the whole document, in the “deep solidarity with the human race and its history.”¹²³ The Second Vatican council, which arguably draws on his thought, studies “the mystery of the Church more deeply,” addressing “the whole of humanity.”¹²⁴ “The world” which the council “has in mind” is

the world of women and men, the entire human family seen in its total environment. It is the

emphasis overlooked in Part II. In Part I the church develops its teaching on humanity, the world it inhabits, and its relationship to women and men. Part II treats at length of various aspects of life and human society today and in particular deals with those questions and problems which seem to have a greater urgency in our day. The result is that in Part II the subject matter which is viewed in the light of doctrinal principles consists of elements, some of which are permanent and some of which are contingent. The Constitution is to be interpreted according to the general norms of theological interpretation, while taking into account, especially in Part II, the changing circumstances which the subject matter, by its very nature, involves.”

¹¹⁹ GS 1. *VCII*, 163. Par. 1, “De intima coniunctione Ecclesiae cum tota familia gentium.”

¹²⁰ GS 1. *VCII*, 163. Par. 1, “De intima coniunctione Ecclesiae cum tota familia gentium.”

¹²¹ Karl Rahner, SJ., “Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II,” in: *Theological Studies* 40, issue: 4 (December 1, 1979): 716-727, esp. 719 [*italics* my emphasis]. “This citation is from an address delivered by Karl Rahner on April 8, 1979, at an academic convocation in Cambridge, Mass., at which the Weston School of Theology awarded him the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters. The translation was made by Leo J. O’Donovan, SJ., Professor of systematic theology at Weston.” Cf. Lucien Richard, with Daniel T. Harrington and John W. O’Malley, eds., *Vatican II, The Unfinished Agenda: A Look to the Future* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1987), 13.

¹²² GS 1. *VCII*, 163. Par. 1, “De intima coniunctione Ecclesiae cum tota familia gentium.”

¹²³ GS 1. *VCII*, 163. Par. 1, “De intima coniunctione Ecclesiae cum tota familia gentium.”

¹²⁴ GS 2. *VCII*, 163. Par. 2, “Ad quosnam Concilium sermonem dirigat.”

world as the theatre of human history, bearing the marks of its travail, its triumphs and failures. It is the world which Christians believe has been created and is sustained by the love of its maker, has fallen into the slavery of sin but has been freed by Christ, who was crucified and rose again in order to break the stranglehold of the evil one, so that it might be fashioned anew according to God's design and brought to its fulfilment.¹²⁵

Furthermore, the council reflects on the problems of the world, and is aware of the enslavement and imprisonment of the human spirit in modern times:

In no other age has humanity enjoyed such an abundance of wealth, resources and economic well-being; and yet a huge proportion of the people of the world is plagued by hunger and extreme need while countless numbers are totally illiterate. At no time have people had such a keen sense of freedom, only to be faced by new forms of social and psychological slavery. The world is keenly aware of its unity and of mutual interdependence in essential solidarity, but at the same time it is split into bitterly opposing camps.¹²⁶

On a somewhat pessimistic note the document continues:

We have not yet seen the last of bitter political, social, and economic hostility, and racial and ideological antagonism, nor are we free from the spectre of a war of total destruction. If there is a growing exchange of ideas, there is still widespread disagreement in competing ideologies about the meaning of the words which express our key concepts. There is lastly a painstaking search for a better material world, without a parallel spiritual advancement.¹²⁷

Karl Rahner's theological anthropology as well as *Gaudium et Spes* lay particular stress "on respect for the human person,"¹²⁸ that is, "everybody should look upon his or her neighbour (without any exception) as another self, bearing in mind especially their neighbour's life and the means needed for a dignified way of life."¹²⁹ In the spirit of Rahner, the text calls for human dignity and awakens our conscience "by calling to mind the words of Christ: 'As you did it to one of the least of these my

¹²⁵ GS 2. *VCII*, 164. Par. 2, "Ad quosnam Concilium sermonem dirigat."

¹²⁶ GS 4. *VCII*, 166. Par. 4, "De spe et angore."

¹²⁷ GS 4. *VCII*, 166. Par. 4, "De spe et angore."

¹²⁸ GS. 27. *VCII*, 192. Par. 27, "De reverentia erga personam humanam."

¹²⁹ GS 27. *VCII*, 192. Par. 27, "De reverentia erga personam humanam."

brothers or sisters, you did it to me' (Mt 25: 40)."¹³⁰ Next, the council lists the varieties of crime, which are numerous:

all offenses against life itself, such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and willful suicide; all violations of the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture, undue psychological pressures; all offences against human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, degrading working conditions where people are treated as mere tools for profit rather than free and responsible persons: all these and the like are criminal: they poison civilization; and they debase the perpetrators more than the victims and militate against the honour of the creator.¹³¹

Despite the horrific mutilations of the dignity of the human person in social, political, and religious matters – that is, in a confused and wounded world – *Gaudium et Spes* pleads for “respect and love for enemies.”¹³² It argues that “the more deeply, through courtesy and love, we come to understand” the different ways of thinking “the more easily will we be able to enter into dialogue” with what is *other*.¹³³ “Love and courtesy of this kind,” however, “should not, of course, make us indifferent to truth and goodness.”¹³⁴ The council reasons as follows:

Love, in fact, impels the followers of Christ to proclaim to everyone the truth which saves. But we must distinguish between the error (which must always be rejected) and the people in error, who never lose their dignity as persons even though they flounder amid false or inadequate religious ideas. God, who alone is the judge and the searcher of hearts, forbids us to pass judgment on the inner guilt of others.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ GS 27. *VCII*, 192-193. Par. 27, “De reverentia erga personam humanam.” See ch 2, “The Prison Pastorate.”

¹³¹ GS 27. *VCII*, 193. Par. 27, “De reverentia erga personam humanam.”

¹³² GS 28. *VCII*, 193. Par. 28, “De reverentia et amore erga adversaries.” For “human rights in prisons” see Anastasia Karamalidou, *Embedding Human Rights in Prison: English and Dutch Perspectives* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). Karamalidou’s comparative study of prisoners’ human rights in England, Wales and the Netherlands documents “the impact of the two countries’ penal policies on prisoners’ human rights and presents prisoners’ views on the human rights contribution to prison life and prisoner treatment.” In this light of “human rights” for the incarcerated, the plea of *Gaudium et Spes* for “respect and love for enemies” has something to offer to prison ministry today.

¹³³ GS 28. *VCII*, 193. Par. 28, “De reverentia et amore erga adversaries.”

¹³⁴ GS 28. *VCII*, 193. Par. 28, “De reverentia et amore erga adversaries.”

¹³⁵ GS 28. *VCII*, 193. Par. 28, “De reverentia et amore erga adversaries.”

Moreover, when we take our main research subject, “prison ministry,” into account, *Gaudium et Spes* claims that “the teaching of Christ even demands that we forgive injury”: that we forgive prisoners, forgive those who injured their fellow human beings. This means that “the precept of love, which is the commandment of the New Law, includes all our enemies,”¹³⁶ recalling the Scriptures: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, do good to them that hate you; and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you’ (Mt 5: 43-44).”¹³⁷ The council basically advocates an “essential equality of all” in terms of “social justice”:

All women and men are endowed with a rational soul and are created in God’s image; they have the same nature and origin and, being redeemed by Christ, they enjoy the same divine calling and destiny; there is here a basic equality between all and it must be accorded ever greater recognition.¹³⁸

Gaudium et Spes acknowledges that all women and men can have access to God but “not all people are alike.” As human beings we differ physically, intellectually and morally. “But any kind of social or cultural discrimination in basic personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, colour, social conditions, language or religion, must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God’s design.”¹³⁹ The council defends equality and human dignity. Consequently, we must strive, even in penitentiaries, “for fairer and more humane conditions.”¹⁴⁰ The unwarranted “economic and social disparity between individuals and peoples of the one human race is a source of scandal.”¹⁴¹ It works against “social justice, equity, human dignity, as well as social and international peace.”¹⁴² It is for public and private organisations, for institutions of incarceration,

to be at the service of the dignity and destiny of humanity; let them spare no effort to banish every vestige of social and political slavery and to safeguard basic human rights under every political system. And even if it takes a considerable time to arrive at the desired goal, these organisations should gradually align themselves with spiritual realities, which are the most

¹³⁶ GS 28. *VCII*, 193-194. Par. 28, “De reverentia et amore erga adversaries.”

¹³⁷ GS 29. *VCII*, 194. Par. 28, “De reverentia et amore erga adversaries.”

¹³⁸ GS 29. *VCII*, 194. Par. 29, “De essentiali inter omnes homines aequalitate et de iustitia sociali.”

¹³⁹ GS 29. *VCII*, 194. Par. 29, “De essentiali inter omnes homines aequalitate et de iustitia sociali.”

¹⁴⁰ GS 29. *VCII*, 194. Par. 29, “De essentiali inter omnes homines aequalitate et de iustitia sociali.”

¹⁴¹ GS 29. *VCII*, 194. Par. 29, “De essentiali inter omnes homines aequalitate et de iustitia sociali.”

¹⁴² GS 29. *VCII*, 194. Par. 29, “De essentiali inter omnes homines aequalitate et de iustitia sociali.”

sublime of all.¹⁴³

In order to deal with punishment, imprisonment, crime, and the grounding dimensions of evil, we need to align ourselves “with spiritual realities.”¹⁴⁴ The council discusses therefore the true meaning and “the excellence of freedom.”¹⁴⁵ It is “in freedom that people can turn themselves towards what is good.”¹⁴⁶

The people of our time prize freedom very highly and strive eagerly for it. In this they are right. Yet they often cherish it improperly, as if it gave them leave to do anything they like, even when it is evil. But genuine freedom is an exceptional sign of the image of God in humanity.¹⁴⁷

“The image of God in humanity” (*divinae imaginis in homine*),¹⁴⁸ of the Good, is Christ, “the Alpha and Omega.”¹⁴⁹ In *Gaudium et Spes* it is made evident that without a beginning, “without a creator there can be no creature.”¹⁵⁰ People of different cultures and religions “have always recognized the voice and the revelation of God in the language of creatures.”¹⁵¹ Above and beyond this insight, we recognise that “once God is forgotten,” I as a creature will myself be “left in darkness.”¹⁵² The Council speaks of “human activity infected by sin” (*De humana nativitate a peccato corrupta*).¹⁵³ What prison chaplains encounter on a daily basis, the sacred scripture teaches us, namely “what has also been confirmed by centuries of experience”¹⁵⁴:

that the great advantages of human progress bring with them grave temptations: the hierarchy of values has been disordered, good and evil intermingle, and every person and group are interested only in their own affairs, not in those of others. So it is that the earth has not yet become the scene of true amity; rather, humanity’s growing power now threatens to put an

¹⁴³ GS 29. *VCII*, 194-195. Par. 29, “De essentiali inter omnes homines aequalitate et de iustitia sociali.”

¹⁴⁴ GS 29. *VCII*, 195. Par. 29, “De essentiali inter omnes homines aequalitate et de iustitia sociali.”

¹⁴⁵ GS 17. *VCII*, 179. Par. 17, “De praestantia libertatis.”

¹⁴⁶ GS 17. *VCII*, 179. Par. 17, “De praestantia libertatis.”

¹⁴⁷ GS 17. *VCII*, 179. Par. 17, “De praestantia libertatis.”

¹⁴⁸ GS 17. *VCII*, 179. Par. 17, “De praestantia libertatis.”

¹⁴⁹ GS 45. *VCII*, 215. Par. 45, “De Christo, alpha et omega.”

¹⁵⁰ GS 36. *VCII*, 202. Par. 36, “De iusta rerum terrenarum autonomia.”

¹⁵¹ GS 36. *VCII*, 202. Par. 36, “De iusta rerum terrenarum autonomia.”

¹⁵² GS 36. *VCII*, 202. Par. 36, “De iusta rerum terrenarum autonomia.”

¹⁵³ GS 37. *VCII*, 202-203. Par. 37, “De humana nativitate a peccato corrupta.”

¹⁵⁴ GS 37. *VCII*, 202. Par. 37, “De humana nativitate a peccato corrupta.”

end to the human race itself.¹⁵⁵

We are made aware that “the whole of human history has been the story of our combat with the powers of evil stretching as our Lord tells us, from the very dawn of history until the last day.”¹⁵⁶ Not only prison ministers find themselves daily “in the battlefield.” We all have to “struggle to do what is right.” It is at great cost, “aided by God’s grace,” that we may succeed in achieving our “own inner integrity” and dignity as persons. Hence we should not be “reduced to being an instrument of sin”¹⁵⁷:

To the question of how this unhappy situation can be overcome, Christians reply that all these human activities, which are daily endangered by pride and inordinate self-love, must be purified and perfected by the cross and resurrection of Christ. *Redeemed by Christ and made a new creature by the holy Spirit, a person can, and indeed must, love the things which God has created.*¹⁵⁸

“Redemption” is here proposed as the ‘solution’ to the predicament in which prisoners *inter alia* find themselves. Chapters Four and Five hope to clarify what *redemption* might look like for prisoners and whether it is what will actually meet their need.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, the theology of *empowerment* and of suffering that will be expounded in Chapter Five could arguably be seen as a form of redemption. By finding a purpose for their suffering and pain, through uniting their suffering *with* Christ (whatever that might mean for people who are not Christian), prisoners can find redemption: that is to say, can be renewed in the Spirit and find new life.

Christ assures us that when we “trust in the charity of God that the way of love is open to all.”¹⁶⁰ The Council stresses that our efforts “to establish a universal communion will not be in vain.”¹⁶¹ No one knows “the moment of the consummation of the earth and of humanity.”¹⁶² Nor do we grasp “the

¹⁵⁵ GS 37. VCII, 202. Par. 37, “De humana nativitate a peccato corrupta.”

¹⁵⁶ GS 37. VCII, 202. Par. 37, “De humana nativitate a peccato corrupta.”

¹⁵⁷ GS 37. VCII, 202. Par. 37, “De humana nativitate a peccato corrupta.”

¹⁵⁸ GS 37. VCII, 202-203. Par. 37, “De humana nativitate a peccato corrupta” [*italics my emphasis*].

¹⁵⁹ For “seeking redemption” see John Irwin, *Lifers: Seeking Redemption in Prison*, Criminology and Justice Studies (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009). Dr. Irwin (Ph.D. in sociology) served five years in a California state penitentiary for armed robbery. The ex-convict reveals “through the lifers’ stories,” what happens to prisoners “serving very long sentences in correctional facilities and what this should tell us about effective sentencing policy.”

¹⁶⁰ GS 38. VCII, 203. Par. 38, “De humana nativitate in paschali mysterio ad perfectionem adducta.”

¹⁶¹ GS 38. VCII, 203. Par. 38, “De humana nativitate in paschali mysterio ad perfectionem adducta.”

¹⁶² GS 39. VCII, 204. Par. 39, “Terra nova et caelum novum,” esp. n. 15: See Acts 1:7.

way the universe will be transformed.”¹⁶³ Nonetheless, “the form of this world, distorted by sin, is passing away.”¹⁶⁴ *Gaudium et Spes* is trying to convince us that

we are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling and a new earth in which righteousness dwells, whose happiness will fill and surpass all the desires of peace arising in human hearts. Then death will have been conquered, the daughters and sons of God will be raised in Christ and what was sown in weakness and dishonour will become incorruptible; charity and its works will remain and all of creation, which God made for humanity, will be set free from its bondage to decay.¹⁶⁵

We will be “set free” from our imprisonment, from our “bondage to decay.” “Whether it aids the world or whether it benefits from it,” both Rahner and the Council saw that in the end “the Church has but one sole purpose,”¹⁶⁶

that the kingdom of God may come and the salvation of the human race may be accomplished. Every benefit the people of God can confer on humanity during its earthly pilgrimage is rooted in the Church’s being “the universal sacrament of salvation,” at once manifesting and actualizing the mystery of God’s love for humanity.¹⁶⁷

Gaudium et Spes, influenced by Rahner’s theological anthropology, clearly shows that the human accessibility to God is “animated and drawn together in his Spirit” (*in Eius Spiritu vivificati et coadunati*).¹⁶⁸ *Gaudium et Spes* claims that “we press onwards on our journey towards the consummation of history which fully corresponds to the plan of his love: ‘to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth’ (Eph 1:10).”¹⁶⁹

1.2.3. *The Theological Reception History (Wirkungsgeschichte) of Gaudium et Spes*

“One of the most striking developments in the first decade after the close of the Second Vatican

¹⁶³ GS 39. VCII, 204. Par. 39, “Terra nova et caelum novum.”

¹⁶⁴ GS 39. VCII, 204. Par. 39, “Terra nova et caelum novum,” esp. n. 16: See I Cor 7:31; St Irenaeus *Adversus Haereses*, V, 36,1: PG 7, 1222.

¹⁶⁵ GS 39. VCII, 204. Par. 39, “Terra nova et caelum novum.”

¹⁶⁶ GS 45. VCII, 215. Par. 45, “De Christo, alpha et omega.”

¹⁶⁷ GS 45. VCII, 215-216. Par. 45, “De Christo, alpha et omega.”

¹⁶⁸ GS 45. VCII, 216. Par. 45, “De Christo, alpha et omega.”

¹⁶⁹ GS 45. VCII, 216. Par. 45, “De Christo, alpha et omega.”

Council,” however, was an arresting disunity, “the splintering of the coalition of theologians.”¹⁷⁰ In his essay, “The Redaction and Reception of *Gaudium et Spes*: Tensions within the Majority at Vatican II,” Joseph A. Komonchak makes the point that it seems to him “that the divisions among the progressive theologians deserve more study than they have so far received, since they are a key to the theological reception history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) of the Council.”¹⁷¹ He refers to Alberigo, Bouyer, Daniélou, Philips, de Lubac, Ratzinger, and von Balthasar, but also to Chenu, Congar, Dossetti, Hauptmann, Lonergan, Rahner, and Schillebeeckx.

In his essay, Komonchak brings theological clarity to a chaotic variety of views. Following David Tracy, he offers a distinction between “a correlation-theology, the contemporary equivalent of Aquinas’s engagement with Aristotle,” and an “epiphanic theology, the contemporary equivalent of a more Augustinian and Bonaventuran approach.”¹⁷² The debates and arguments regarding *Gaudium et Spes* originate roughly in these two theological strands. Deferentially, Komonchak analyses the theological differences “as they began to appear in the last stages of the preparation of *Gaudium et Spes* and as they were reflected, rather consistently, also in the initial commentaries on the pastoral constitution.”¹⁷³ Schema thirteen of the Council,¹⁷⁴ for instance, was extensively rewritten. Komonchak refers to Karl Rahner’s argument that

the schema did not adequately address the relationship between the order of creation and the order of redemption, particularly the meaning of the human activity that was profoundly transforming the world. The inner-worldly significance of this activity was neglected in

¹⁷⁰ Joseph A. Komonchak, “The Redaction and Reception of *Gaudium et Spes*: Tensions within the Majority at Vatican II,” *The Catholic University of America* (2013): 1-23, esp. 1 [retrieved from: <https://jakomonchak.files.wordpress.com>]. Henceforth, the abbreviation used will be: “RRGS.” Komonchak’s essay was first published as “Le valutazioni sulla *Gaudium et spes*: Chenu, Dossetti, Ratzinger,” in: *Volti di fine Concilio: Studi di storia e teologia sulla conclusione del Vaticano II*, ed. Joseph Doré and Alberto Melloni (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000) 115-153; also published as “La redazione della *Gaudium et spes*,” *Il Regno* 13/99 (1 July 1999) 446-455, and in an abbreviated version as “Augustine, Aquinas or the Gospel *sine glossa*: Divisions over *Gaudium et spes*,” in *Unfinished Journey: The Church 40 Years after Vatican II. Essays for John Wilkins*, ed. Austen Ivereigh (New York, NY: Continuum, 2003) 102-118.

¹⁷¹ RRGS: 2.

¹⁷² RRGS: 23.

¹⁷³ RRGS: 2.

¹⁷⁴ The original drafts of Vatican II are called “schemas.” In *The Spirit of Vatican II: A History of Catholic Reform in America*, Colleen McDannell writes: “The most important votes were taken on the various chapters of what would become *Gaudium et Spes*. As the only draft document that originated from the Council Fathers themselves and not from one of the preparatory commissions, ‘schema 13’ became the ‘Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.’ The longest and most repetitious of the documents produced by the Second Vatican Council, it sought to provide guidance on how Christianity could help people understand and solve contemporary social problems.” Colleen McDannell, *The Spirit of Vatican II: A History of Catholic Reform in America* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2011), 104.

favour of its immediate religious and moral significance. The concept of the “world” in the text also needed further clarification.¹⁷⁵

Komonchak stresses the importance of the fact that the schema also lacked “a real and profound theology of sin [...] the ineradicable depths of sin were overlooked.” Moreover, it “lacked a theology of the eschatological situation in which the world and the Church stand in virtue of the incarnation, cross, and resurrection of Christ.” Komonchak writes that the schema was missing a confrontation “between Christian eschatology and various forms of secular, this-worldly eschatology, such as Marxism.” Finally, the document “lacked the needed Christian anthropology.”¹⁷⁶

The idea of the “image of God” was presented too rapidly and too briefly and ignored the complexities of the notion. The reflections on human dignity were too abstract, too formal, and too oriented toward contemplation. God is invoked to explain man rather than the other way round. The result was a tedious moralizing. The text lacked a “theology of the cross” and of its implications for the history of the world and of the human race.¹⁷⁷

A defender of Schema thirteen, Marie-Dominique Chenu, supported the text with its “structure and inspiration,” specifically, “both during the last stages of its redaction and in his commentaries on *Gaudium et Spes*.”¹⁷⁸ He was aware of Rahner’s critique concerning “the lack of attention to the eschatological situation.”¹⁷⁹ In a letter to Hauptmann, Chenu wrote:

It is not simply for pedagogical reasons, and to gain an audience among non-Christians, that each chapter (1,2,3) begins by observing the human condition in order then to move on to Christ. This, of course, is quite valid in a document addressed to the whole world. More profoundly, however, this progressive method is the expression of a theology whose object is, not to “deduce” a Christian anthropology from Christology, but to discern “the signs of the times” in the concrete reality of history.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁵ *RRGS*: 3.

¹⁷⁶ *RRGS*: 3.

¹⁷⁷ *RRGS*: 3.

¹⁷⁸ *RRGS*: 4-7.

¹⁷⁹ *RRGS*: 5.

¹⁸⁰ *RRGS*: 6, esp. n. 16 [Chenu to Hauptmann, 2 October 1965, as quoted in Turbanti, “La redazione,” 406; see p. 407 for a similar letter to Msgr. Hengbach].

“This is the entire soul of the schema,” Chenu argues,

in manifest continuity with the inspiration of John XXIII and with the general movement of the Council – not to present *ex auctoritate* a “social doctrine” but to discern in humans today, in the great webs of historical progress (socialization, universalism, political consciousness...), appeals, capacities, obediential potencies, “building blocks,” ways of being open, more or less consciously, to the Word of God.¹⁸¹

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI), on the contrary, takes a more Augustinian stance. His commentary “criticizes the Ariccia text for its neglect of the notion of sin, which he attributes to the ‘optimistic atmosphere’ created by Pope John’s opening speech.”¹⁸² Ratzinger provides a different account of the Council’s inspiration. Komonchak writes:

In a generally negative paper written ten years after the Council began, he [Ratzinger] asked what theological and spiritual resources the Church had with which to face the Council’s disappointing aftermath. The only hope lay, he thought, “in those forces that really had made Vatican II possible and shaped it but that shortly thereafter had been overrun by a wave of modernity.”¹⁸³

For Ratzinger this was

a theology and a piety which essentially were based on the Holy Scriptures, on the Church Fathers, and on the great liturgical heritage of the universal Church. At the Council this theology succeeded in nourishing the faith not only on the thought of the last hundred years but on the great stream of the whole tradition in order thus to make it richer and more vital and at the same time simpler and more open.¹⁸⁴

Komonchak argues that Joseph Ratzinger, dismisses two other possibilities: “the post-conciliar progressivism that had arisen out of J.B. Metz’s transformation of Karl Rahner’s transcendental

¹⁸¹ *RRGS*: 6.

¹⁸² *RRGS*: 11.

¹⁸³ *RRGS*: 21.

¹⁸⁴ *RRGS*: 21.

Thomism into, first, a theology of hope and, second, a political theology.”¹⁸⁵

Despite theological divergence and the fact that the participating theologians at the Council drew their main inspirations from various theological sources, *Gaudium et Spes* ends hopefully by saying: “It is the Father’s will that we should recognize Christ our brother in the persons of all men and women and should love them with an active love, in word and in deed, thus bearing witness to the truth; and it is his will that we should share with others the mystery of his heavenly love.”¹⁸⁶

1.3. Anonymous Christianity

1.3.1. The Origins of the Term “Anonymous Christian”

Karl Rahner’s notion of “Anonymous Christianity” is considered both controversial and influential.¹⁸⁷ It developed in significance during the period of the Second Vatican Council.¹⁸⁸ German Professor Albert Raffelt from the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg studied the origins of the term “anonymous Christian” (*anonymer Christ*) in Karl Rahner’s theology.¹⁸⁹ He discovered that

¹⁸⁵ RRGs: 21. Cf. Francis S. Fiorenza, “Chapter Seven: The New Theology and Transcendental Thomism,” in: James C. Livingstone, et al. *Modern Christian Theology*, Volume 2, The Twentieth Century (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006 [2000]), 197-232.

¹⁸⁶ *VCII*, 281. Par. 93, “De mundo aedificando et ad finem perducendo.”

¹⁸⁷ For “the anonymous Christian” (*anonymer Christ*) in the collected works see esp.: *SW*, 26 (*Grundkurs des Glaubens*): 172, 281, 291, 296, 380, 384, 404 f., 426, 474, 541 f.; *SW*, 5/1 (*De Gratia Christi*): 178 f., 184, 186, 189, 192; *SW*, 9 (*Maria, Mutter des Herrn*): 437; *SW*, 10 (*Kirche in den Herausforderungen der Zeit*): 442, 465 f., 494, 513, 515, 570-573, 578-580, 589, 648, 653; *SW*, 12 (*Menschsein und Menschwerdung Gottes*): 82 f., 222 f., 307, 449, 462; *SW*, 14 (*Christliches Leben*): 158, 216; *SW*, 16 (*Kirchliche Erneuerung*): 172, 181-187, 189 f., 550. *SW*, 17/2 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie II*): 1207-1210, 1209; *SW*, 19 (*Selbstvollzug der Kirche*): 156, 160, 347, 355, 430, 435, 494; *SW*, 21/1 (*Das Zweite Vatikanum I*): 501, 506; *SW*, 21/2 (*Das Zweite Vatikanum II*): 803, 816, 819, 885-903, 1006; *SW*, 22/1a (*Dogmatik nach dem Konzil Ia*): 356, 387; *SW*, 22/1b (*Dogmatik nach dem Konzil Ib*): 700 f., 901-903, 908; *SW*, 22/2 (*Dogmatik nach dem Konzil II*): 165, 283-291, 312-344, 352 f., 562-565, 848 f.; *SW*, 23 (*Glaube im Alltag*): 57, 164 f., 260, 264, 272, 290-291, 357-358, 365, 367, 486; *SW*, 24/1 (*Das Konzil in der Ortskirche I*): 114, 151, 170, 180, 293, 300, 312; *SW*, 24/2 (*Das Konzil in der Ortskirche II*): 466, 482, 596-597, 847, 850-852; *SW*, 25 (*Erneuerung des Ordenslebens*): 13, 17 f., 44, 51, 123 f., 249, 656; *SW*, 27 (*Einheit in Vielfalt*): 70 f., 110; *SW*, 28 (*Christentum in Gesellschaft*): 9, 276 f., 341, 469 f., 475, 797; *SW*, 30 (*Anstöße systematischer Theologie*): 230 f., 259, 261; *SW*, 31 (*Im Gespräch über Kirche und Gesellschaft*): 125, 200, 202, 204, 209 f., 216 f., 239, 262 f., 322 f., 353 f., 364 f., 403, 415 f., 523; *SW*, 32/1 (*Ergänzungen*): 30, 38, 187 f., 351 f., 356, 360-363, 409. [Cf. *SW*, 32/2 (*Register: anonyme Christologie, anonymer Christ, anonyme Christlichkeit*)]

¹⁸⁸ See Anthony Mellor, “The Human Orientation towards Transcendence and the Anonymous Christian,” in: *Ibidem*, *Karl Rahner, Culture and Evangelization: New Approaches in an Australian Setting*, Theology and Mission in World Christianity, Band: 13 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2019), 134-138.

¹⁸⁹ Albert Raffelt, “‘Anonyme Christen’ und ‘konfessioneller Verein’ bei Karl Rahner: Eine Bemerkung zur Terminologie und zur Frage der Interpretation seiner frühen Theologie,” Sonderdrucke aus der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, 1997 (URN: urn:nbn:de:bsz:25-opus-23239). First published in: *Theologie und Philosophie* 72 (1997): 565-573. Cf. “Der Gesetzesbegriff in der christlichen Offenbarung: Dialog zwischen Prof. Karl Rahner, Innsbruck, Pater Dr. Leopold

it was originally used in an intellectual discussion group in 1948, its theological foundations were developed in the preceding years. The historical relevance of this fact can arguably be asserted against the later wide-ranging and unscientific usages of the term. Raffelt cites Rahner's answer about the "Anonymous Christian" in the following passage:

It has already been said that man's ultimate attitude to God can neither be clearly qualified externally nor determined in self-reflection. Of course, there are real and spurious existentialists as well as real and spurious Christians. But if a person is genuine, called by God, and truly says yes, then he is *an anonymous Christian*. The existentialist must reckon with the fact that he is doing something existentially different from what he believes to be doing according the existential interpretation of his existence and action.¹⁹⁰

Albert Raffelt has shown that the term "anonymous Christian" is employed here casually in human conversation in a rather informal context. Whether it was a momentary anthropological 'imprint' or a theological 'label' that Rahner already had in mind could not be determined at this point. It is not even clear, Raffelt argues, whether Rahner's idea of "anonymous Christian," disappeared from his memory after this peripheral use, and that it was rediscovered or reinstalled as a formulation at a later stage. Like other basic concepts in Rahner's work, the *anonymer Christ* appeared at an early phase in his theological career, without necessarily being used frequently and continuously using it as either a theological 'symbol' or a dogmatic 'statement.'¹⁹¹ In his reflections on "The Human Orientation towards Transcendence and the Anonymous Christian," Anthony Mellor claims that

Soukup, Seckau, und Pastor Dr. G. Molin, Wien," in: Simon Moser (ed.), *Gesetz und Wirklichkeit*: 4. Internationale Hochschulwoche des österreichischen Collegs, Alpbach, Tirol, 1948, Innsbruck, pp. 251-254.

¹⁹⁰ Albert Raffelt, "'Anonyme Christen' und 'konfessioneller Verein' bei Karl Rahner," in: *Theologie und Philosophie* 72 (1997): 568. Raffelt cites here from "Der Gesetzesbegriff in der christlichen Offenbarung," in: Moser (ed.), *Gesetz und Wirklichkeit*, esp. 252 [*my translation*]: Es wurde schon gesagt, daß die letzte Haltung des Menschen vor Gott von außen und in der Eigenreflexion nicht eindeutig qualifiziert werden kann. Selbstverständlich gibt es echte und unechte Existentialisten genau so wie echte und unechte Christen. Wenn aber ein Mensch echt ist, von Gott angerufen wird und echt ja sagt, ist er *ein anonymer Christ*. Der Existentialist muß damit rechnen, daß er existentiell etwas anderes tut, als er nach der existentialen Interpretation seines Daseins und Tuns vermeint (Albert Raffelt).

¹⁹¹ Albert Raffelt, "'Anonyme Christen' und 'konfessioneller Verein' bei Karl Rahner," 565. For the "anonymous Christian" Raffelt refers, among others, to the following texts: "Die anonymen Christen," in: Karl Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie*, Bd. 6. (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1965), 545-554, und öfter bis hin zum Stichwort "Anonymer Christ" im *Lexikon der Pastoraltheologie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1972); HPT (Handbuch der Praktischen Theologie) 5, jetzt in Karl Rahner, *Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. 19 (Freiburg: Herder, 1995), 494; *Meyers enzyklopädisches Lexikon*, Bd. 2. (Mannheim: BI, 1971), 261 (*Anonymes Christentum*); *Brockhaus Enzyklopädie*, 19. Aufl. Bd. 1. (Mannheim: Brockhaus, 1986) (*Anonymes Christentum*); LThK (*Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*) 3 I (1993), 702 (*Anonymer Christ*); *Gnade und Welt: Zum Grundgefüge von Karl Rahners Theorie der "anonymen Christen"* (Freiburg: Herder, 1982); FThSt (*Freiburger Theologische Studien*) 123.

The concept of the “anonymous Christian” and the “anonymous Christian world” finds an earlier expression in *Hearers of the Word*. There, Rahner argued that the universal human capacity for transcendence must be intelligibly expressed in some living form: “Man is the same the world over, and [...] where man’s expectation of a true revelation from God is not satisfied or not thought to be satisfied, very easily comparable substitute images begin to arise.”¹⁹²

1.3.2. Scriptural Value and Answer to “Humanism” and Global “Militant Atheism”¹⁹³

Aware of this nuanced background, as carefully researched by Raffelt, the term *anonymer Christ* represents a movement towards an inclusive theology with interreligious bearings. Rahner offers more than an article of faith,¹⁹⁴ and seems to ask a valid question which has particular resonance for the prison pastorate: whether someone who has no explicit knowledge of God could already be in tune *with* his incarnate Presence, *in* Christ. Rahner is clear that anyone who does *not* say in his/her heart “there is no God” but affirms the Presence with his/her being in truth and deed, is already a believer, and through grace an “anonymous Christian” (*anonymer Christ*).¹⁹⁵

Rahner’s view of “Anonymous Christianity” is positive in relation to the anthropological perspective on human beings in imprisoned existence: to be *human* is to be saved, graced and forgiven by God in Jesus Christ.¹⁹⁶ Rahner’s theological reflection is grounded in the reality and mystery of “relationship” (*Beziehung*): the relationship between the divine and the human. Moreover, he believes in a “salvation” outside of the established traditional Church – that is, with a capital ‘C.’¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² Anthony Mellor, *Karl Rahner, Culture and Evangelization*, 134.

¹⁹³ See my response to the global “Militant Atheism” in the twenty-first century: Meins G.S. Coetsier, “Between Realities: Dawkins vs. Voegelin,” in: *Modern Age: A Quarterly Review* 51, no. 3 & 4 (Summer/Fall 2009): 220-230.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Rm 2: 14-16, and in Mt 25: 31-46.

¹⁹⁵ SW, 22/2 (*Dogmatik nach dem Konzil*): 288. This new angle, however, can become problematic in dialogue with other religions. For instance, on what grounds, can I assert that a Jewish woman like Etty Hillesum, or the Jewish philosophers Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas, were ‘anonymous Christians’? Or that an Imam, the worship leader of a mosque and Muslim community, is in fact under the hidden influence of “Christ.” Or that a practicing Buddhist fundamentally acts without perhaps being aware of it, as a Christian mystic? For some, this could be really provocative, especially when Christian theologians or ministers categorically claim such a position. Moreover, who are we as Christians to say what the identity of the Other essentially is. Wouldn’t such a theology be pretentious?

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Harvey D. Egan, S.J., *Karl Rahner: Mystic of Everyday Life* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Co, 1998).

¹⁹⁷ This hope for “universal salvation” goes back to St. Paul’s suggestion at “the end of 1 Corinthians 15 that God will be ‘all in all.’” This appealed to Rahner who holds a “‘wider hope’ that eventually no person will be lost from God’s love,” including the incarcerated of our time. See Morwenna Ludlow, *Universal Salvation: Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000).

He argues in favour of a humanity grounded in Christ which includes 'the outsider,' 'the non-Christian,' 'the pagan' and 'the non-believer,' the 'prisoner.' He responds to "world-wide and militant atheism,"¹⁹⁸ with a theology of grace. His highly influential but controversial theory of the "anonymous Christian"¹⁹⁹ – "introducing a version of [new missionary] *inclusivism*"²⁰⁰ – became eventually one of the most significant theological contributions to mark the Second Vatican Council.²⁰¹ "One of Rahner's clearest [written] statements about this idea," Ivor J. Davidson claims, "is in fact the earliest, found in an essay originally published in 1960"²⁰²:

There is such a thing as anonymous Christianity. There are human beings who think that they are not Christians, but who are in the grace of God. And hence there is an anonymous humanism inspired by grace, which thinks that it is no more than human. We Christians can understand it, better than it does itself. When we affirm a doctrine of faith that human morality even in the natural sphere needs the grace of God to be steadfast in its great task, we recognise as Christians that such humanism, wherever it displays its true visage and wherever it exists, even outside professed Christianity, is a gift of the grace of God and a tribute to the redemption, even though it as yet knows nothing of this.²⁰³

¹⁹⁸ Karl Rahner, "Atheism and Implicit Christianity," in: *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 9 (London: DLT, 1972), 145-164, esp. 147. Cf. Ivor J. Davidson and Murray A. Rae, eds. *God of Salvation: Soteriology in Theological Perspective* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 141.

¹⁹⁹ Gavin D'Costa, "Karl Rahner's Anonymous Christian – A Reappraisal," *Modern Theology*, 1 (1985): 131-148. In his article, "Karl Rahner's anonymous Christian: a reappraisal," Gavin D'Costa defends Rahner's theory of the "anonymous Christian" against considerable theological objections. He refers the reader to the development of Rahner's thought, giving a basic framework including the following works: Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, edited and revised by J. B. Metz, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1968); *Hörer des Wortes: Zur Grundlegung einer Religionsphilosophie*, edited by J. B. Metz (Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1963). For the significant writings dealing with the notion of the anonymous Christian, cf. his *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 5 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd / New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1966), ch 6; Vol. 6 (1969), ch 16 and 23; Vol. 9 (1972), ch 9; Vol. 12 (1974), ch 9; Vol. 14 (1976), ch 17; Vol. 16 (1979), ch 4 and 13; Vol. 17 (1980), ch 5. For extensive expositions of Rahner's theory see: James J. Bacik, *Apologetics and the Eclipse of Mystery: Mystagogy According to Karl Rahner* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980); Anita Roper, *The Anonymous Christian* (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, 1966); Eamonn Conway, *The Anonymous Christian – A Relativised Christianity? An Evaluation of Hans Urs von Balthasar's Criticisms of Karl Rahner's Theory of the Anonymous Christian* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1993), 1-33; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness* (Glen Rock, NJ: Newman Press, 1968), 60-76; Karen Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 115-28.

²⁰⁰ Ruth A. Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: A Biographical History of Christian Missions* (Michigan, MI: Grand Rapids, 2011), 440.

²⁰¹ Cf. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 6, *Concerning Vatican Council II*, tr. Karl-H. & Boniface Kruger (Baltimore, MD: Helicon Press Inc, 1969). Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation outside the Church: Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992).

²⁰² Davidson and Rae, *God of Salvation*, 141.

²⁰³ Karl Rahner, "Poetry and the Christian," in: *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4 (London: DLT, 1966), 357-367, esp. 366. Cf. Davidson and Rae, *God of Salvation*, 141.

The reference to human experience here is important, Davidson argues, “because it is a reminder that the idea of anonymous Christians was not originally generated by the encounter with the non-Christian religions.”²⁰⁴ He makes the point that although the discussion has been concentrated in this area of the “non-Christian religions,” “Anonymous Christianity” is essentially Rahner’s answer to the communal tensions created by “humanism” and global “militant atheism.”²⁰⁵ In *Ecclesiology, Questions in the Church, The Church in the World (Theological Investigations, Vol. XIV)*,²⁰⁶ he gives the following explanation:

[T]he ‘anonymous Christian’ in our sense of the term is the pagan after the beginning of the Christian mission, *who lives in the state of Christ’s grace* through faith, hope, and love, *yet who has no explicit knowledge* of the fact that his life is orientated in grace-given salvation to Jesus Christ.²⁰⁷

Surely the term *anonymous Christian*, one could question, is no less offensive to today’s atheists or humanists or even to those who simply are indifferent to God and religion?

1.3.3. *The “Non-Christian” and the “Self-Communication of God”*

The experience of “anonymous Christianity” is developed, articulated and introduced by Rahner to describe the reality that people who have never heard of Jesus Christ or read the Scriptures, may actually have experienced Christ in some form or another, and can be saved by him. He states: “[E]ven outside the Christian body there are individuals – and they are to be found even in the rank of atheists – who are justified by God’s grace and possess the Holy Spirit.”²⁰⁸ Rahner understands the divine-human relationship as being completely dependent on the “initiative” and on the “self-communication of God.”²⁰⁹ Joseph Ratzinger refers to Rahner’s “anonymous Christian” in *Truth and*

²⁰⁴ Davidson and Rae, *God of Salvation*, 141.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.

²⁰⁶ See the commentary upon Rahner’s ecclesiological writings by Richard Lennan, *The Ecclesiology of Karl Rahner* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998).

²⁰⁷ Karl Rahner, “Observations on the Problem of the ‘Anonymous Christian,’” in: *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 14, *Ecclesiology, Questions in the Church, The Church in the World*, tr. David Bourke (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1976), 283 [*My emphasis*]. Cf. Paul Crowley, ed. *Rahner Beyond Rahner: A Great Theologian Encounters the Pacific Rim* (Kansas City, MO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005). Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger [Pope Benedict XVI], *Glaube-Wahrheit-Toleranz: Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Verlag, 2003); *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2004).

²⁰⁸ Karl Rahner, “Observations on the Problem of the ‘Anonymous Christian,’” 291.

²⁰⁹ Cf. Herbert Vorgrimler, *Karl Rahner: His Life, Thought and Works* (Montreal: Palm Publishers, 1965), 59 & 82.

Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions (Glaube-Wahrheit-Toleranz: Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen):

This paper, in which Rahner developed the concept of the “anonymous Christian” as a keyword in his response to the challenge of other religions, later became the starting point for arguments that were at times heated. Toward the end of his article, he summed up what he meant by this concept: “It may appear presumptuous to non-Christians for the Christian to reckon the healthy element, that which has been healed and made holy, in every man as a fruit of the grace of Christ and as anonymously Christian and for him to regard the non-Christian as a Christian who has not yet become consciously aware of himself. But the Christian cannot renounce this ‘presumption’” (p. 158).²¹⁰

Ratzinger “did not agree with this theory,” but it would have seemed to him “impertinent,” to “take a critical attitude toward it in a *Festschrift* dedicated to him [Rahner].”²¹¹ Ratzinger aspired to widen “the field of inquiry to questions that could be the basis for a dialogue with other religions.”²¹²

Rahner had, quite naturally, regarded the question concerning the salvation of the non-Christian as being really the only question for the Christian who is thinking about the phenomenon of the multiplicity of religions in the world. A second preliminary decision had been involved in this. In the face of the question concerning salvation, the distinction between one religion and another appears to be ultimately irrelevant. These two assumptions have remained determinative for the whole ensuing debate.²¹³

According to Rahner, “non-Christians” could have a basic orientation towards Christ. The “anonymous Christian” is someone who is inclined to live a spiritual life: he or she accepts “God’s grace” in acting and living through faith, hope, and love – qualities that one would ascribe to those who possess “the Holy Spirit.” Anonymous Christians could have made a decision for Christ (in the

²¹⁰ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 16-17.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 16-17. See also n.3. Ratzinger writes that he “later made up for this” – in response to Rahner’s *Grundkurs des Glaubens: Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums* (Freiburg: Herder, 1976) [E.T., *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, tr. William V. Dych (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1978)] – in his book *Theologische Prinzipienlehre* (Munich: Weigel, 1982). [E.T., *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, tr. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1987)].

²¹² Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 17.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 17.

Holy Spirit) without even noticing it. Rahner speaks of a basic and natural acceptance of God's grace. In other words, the anonymous Christian does not know that he or she is a 'Christian.' People, whose experiences could be described as such, have no explicit differentiated knowledge of Jesus, of the Gospel, of the teachings of the Church, and are often found among the contemporary "atheists" and "agnostics."

"Rahner articulates the idea of anonymous Christianity in the context of anthropology and the possibility of the human act of faith."²¹⁴ He is convinced that people's personal experience of God, via Christ, in all things, without labelling or comprehending it as such, may as it were already be part of that wider Christian experience. They, who have never heard of Christian revelation, and who do not profess the Christian faith, may actually live Christian lives in attunement with the mystery of God's presence. Rahner wants us to trust in what we cannot see: faith. He pays specifically "close attention to the structure of human existence and the category of faith exercised by anonymous Christians."²¹⁵ He believes strongly that we will always be able to find grace in the other person, in so far as he or she is an "anonymous Christian."

Conclusion

This chapter outlined Karl Rahner's theological anthropology, the anthropology of *Gaudium et Spes*, and his concept of the 'anonymous Christian.' The study shows that the Christian experience through the mystery of the self-communication of God is not only a probability: it is already *there* – present – being lived at the heart of human existence. The examined elements of Rahner's thinking in this chapter help our study further to argue this point in the next few chapters: that is to say, with Rahner's understanding of the human person as (a) the "hearer of the word (*Hörer des Wortes*) who, being *human* is (b) a reference to the "mystery of God" in his/her "suffering" (*Leid*), and (c) who through encounters with "moral evil" (*moralisches Übel*) and pain, experiences "love" (*Liebe*), "grace" (*Gnade*) and "freedom" (*Freiheit*) through the active "Self-Communication of God." These Rahnerian features are our stepping stones and direction to build and support the argument in the next few chapters as well as to underline, what parts of Rahner in "The Prison Pastorate" we are accepting and the parts we don't.

²¹⁴ Davidson and Rae, *God of Salvation*, 145.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

To conclude, Rahner's theological anthropology teaches that "grace" can be found in prison today. Ministers and the incarcerated as "hearers of the Word" bear witness to the event. Rahner's views on grace and his understanding of human sin, however, may prove too theoretical and optimistic. Chapters Three and Four will explore this suggestion.

CHAPTER TWO

KARL RAHNER ON THE PRISON PASTORATE

Introduction

In the first chapter we discussed the theological anthropology of Karl Rahner and the influence this has on the theology of *Gaudium et Spes* in order to build a coherent framework relevant to our thesis and to our further examination of Rahner's views on prison ministry. As this work has not been studied before, the chapter will now turn to a careful analysis of "The Prison Pastorate" (*Gefängnisseelsorge*) in *Sendung und Gnade: Beiträge zur Pastoraltheologie* which is translated into English in Volume 3 of the collected works *Mission and Grace*.¹ In order to be precise and to remain as close to the original text as possible, the reader will always find the original German transcriptions in a footnote. Significant passages will be noted and commented on where needed. The task lies in giving a clear analysis of Rahner's theology of the prison pastorate as well exploring his pastoral insights on prison ministry.

Karl Rahner, addressing prison pastors, in his time all priests, did arguably not intend to develop a specific theology of prison ministry. "The Prison Pastorate," rooted in his theological anthropology, meditates on a human experience that was not his own – the pastoral care of prisoners. Yet he presents surprisingly poignant reflections on incarceration. They form the basic thought-unit of our

¹ The English quotations from Karl Rahner's writings are taken from: "The prison pastorate," in: *Mission and Grace: Essays in Pastoral Theology*, Volume 3, tr. Cecily Hastings (London and Melbourne: Sheed and Ward, 1966), 74-97. This translation by Cecily Hastings is indicated with the abbreviation "MG, 3." The original German text is quoted from two main sources that published the same transcript: (i) the 2005 complete and scholarly edition of Rahner's Collected Works: "Gefängnisseelsorge," in: *Sämtliche Werke*, Band 16, *Kirchliche Erneuerung: Studien zur Pastoraltheologie und Struktur der Kirche*, eds. Albert Raffelt, Roman A. Siebenrock, and Peter Suchla (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2005), 214-225. Henceforth abbreviated: "SW, 16"; and (ii) "Gefängnisseelsorge," in: *Sendung und Gnade. Beiträge zur Pastoraltheologie* (Innsbruck, Wien und München: Tyrolia, 1966 [1959, 1961, 1988]), 447-463 [= *Fassung C* in: SW, 16: 214-225]. Henceforth abbreviated: "SG." For the three available German manuscripts of the same text (*Fassung A, B and C*) see SW, 16 (*Kirchliche Erneuerung*): 567: – *Fassung A*: "Besinnung für Gefangenenhausseelsorger," in: *Der Seelsorger* (Wien), 29 (1959): 460-469. – *Fassung B*: "Gefängnisseelsorge," in: Karl Rahner *Sendung und Gnade: Beiträge zur Pastoraltheologie* (Innsbruck 1959), 452-468. – *Fassung C*: Karl Rahner: *Sendung und Gnade*. Innsbruck 4. Aufl. 1966, S. 447-463. – Abdruck nach *Fassung C*. For a French Review on *Fassung B* see: A. Janssen, Review of "Karl Rahner, SJ, *Sendung und Gnade: Beiträge zur Pastoraltheologie* (Innsbruck-Vienna-Munich: Tyrolia, 1959), pp. 561," in: *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses*, 36.1 (1960): 117.

exploration and will help us in Chapters Three and Four, to decide and evaluate whether or not Rahner's theological anthropology is relevant for our pastoral encounters with inmates today. The aim is to employ Rahner's theological anthropology and his views on "The Prison Pastorate" as an analytical framework for our research towards a theology of prison ministry in the twenty-first century.²

This chapter is divided into three sub-sections. The first section, "Finding Christ in Prisoners," explores how the prison pastor – as human being, as person and subject – can find Christ in prisoners. The second part, "Finding Ourselves in the Prisoners," describes how Rahner thinks we could find ourselves in the prisoners, i.e., in human knowledge, in meeting and experience. The final observation, "The Hidden Truth of Our Own Situation," expands on the concealed truth in our lives, and why Rahner's pastoral theology is particularly relevant to this study on prison ministry: namely, the "awareness that the hiddenness and incomprehensibility of God drives the theological enterprise."³

2.1. Finding Christ in Prisoners (*Christus in den Gefangenen*)

2.1.1. Reflections for Prison Pastors: To find God

In his thoughts on "the prison pastorate," Karl Rahner sets the parameters of a theology of prison ministry.⁴ One of the first German publications of his treatise, "Reflections for Prison Pastors"

² We are aware that Karl Rahner's theological anthropology in the "Collected Works" (*Sämtliche Werke*) can never be 'exactly' and 'fully' reflected in a short essay as "The Prison Pastorate." We take notice of this fact and take the subsequent restrictions into account in our further analysis of the problems detected in Rahner's views on prison ministry. However, valuable resources in his theological anthropology which may not have been mentioned in "The Prison Pastorate" could still be discovered.

³ Cyrus P. Olsen, Review of "Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, xv + 334pp," in: *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, Volume 8, 2 (2006): 209-212, esp. 211.

⁴ It is not surprising that Rahner as a Jesuit and theologian had an interest in the prison pastorate. In his study *Ignatian Humanism*, Ronald Modras makes an historical link between *The Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola and Jesuit ministry in prisons. Modras writes: "*The Spiritual Exercises* speak of showing one's love for God 'more in deeds than in words.' Nursing the sick and dying was only the beginning of that kind of Jesuit ministry. The first Jesuits also tried to influence the rest of the staff to treat patients in a manner that was more helpful and humane. *Working as prison chaplains, they comforted the poor who were imprisoned simply because of debt and consoled prisoners awaiting sentencing and execution.* Jesuits working in remote villages found fierce blood feuds that had raged for years; making peace among warring parties became a special concern for the early Society of Jesus, later formulated in their constitutions as 'reconciling the estranged.'" Ronald Modras, *Ignatian Humanism* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2010), 76 [*italics* my emphasis].

(*Besinnung für Gefangenenhausseelsorger*),⁵ contains a short editorial preface. It says that the following has been spoken and written for “a special sector of pastoral care” (*einen speziellen Sektor der Seelsorge*). As a lecture and meditation it served as the beginning of a meeting of prison pastors in Austria in the late 1950s. As regards its spiritual intensity and depth of theological thought, however, it has provided essential religious statements and universal insights for pastoral care in general up to this day.⁶

Rahner’s main argument concerning the experience of and the accessibility to God in relation to prisoners, can be summed up in two important sentences that concern and give focus to our thesis: “In the prisoners entrusted to our pastoral care we find Christ our Lord; and in these prisoners we find ourselves, what we see in them being the concealed truth of our own situation.”⁷ This particular view of prison ministry echoes the recurrent themes of his theological anthropology and of the Second Vatican Council, such as “God with us,” the “experience of grace,” “anonymous Christianity,” and so on.⁸

On Tuesday, 23 June 1959, at a summer meeting of prison ministers (*Tagung von Gefängnisseelsorgern*) in Innsbruck,⁹ Rahner spoke in a meditative lecture directly to the prison pastors, ordained priests, in a personal and brotherly manner: “You, who are prison chaplains, have come together here for an hour’s meditation as priests.”¹⁰ Then Rahner explains to them that the “meaning of such an hour can precisely *not* be to think out how the charge laid upon you is to be made fruitful and beneficial for those entrusted to your care.”¹¹ It “must be directed,” so he argues,

⁵ Karl Rahner, “Besinnung für Gefangenenhausseelsorger” in: *Der Seelsorger* (Wien), 29 (1959): 460-469.

⁶ *SW*, 16 (*Kirchliche Erneuerung*): 552. Gefängnisseelsorge: Fassung A (*Der Seelsorger* (Wien), 29 (1959): 460-469) enthält die redaktionelle Vorbemerkung: “Das Folgende ist für einen speziellen Sektor der Seelsorge gesprochen und geschrieben worden: als Besinnung am Beginn einer Gefangenenhaus-Seelsorger-Tagung. Die Arbeit enthält aber darüber hinaus in ihrer Eindringlichkeit und Gedankentiefe auch wesentliche Aussagen für die Seelsorge im allgemeinen.” [“It contains the preliminary editorial note: ‘The following has been spoken and written for a special sector of pastoral care: as a reflection at the beginning of a conference on prison ministry. In its urgency and depth of thought, the work also contains essential statements for pastoral ministry in general.’”]

⁷ *MG*, 3: 75. *SW*, 16: 214-215. *SG*, 448: Was in dieser kleinen Besinnungsstunde bedacht werden mag, sei in die zwei Sätze zusammengefaßt: In den Gefangenen, die unserer Seelsorge anvertraut sind, finden wir Christus den Herrn; in diesen Gefangenen finden wir uns, indem wir in ihnen unsere eigene verborgene Situation erblicken.

⁸ See Chapter One. Cf. *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*. Olsen, Review, 209-212.

⁹ *SW*, 16 (*Kirchliche Erneuerung*): XIX. Vortrag bei der Tagung von Gefängnisseelsorgern in Innsbruck am 23.6.1959.

¹⁰ *MG*, 3: 74. *SW*, 16: 214. *SG*, 447: Wenn Sie als Seelsorger in Strafanstalten zu einer priesterlichen Besinnungsstunde zusammenkommen [...]

¹¹ *MG*, 3: 74. *SW*, 16: 214. *SG*, 447: [D]ann kann der Sinn dieser Stunde gerade nicht darin bestehen, daß in ihr bedacht wird, wie dieses Amt für die fruchtbar und segensreich wird, die Ihrer Sorge anvertraut sind [...]

“to considering how such a pastor with such a charge is himself to find God.”¹² Rahner makes an important decision here: he wants to strengthen the prison pastors so that they will see the value and meaning of such a challenging ministry. Due to this focus and the limited time-frame of his lecture, he neglects a clear argument for the empowerment of the incarcerated. This thesis seeks a rejoinder and argues that we need both.

Rahner says clearly that the ‘target group’ and the ‘meaning’ of his paper should *not* be the prisoners. This assertion is key and has created for us today a chance for developing Rahner’s theology by bridging the ‘empowerment-relation’ gap. It is this central point where today’s prison ministers *must* try to go beyond Rahner. As will be further examined in this study, we will be thinking of prison ministry precisely in a way so as to benefit the prisoners – by including their perspective, of course, and not as a top-down, chaplain-prisoner approach. This momentous statement by Rahner brings us to disagree with it and the reasons why will be set out in the next three chapters. Rahner is focused solely on pastors as opposed to prisoners but as the thesis will argue, it will go a bit further than that: our study and Rahner are coming at this not only from different perspectives but with different goals. He is seeking to enable and empower the chaplains. We will be seeking to empower the prisoners as well, which will eventually be developed in Chapter Five. This is an essential difference.

What Rahner wants, is to talk about *how* a prison pastor within the custodial setting “is himself to find God.” This is the original intention of his enterprise, which doesn’t mean, he argues, that “the task of caring selflessly for others, and Christian neighbourly love itself, are being changed into egotism.”¹³ On the contrary,

we are merely giving scope to the simple, fundamental insight that in our priestly lives we can only serve others insofar as we are ourselves filled with the grace of him to whom we are bearing witness, and whom we are there to mediate to men, in his word, his sacraments, and his grace.¹⁴

¹² *MG*, 3: 74. *SW*, 16: 214. *SG*, 447: [S]ondern es muß diese Besinnung daraufhin gehen, wie dieser Seelsorger in diesem seinem Amt selbst seinen Gott findet.

¹³ *MG*, 3: 74. *SW*, 16: 214. *SG*, 447: Damit ist das Amt der selbstlosen Sorge für andere, die christliche Nächstenliebe, nicht in Egoismus verkehrt.

¹⁴ *MG*, 3: 74. *SW*, 16: 214. *SG*, 447: Es ist vielmehr nur der einfachen und doch fundamentalen Einsicht Raum gegeben, daß wir in unserem priesterlichen Dasein nur insoweit anderen dienen können, als wir selbst von der Gnade dessen erfüllt sind, für den wir Zeugnis ablegen, den wir in seinem Wort, in seinen Sakramenten und seiner Gnade den Menschen vermitteln sollen. [Regarding Rahner’s focus on “priestly lives” (*priesterlichen Dasein*) one could ask the question: is it

He continues:

Nor is anything changed in this either by our objective official mission or by the power of the *opus operatum*. For both of these have got to be accepted by men if they are to be effective. But they will only be accepted if those who bring them are such as to make their objective mission and objective grace credible by the quality of their own Christian living.¹⁵

What follows is Rahner's proposition that one cannot simply say that the "selfless service" in our pastoral ministry is "itself holy."¹⁶ He argues that it is true that the more one forgets oneself in it and dies to oneself, the more a person "will be filled with the grace of God."¹⁷ However, "selfless service" (*der selbstlose Dienst*) in itself, is for him no guarantee that one wins his/her neighbour "by the witness of the Spirit and of power."¹⁸ In other words, religious affinity, for Rahner, is neither the assurance to win the affection of others nor does it necessarily realise one's own 'holiness.' Merely "selfless service" to date does not guarantee *faith* over the long course, especially in the prison pastorate.

In its "positive sense" (*in seinem positiven Sinn*) one could argue that the statement, "selfless service is itself holy," is true (*wahr*). "It would," however, "turn into a dangerous lie" (*in eine gefährliche Lüge verwandeln*), Rahner claims, "if we supposed that it could provide the one single all-embracing norm for our mission."¹⁹ He says that "there are no maxims," no final rules of conduct "in the spiritual life" that are "capable of providing, on their own, a total formula covering the whole thing."²⁰ Rahner believes that there is no way of including everything in one thought, in one exercise, in one set of moralistic values that intends to motivate people.²¹ "For we are creatures who," he says,

possible for non-ordained? See Chapters Four and Five in this thesis].

¹⁵ *MG*, 3: 74. *SW*, 16: 214. *SG*, 447: Daran ändert auch die objektive amtliche Sendung nichts noch die Gewalt des *opus operatum*. Denn beides muß von den Menschen angenommen werden, damit es wirksam wird. Beides wird aber nur angenommen, wenn die, die es bringen, durch ihr eigenes christliches Dasein ihre objektive Sendung und ihre objektive Gabe glaubwürdig machen.

¹⁶ *MG*, 3: 74-75. *SW*, 16: 214. *SG*, 447: Man kann auch nicht nur sagen, daß der selbstlose Dienst selbst heilige [...]

¹⁷ *MG*, 3: 75. *SW*, 16: 214. *SG*, 447: [j]e mehr ein Mensch darin sich selbst vergißt und sich stirbt, er erfüllt werde von der Gnade Gottes und so am ehesten Aussicht habe, durch Zeugnis der Kraft und des Geistes den Nächsten zu gewinnen.

¹⁸ *MG*, 3: 75. *SW*, 16: 214. *SG*, 447: [D]urch Zeugnis der Kraft und des Geistes den Nächsten zu gewinnen.

¹⁹ *MG*, 3: 75. *SW*, 16: 214. *SG*, 447: [W]ollte man meinen, er könne die einzige und alles umfassende Norm für unsere Sendung sein.

²⁰ *MG*, 3: 75. *SW*, 16: 214. *SG*, 447-448: [D]ie totale Formel des ganzen geistlichen Lebens [...]

²¹ *MG*, 3: 75. *SW*, 16: 214. *SG*, 447-448: [W]ollte man meinen, er könne die einzige und alles umfassende Norm für unsere Sendung sein. Es gibt im geistlichen Leben keine solche Maxime, die für sich allein die totale Formel des ganzen geistlichen Lebens abgeben könnte. Man kann nirgends alles in einer Übung haben.

“even in this respect, have no abiding city, but must humbly, in our finitude, do many different things in order to reach the whole.”²²

This is important for Rahner: to be humble in our finitude (*in demütiger Endlichkeit*). To be unassuming and then to try various different pathways – that is, “in order to reach the whole” (*um das Ganze zu erreichen*). The point he makes is that to find God, “we have got to take pains over our nearness to God”: our nearness to Christ. He avows that “we find Christ our Lord in the prisoners” (*Wir finden Christus den Herrn in den Gefangenen*).²³ Therefore, we have to risk such a relationship to meet God.²⁴

As the initial building block of his theological method in “The Prison Pastorate” (*Gefängnisseelsorge*), Rahner not only gives us the following hypothesis: “We find Christ our Lord in the prisoners.” He believes that we “have got to find him there.” More so, “he is really there to be found.” Rahner is convinced that Christ is “to be found in such a way that our encounter with him will also be for our salvation and our happiness.”²⁵

2.1.2. *Bitterness and Horrible Realism: Struck with Horror by Imprisoned Humanity*

As a pastoral theologian, he is aware that there is no need to remind prison pastors (*Strafanstaltsseelsorger*) of their own experience (*diese Erfahrung*) behind bars which mirrors to them “all its bitterness and horrible realism” (*die bittere, die grausig-realistische*). This experience with prisoners and with the justice system is more present to the ministers themselves than anything Rahner could intelligently “describe” or “suggest” of it:

the experience of shattered human existences; the mental and moral defectives; the unstable

²² *MG*, 3: 75. *SW*, 16: 214. *SG*, 448: Denn wir sind Kreaturen, die auch in dieser Hinsicht keine bleibende Stätte haben, sondern in demütiger Endlichkeit vielerlei tun müssen, um das Ganze zu erreichen.

²³ *MG*, 3: 75. *SW*, 16: 215. *SG*, 448: Wir finden Christus den Herrn in den Gefangenen.

²⁴ For Rahner, such a risk of faith in modern times is particularly challenging: “In such a situation the lonely responsibility of the individual in his or her decision of faith is necessary and required in a way much more radical than it was in former times. That is why the modern spirituality of the Christian involves courage for solitary decision contrary to public opinion, the lonely courage analogous to that of the martyrs of the first century of Christianity, the courage for a spiritual decision of faith [...] Such a solitary courage, however, can exist only if it lives out of a wholly personal experience of God and his Spirit.” Karl Rahner, *The Practice of Faith: A Handbook of Contemporary Spirituality*, eds. Karl Lehmann and Albert Raffelt (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1986), 21-22.

²⁵ *MG*, 3: 75. *SW*, 16: 215. *SG*, 448: Wir finden Christus den Herrn in den Gefangenen. Wir sollen ihn finden, er ist da wirklich so zu finden, dass wir ihm selbst für uns zu unserem Heil und unserer Seligkeit begegnen.

characters; the psychopaths; the vicious, the smooth, the cynical, the hypocrites and liars; the merely impulsive, the victims of circumstances, of addiction; the inevitable recidivists, the religiously impervious, the poor devils, the imbeciles.²⁶

This traumatic kind of *Erfahrung* with inmates is of course not the only experience ministers may have in jail, Rahner argues. They also meet people there who come across “immediately as no different from anyone else – normal, decent men.”²⁷ And yet, “it still remains true” that ministers “have often been struck with horror by the humanity” they face there.²⁸ Prison pastors, Rahner writes, “have so often been let down, shown up as stupid, rewarded with ingratitude; so often knocked in vain for admission to hearts that were locked and barred.”²⁹

To put it more directly, the pursuit of happiness in these confinements, according to Rahner, is a pointless goal. The strenuous experiences of giving time and energy, providing help only to be rejected “as representatives of the hated system” (*als Vertreter verhasster Institutionen*), are painfully challenging to anyone doing the work. The truth is that pastors suffer gravely “the sense of futility and the hopelessness of all such efforts.”³⁰ Rahner is aware of this tragedy and of the burden of Christian service to convicts. Aware too of the impression that all our human “efforts” (*Mühe*), and this includes our “concern” and “love” (*Sorge und Liebe*), our “patience” and “work” (*Geduld und Arbeit*), are in danger of “being dropped into a bottomless abyss from which no response ever comes.”³¹

Rahner carefully enumerates the trials and tribulations of prison ministry to show that life behind

²⁶ *MG*, 3: 76. *SW*, 16: 215. *SG*, 448: die Erfahrung der gescheiterten menschlichen Existenzen, der geistig und moralisch Defekten, der Labilen, der Psychopathen, der Boshaften, der Hochstapler, der Zynischen, der Heuchler und Lügner, der bloß Triebhaften, der Opfer der Verhältnisse, der Süchtigen, der haltlos Rückfälligen, der religiös Unempfänglichen, der armen Teufel, der Imbezillen.

²⁷ *MG*, 3: 76. *SW*, 16: 215. *SG*, 448-449: Auch wenn *diese* Erfahrung nicht die einzige ist, die Sie in den Gefängnissen machen, auch wenn Sie auch da Menschen begegnen, die Sie von vornherein nicht anders empfinden als sonstige – normale und anständige – Menschen [...]

²⁸ *MG*, 3: 76. *SW*, 16: 215. *SG*, 449: [S]o hat Sie doch schon oft ein Grausen über diese Menschheit gepackt, die Ihnen da begegnet. Cf. Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis: The Ballad of Reading Gaol and Other Writings* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2020 [1999]). In the *Ballad of Reading Gaol* which was published anonymously in 1898, Wilde articulates this “horror” of “humanity,” with a “deeply moving and characteristically generous poem on the horrors of prison life.” For Wilde, see Chapter Five, Section 5.1. *The Situation of Prisoners Today* in this thesis.

²⁹ *MG*, 3: 76. *SW*, 16: 215. *SG*, 449: [S]ie waren schon oft die Betroffenen, die Dummen, die mit Undank Belohnten, diejenigen, die vergebens an verschlossene Herzen pochten [...]

³⁰ *MG*, 3: 77. *SW*, 16: 215. *SG*, 449: Sie haben Vergeblichkeit erlitten und die Hoffnungslosigkeit solcher Bemühungen [...]

³¹ *MG*, 3: 77. *SW*, 16: 215. *SG*, 449: [I]n einen leeren Abgrund fällt, aus dem keine Antwort zurückkommt.

bars is tragic. He is conscious that every human being is capable of turning into a monster. What follows is the description of prison pastors as “men who continually encounter evil” (*die dem Bösen dauernd begegnen*). That is, in all its “dreary, nerve-racking, hopeless, detestable reality.” Having a deep respect for these pastors, he admits to them in all humility: “You know all that better than I do.”³²

2.1.3. *The Words of Christ: “I Was in Prison, and You Came to See Me”*

At this particular point in the text, Rahner changes direction by saying, “and now let us read the words of Christ” (*und nun lesen wir das Wort Christi*). He makes it very clear on what ground he wants to build his theological answer regarding the prison pastorate, namely, on the words of Christ: “I was in prison, and you came to see me.” His response to the “bottomless abyss” is taken from Matthew 25: 34-40 as the foundational scripture passage for his meditation:

And now let us read the words of Christ, his incredible, provocative, thrilling words: “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for

... I was in prison, and you came to see me.’

Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see thee ... in prison and visit thee?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’” (Mt 25: 34-40).³³

Rahner holds that “the first thing” one should do as a prison pastor, “is simply to rejoice” (*einfach freuen*) over these concrete given words from Scripture. He thinks “they apply to you without any kind of translation, just as they were spoken then.”³⁴ “They do not need,” he believes, “to be

³² *MG*, 3: 77. *SW*, 16: 215. *SG*, 449: Sie sind Menschen, die dem Bösen dauernd begegnen in seiner dumpfen, gereizten, hoffnungslosen, hässlichen Wirklichkeit. Sie wissen all das besser als ich.

³³ *MG*, 3: 77. *SW*, 16: 215. *SG*, 449: Und nun lesen wir das Wort Christi, das unglaubliche, aufreizende, abenteuerliche Wort: Kommt, ihr Gesegneten meines Vaters, nehmt das Reich in Besitz, das euch seit Anbeginn der Welt bereitet ist ... denn im Gefängnis war ich und ihr seid zu mir gekommen ... Da werden die Gerechten fragen: Herr, wann haben wir Dich im Gefängnis gesehen und sind zu Dir gekommen? Der König wird ihnen zur Antwort geben: “Wahrlich, ich sage euch: was ihr auch nur einem von meinen geringsten Brüdern getan habt, das habt ihr mir getan” (Mt 25: 34-40).

³⁴ *MG*, 3: 77. *SW*, 16: 215. *SG*, 449: Es gilt Ihnen, es gilt ohne jede Übersetzung Ihnen, so, wie es damals gesprochen wurde.

translated and adapted and transported into a new set of circumstances.³⁵ Rahner clearly reads this Gospel passage literally. He is not engaging in a careful biblical or scholarly hermeneutic at this stage because he thinks that what pastors live is “a primary, abiding form of life which Jesus saw clearly in its abiding pattern.”³⁶

Rahner saw the person of Jesus in the Gospels giving expression to this form of life (*Lebensform*) of radical service. Jesus brings it “to the level of a concrete utterance of God’s judgement.”³⁷ He refers to “the judgement which brings world history to its fulfilment.”³⁸ He symbolically speaks of “a wine-press,” of “ultimate meaning,” and of transformation “into the wine of eternal joy.”³⁹ With a strong theological conviction and personal faith, Rahner tries to convince the prison pastors that there are few ministries “with such words to rejoice over.” In their presence behind bars, chaplains “find themselves being addressed in so unchanged a fashion by the mouth of the Son of Man, with words at once realistically human and divinely heavenly.”⁴⁰

Rahner is aware of “the next response to these words”: one that “has to be one of terror” (*Sie erschrecken über dieses Wort*). The actual “command,” namely the experience of seeking and searching for the Lord in men and women in prison, is “a terrifying and exacting task!” (*Welch erschreckende und überfordernde Aufgabe!*). Rahner stresses:

Do not say that these words are not meant to be taken quite so seriously as that. Do not say that all that is really wanted when you get right down to it is a little human compassion, a certain amount of reasonable allocated help; some of that sober realism which has no illusions but at the same time is not too ready to despair of humanity: which has the humanist optimism to believe in the good in every human being, stimulate it, and give it another chance to do better; and which, when that fails, consoles itself with the thought that after all there are

³⁵ *MG*, 3: 77. *SW*, 16: 215. *SG*, 449: Es braucht nicht übersetzt, angepaßt, auf neue Verhältnisse übertragen zu werden.

³⁶ *MG*, 3: 77. *SW*, 16: 215-216. *SG*, 449: Sie leben eine ganz urtümliche, stets bleibende Lebensform, die Jesus genau in ihrer bleibenden Gestalt gesehen hat.

³⁷ *MG*, 3: 77. *SW*, 16: 216. *SG*, 449: [S]ie ausspricht und die Aussage dieses Daseins emporhebt und konsekriert zu einem Wort des Gerichtes Gottes.

³⁸ *MG*, 3: 77. *SW*, 16: 216. *SG*, 449: [D]as alle Weltgeschichte vollendet [...]

³⁹ *MG*, 3: 77. *SW*, 16: 216. *SG*, 449: [D]as alle Weltgeschichte vollendet und den letzten Sinn dieser Geschichte keltert und verwandelt in den Wein ewiger Freude.

⁴⁰ *MG*, 3: 78. *SW*, 16: 216. *SG*, 449-450: Es gibt wenig Berufe, die sich solcher Worte erfreuen können, die unverwandelt sich so aus dem Munde des Menschensohnes anrufen lassen können mit einem ganz realistisch menschlichen und ganz himmlisch göttlichen Wort.

psychopathic conditions which can be as incurable as other diseases and ought not to break one's heart any more than the others: the patients all die in the end anyway, but the human race doesn't let itself get excessively depressed over it. No, no – and again, no. More is asked of you than this.⁴¹

Even “More”? His theological quest is to dive into the deep: We are “to find our Lord in these prisoners.” We are “to encounter him there” to our own “saving benefit.”⁴² Of course we are

under the temptation to ask our Lord, impatiently and (as we like to see it) unsentimentally, in the name of sober realism, reason, and our own experience, “When did we see you in prison?”⁴³

We are tempted to say: “We were in prison, but we didn't find you there. We found pitiful human beings, poor devils, and cynical criminals. But you? No, not you?”⁴⁴ Rahner is sensitive to what prison pastors may feel and might say to the Lord, and gives a possible reply:

We've nothing against it if you like to be so magnanimous and gracious as to use a sort of splendid heavenly fiction to count these services rendered, these visits to the prison, *as if* we had done them to you. That's all right, that's fine, we have no objection to a fiction of that sort. But a fiction it remains. You are you and these people are these people. And we did not find you in the prisons. Not there, of all places.⁴⁵

⁴¹ *MG*, 3: 78. *SW*, 16: 216. *SG*, 450: Aber dann müßten Sie erschrecken über dieses Wort: Es ist Ihnen geboten, den Herrn in denen zu finden, die Sie im Gefängnis besuchen. Welch erschreckende und überfordernde Aufgabe! Sagen Sie nicht, das Wort sei nicht so ganz ernst zu nehmen, verlangt sei doch im Grunde ein wenig menschliches Mitleid, ein wenig vernünftig dosierte Hilfe, ein nüchterner Realismus, der sich nichts vormachen läßt, aber auch nicht zu schnell an der Menschheit verzweifelt, sondern in einem humanistischen Optimismus an das Gute in jedem Menschen glaubt, es weckt und nochmals eine Chance gibt, es besser zu machen, und wo das nicht mehr geht, eben sich damit tröstet, daß es Psychopathien gibt, die ebenso wenig zu heilen sind wie andere Krankheiten und einem auch nicht mehr zu Herzen gehen sollen als diese anderen Krankheiten, die schließlich alle zum Tode führen, unheilbar sind, ohne dass darum die Menschheit sich ihre gute Laune verderben läßt. Nein, und abermals nein. Es ist von Ihnen mehr verlangt.

⁴² *MG*, 3: 76, 78-79. *SG*, 450: Sie sollen den Herrn in den Gefangenen finden; er soll Ihnen selbst zu Ihrem eigenen Heil in diesen Gefangenen begegnen.

⁴³ *MG*, 3: 79. *SW*, 16: 216. *SG*, 450: Sind wir da nicht auch in Versündigung, im Namen des nüchternen Realismus, der Vernunft und unserer Erfahrung ungeduldig und unsentimental (so will es uns scheinen) den Herrn zu fragen: wann haben wir Dich im Gefängnis gesehen?

⁴⁴ *MG*, 3: 79. *SW*, 16: 216. *SG*, 450: [W]ir waren im Gefängnis, aber Dich haben wir dort nicht gefunden? Wir haben erbärmliche Menschen gefunden, arme Teufel und zynische Verbrecher, ganz gewiß. Aber Dich? Nein, Dich nicht.

⁴⁵ *MG*, 3: 79. *SW*, 16: 216. *SG*, 450-451: [W]ir haben nichts dagegen, wenn Du so großzügig und freundlich bist, diese Dienste und unsere Gefängnisbesuche so anzurechnen (in einer großartigen himmlischen Fiktion), *als ob* wir das alles

2.1.4. *The Agape of God: Rejecting All our Realism as Unreal*

Is this fiction? Is it real? No matter what the sceptic would say, Rahner emphasises that “Jesus says otherwise. Jesus rejects all our realism as unreal.”⁴⁶ What he tries to say, is that our Lord “does not identify himself with these people by a legal fiction.”⁴⁷ Rahner hopes to encourage and re-focus us “in such a way that we are, in very truth, encountering him in them.”⁴⁸ Moreover, we have got to let Jesus’ words “stand as what they are – and believe them.”⁴⁹ This is exactly where it becomes tough and daring: “We can think about *how* they can be true, but we have got to take them as true.”⁵⁰ Again Rahner uses plain words for a harsh Christian reality: to “love” other human beings (*der sich entäußernden Liebe Gottes in Christus*) can be very demanding.⁵¹ He explains in great detail “the agape of God” (*der Agape Gottes*) and the demand at stake:

We can be horrified at how little we must have grasped of the self-emptying love of God in Christ, the *agape* of God, if we have not understood that there really is a love in this world – the love of God, that is – which accepts when to us it seems that there is no longer anything there to be accepted.⁵²

He speaks of “a love” (*eine Liebe*) which is not a matter of “gracious condescension” (*die gnädig herablässt*), but truthfully,

in all reality and effectiveness, identifies itself with these sinners; a love which strips itself,

Dir erwiesen hätten. Gut, schön und recht, wir wenden nichts gegen eine solche Fiktion ein. Aber sie bleibt eine Fiktion. Du bist Du, und diese Leute sind eben diese Leute. Und Dich haben wir in den Gefängnissen nicht gefunden. Dort am allerwenigsten.

⁴⁶ *MG*, 3: 79. *SW*, 16: 216. *SG*, 451: Jesus aber sagt, daß es anders ist. Jesus verwirft unseren ganzen Realismus als unwirklich.

⁴⁷ *MG*, 3: 79. *SW*, 16: 216. *SG*, 451: Er identifiziert sich nicht in einer juristischen Fiktion mit diesen Menschen.

⁴⁸ *MG*, 3: 79. *SW*, 16: 216. *SG*, 451: [S]ondern so, daß wir in aller Wahrheit ihm in diesen Menschen begegnen.

⁴⁹ *MG*, 3: 79. *SW*, 16: 216. *SG*, 451: Wir müssen dieses Wort stehen lassen, wie es steht. Und es glauben.

⁵⁰ *MG*, 3: 79. *SW*, 16: 216. *SG*, 451: Wir können darüber nachsinnen, *wie* es wahr sein könnte, aber wir müssen es wahr sein lassen.

⁵¹ *SW*, 30 (*Anstöße systematischer Theologie*): 384. See Rahner’s theological anthropology on “love” (*Liebe*) in Chapter One, Section 1.1.3.3. *Human Suffering (Leid), Moral Evil (moralisches Übel) and Love (Liebe)* in this thesis: “The answer to suffering and to moral evil that Rahner sees lies in the ‘unconditional worship and givenness of love’ (*in bedingungslos anbetender Liebe*), by which ‘we give ourselves away to God as an answer’ (*uns selber an Gott als Antwort weggeben*).”

⁵² *MG*, 3: 79-80. *SW*, 16: 216-217. *SG*, 451: Wir können darüber erschrecken, wie wenig wir von der sich entäußernden Liebe Gottes in Christus, von der Agape Gottes begriffen haben müssen, wenn wir nicht begreifen, daß es wirklich eine Liebe in der Welt, die Liebe Gottes nämlich gibt, die annimmt wo wir nichts mehr sehen, was man annehmen könnte [...]

exposes itself, commits itself, spends itself utterly; in which the lover can no longer find himself except in and through the beloved.⁵³

“We can consider the truths” (*wir können nachdenken*), he believes, “that this love is creative and transforming” (*diese Liebe ist schöpferisch und verwandelt*), and “that it is genuine and radical even to death, the death of the Cross”⁵⁴:

that it has dared to descend into the uttermost emptiness of God-forsaken, death-stricken lovelessness and has there been victorious and taken all things to itself; that it is a love which brought the Son of God to make himself a curse that he might really save what is really and inescapably lost – that which is, of itself, dead, without future and without hope; that which grimly locks and bars itself against all love; that which, with cold contempt and unambiguous cynicism, scorns love, purity, kindness, and loyalty as utopian pretence. It is with such sinners that this love has, in strict reality, identified itself.⁵⁵

For Rahner, “Christ” is to be found in the person of prisoners. This “love” that identifies itself with sinners and outcasts is to be found behind bars. Rahner looks for this presence by starting with Christ and looking at him, his love, his work – an Ignatian approach to “The Prison Pastorate.” Another way of looking for this presence, however, is to start with the prisoners themselves, as we will develop in Chapters Four and Five. Looking at them, at the people they are, at their *humanness*, their brokenness, trusting that in there, in that sometimes ugly mess, “Christ” will reveal himself. That, is the approach our thesis is taking and it is another essential difference between what this study argues for and Rahner’s views in “The Prison Pastorate.” However, it is an important one.

Rahner and *Gaudium et Spes* believe that God is really present in the world. They tend to look at this, however, from a ‘believer-’ or ‘God perspective,’ (not that they equate themselves with God but

⁵³ *MG*, 3: 80. *SW*, 16: 217. *SG*, 451: [S]ondern sich wirklich in aller Wahrheit und Wirksamkeit mit diesen Sündern identifiziert, eine Liebe, die sich entäußert und exponiert, einlässt und verschwendet, in der der Liebende sich selbst nur mehr durch den Geliebten hindurch findet.

⁵⁴ *MG*, 3: 80. *SW*, 16: 217. *SG*, 451: [D]aß sie ernsthaft und radikal bis zum Tod, zum Tod am Kreuz ist [...]

⁵⁵ *MG*, 3: 80. *SW*, 16: 217. *SG*, 451: [D]aß sie sich hinabgewagt hat in die äußerste Leere der gottverlassenen, tödlichen Liebelosigkeit und da gesiegt hat, da alles angenommen hat, dass sie eine Liebe war, die den Sohn Gottes zum Fluch werden ließ, um wirklich zu retten, was wirklich unentrinnbar verloren ist, was von sich aus aussichtslos und hoffnungslos tot ist, was sich ingrimmig sperrt gegen die Liebe, was mit kaltem Hohn und zynischer Eindeutigkeit Liebe, Reinheit, Güte und Treue als verlogene Utopien abtut. Mit solchen Sündern hat sich diese Liebe in aller Wirklichkeit identifiziert.

they speak from the perspective of one who has already found God, the perspective of the Catholic Church). To start with the human experience of prisoners, as this thesis argues, is precisely the opposite: one speaks from the perspective of those who may or may *not* have found “God.” A viewpoint from the loss, the lack, the abandonment, ‘the absence of God,’ as was experienced by Hillesum and Frankl in Auschwitz, for instance. It takes great faith to start here, to face this stark reality without the comforting assurance of God being already present and to trust, in pure faith, that “God” or “Meaning” is here and will somehow, sometime, emerge.⁵⁶

When Rahner speaks of the “uttermost emptiness of God-forsaken,” the “death-stricken lovelessness” and of being “victorious,” he refers to the *Paschal mystery*, to the history of salvation. The passion, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ are at the heart of his theology of prison ministry. A prison minister, therefore, following Rahner’s theory, must with “creative and transforming” (*schöpferisch und verwandelnd*) love, identify himself with the sinners behind bars. Why? Well, “for otherwise they would not be redeemed.”⁵⁷ It is a logical consequence of the way Rahner sees the role of Jesus Christ. “Otherwise, only what is sound in itself would have been saved.”⁵⁸ The task of prison ministry, therefore, is to be conscious of and to preoccupy itself with that

⁵⁶ Note: We encounter here the kind of faith one meets in the psalms where the people were living a radically insecure life, with dangers at every turn and yet trusted and called out to God even in the words, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” It is the experience of the Cross before the resurrection yet still somehow believing. It is this naked faith that Jesus had in his Father, the *pistis Christou* (“the faithfulness of Christ” – not our “faith in Christ”) of which St. Paul speaks (Galatians 2:20, Philippians 3:9; Romans 3:21-22) that led to the Resurrection. This fits very much with our thinking in Chapters Four and Five. Our study takes the Good Friday or perhaps the Holy Saturday perspective; Rahner is taking the Easter Sunday perspective. Neither is wrong but our Thesis shows that we are doing different things and it is certainly arguable that our approach is more appropriate both to the prison setting and to our times. Moreover, Rahner is also speaking from a very intellectual point of view, rather abstract, while our study is seeking to take a more pastoral approach which, by its nature, is more concrete and grounded in lived reality. For the *pistis Christou* debate cf. Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle (eds.), *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010).

⁵⁷ *MG*, 3: 80. *SW*, 16: 217. *SG*, 451: Denn sonst wären sie nicht erlöst. Cf. Svein Rise, *The Academic and the Spiritual in Karl Rahner’s Theology* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000). Rise seeks to penetrate the ‘heart’ of Karl Rahner’s theology by asking: “What does it truly mean to say that Jesus Christ is the redeemer of the world?” He essentially reflects on “the relevance of Rahner to postmodern culture” and reveals “that Rahner’s understanding of Jesus is potentially very fruitful in an age marked by pluralism, ethical relativism and the lack of a total vision which could give life a meaning.”

⁵⁸ *MG*, 3: 80. *SW*, 16: 217. *SG*, 451: [D]enn sonst wäre nur gerettet, was von sich aus heil ist. For Rahner, “the essential benefits of redemption may be obtained through the acceptance of the inner self-communication of God which is given to all, as a ‘supernatural existential,’ even before the good news of Jesus Christ is heard. The message of the Gospel, when it becomes known, makes it possible to understand better what is already implied in God’s inner word of grace. All who hear and believe the Christian message obtain assurance that God’s final word toward human beings is not one of severity and judgment but one of love and mercy.” See the 1995 Vatican document *International Theological Commission: Select Questions on The Theology of God The Redeemer* (1995), Part III: Historical Perspectives, Twentieth-Century Movements, par. 31-34, esp. 31. This study of the theology of redemption was proposed to the

which is and was “truly lost” (*das wirklich Verlorene*) because nothing “is sound in itself” without “the love of God,” Rahner believes:

no such thing exists, though it often seems to; so that we think that this thing, basically good in itself, has been accepted by God because it is good, instead of believing that what was truly lost has been accepted in order that it should be made good.⁵⁹

Accepting this *in faith*, Rahner invites us to look at our own human “experience” and “what is actually there.”⁶⁰ We may well discover “that the Lord is in these lost individuals whom we meet in the prisons.”⁶¹ For Rahner it is clear “that he is in them by his will to love” (*in ihnen ist durch seinen Liebeswillen*).⁶² The truth about which he speaks,

calls nothingness and that which is lost by its name and creates it in them by his patience, by the almighty power that sees, even in this bit of the wreckage of world history, a person, an eternity, a brother of the incarnate Word of God, a beloved, someone to be taken seriously with divine seriousness: sees him as this, or, better, creates him as this, by looking on him with love.⁶³

“He is, in all truth, in them,”⁶⁴ Rahner believes, because

the primary mystery of that love which creates and makes one, which *is* God himself, is not

members of the International Theological Commission by His Holiness Pope John Paul II in 1992. Cf. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1982), 194-195; German original, *Grundkurs des Glaubens* (Freiburg, 1976), 193-95.

⁵⁹ *MG*, 3: 80-81. *SW*, 16: 217. *SG*, 451: [W]as es aber nicht gibt, auch wenn es oft den Anschein hat und wir darum meinen, dieses im Grunde doch Gute würde von Gott angenommen, weil es gut ist, anstatt zu glauben, das wirklich Verlorene werde angenommen, damit es gut werde.

⁶⁰ Cf. Karl Lehmann und Albert Raffelt (eds.), *Karl Rahner-Lesebuch* (Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 2014), esp. 7-180; Rudolf Hubert, *Im Geheimnis leben: Zum Wagnis des Glaubens in der Spur Karl Rahners ermutigen* (Würzburg: Echter), esp. 15-131.

⁶¹ *MG*, 3: 81. *SW*, 16: 217. *SG*, 451-452: Wir müssen darüber nachdenken, glaubend und gegen unsere eigene “Erfahrung,” daß der Herr in aller Wahrheit in diesen Verlorenen ist, denen wir in den Gefängnissen begegnen.

⁶² *MG*, 3: 81. *SW*, 16: 217. *SG*, 452.

⁶³ *MG*, 3: 81. *SW*, 16: 217. *SG*, 452: [D]er das Nichtige und Verlorene beim Namen ruft und schafft, in ihnen ist durch seine Geduld, durch die Allmacht, die auch in diesem Strandgut der Weltgeschichte noch die Person, eine Ewigkeit, einen Bruder des ins Fleisch gekommenen Wortes Gottes, einen Geliebten, einen mit göttlicher Ernsthaftigkeit Ernstzunehmenden sieht, besser: schafft, indem er ihn liebend anblickt.

⁶⁴ *MG*, 3: 81. *SW*, 16: 217. *SG*, 452: In ihnen ist ER in aller Wahrheit [...] Cf. Bernd Jochen Hilberath, *Karl Rahner, Gottgeheimnis Mensch* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1995).

understood, and hence the essence of Christianity is radically misunderstood, unless this improbable, paradoxical truth, with its radical reversal of all our short-sighted experience, is unconditionally accepted in faith.⁶⁵

He is conscious that if pastors want to understand the words from Scripture today and find Christ in the prisoners, they must go beyond faith and prayer.

(1) We must not only think, in faith and prayer, about the truth that he [the Lord] is in them;

(2) We must think even more about how we can find him [Christ] in them.”⁶⁶

The seeking and searching for God in the mundane prison routine, however, “is the appalling thing, the deadly danger.”⁶⁷ One can indeed “fail to recognise him.” Rahner is nonetheless convinced that “he [Christ] is in these his lost” (*in diesen seinen verlorenen*). Christ is in the “unfortunate brothers” (*armseligen Brüdern*) of his.⁶⁸ Yet, is he really “one with them” (*eins mit ihnen*)? Rahner writes:

We are liable to pass him by; our eyes can be held, our hearts be dull and closed against him, so that we do not see him. In this time of faith and not of sight we shall indeed never find him except in a hidden fashion. When the last day comes, we shall still be amongst those who ask wonderingly, just as much as those who have not visited the Lord and not found him, “When did we see thee in prison, and visit thee?” (Mt 25: 39-44).⁶⁹

“As far as *experience* goes it will always be like this,” he believes.⁷⁰ Pastors working with inmates are confronted with distressing situations, where it appears “that it is not he, that it is not possible to

⁶⁵ *MG*, 3: 81. *SW*, 16: 217. *SG*, 452: [W]eil das Urmysterium der einenden und schöpferischen Liebe, die Gott selbst *ist*, nicht verstanden und damit das Wesen des Christentums radikal verkannt ist, wenn dieses Unwahrscheinliche, Paradoxe und unsere kurzsichtige Erfahrung radikal Überwältigende nicht bedingungslos glaubend angenommen wird.

⁶⁶ *MG*, 3: 81. *SW*, 16: 217. *SG*, 452: Aber, wenn wir das Wort des Herrn verstehen wollen und den Herrn in den Gefangenen finden wollen, müssen wir nicht nur glaubend und betend darüber nachdenken, dass er in ihnen ist, sondern noch mehr darüber, wie man ihn nun selber in ihnen finden kann.

⁶⁷ *MG*, 3: 81. *SW*, 16: 217. *SG*, 452: Denn das ist ja das Erschütternde, das tödlich Gefährliche [...]

⁶⁸ *MG*, 3: 81. *SW*, 16: 217. *SG*, 452.

⁶⁹ *MG*, 3: 81-82. *SW*, 16: 217-218. *SG*, 452: Wir können in ihnen an IHM vorbeilaufen, unsere Augen können gehalten sein, unser Herz kann stumpf und verschlossen bleiben, so daß wir ihn nicht sehen. Immer zwar werden wir ihn in dieser Zeit des Glaubens und nicht des Schauens nur wie verhohlen finden. Immer werden wir die verwundert Fragenden sein, wenn der letzte Tag kommt, wir werden ebenso fragen wie die, die den Herrn nicht besucht und nicht gefunden haben: Wann haben wir Dich im Gefängnis gesehen und sind zu Dir gekommen? (Mt 25: 39-44).

⁷⁰ *MG*, 3: 82. *SW*, 16: 218. *SG*, 452: Die *Erfahrung* also wird immer so sein, daß wir den Eindruck haben, er sei es nicht, man könne ihn in den Gefangenen nicht finden.

find him,” Jesus Christ, in prisoners. But isn’t this precisely what Christianity is? Rahner speaks of “this finding when we think we have not found, this seeing when we seem to be gazing into darkness, this having when we think that we have lost.”⁷¹ He thinks that “we have to seek and find him in the prisoners,”⁷² even if it is “possible to ignore him and walk blindly past him.”⁷³

2.1.5. *Humility in face of this Other Human Being*

Principally, Rahner connects the “Good” with “Christ,” and asks earnestly “What does it mean to find Christ himself in his brothers in prison?”⁷⁴ Firstly, he states that “it means a reverent humility in the face of this other human being.”⁷⁵ “Reverent humility” (*ehrfürchtige Demut*), then, says that the other person comes first, and in facing another human being, I meet Christ.⁷⁶ As a Christian theologian, Rahner feels the need to specify this *face-to-face* in terms of the other person as “a child of God” (*Kind Gottes*). More specifically in the traditional Christian context: as “a brother of Jesus Christ” (*Bruder Jesu Christi*). He emphasises that human beings in their *otherness* “are called and beloved by God” (*Berufener, ein Geliebter Gottes*).⁷⁷

⁷¹ *MG*, 3: 82. *SW*, 16: 218. *SG*, 452-453: Aber auf dieses Finden, obwohl man meint, nicht gefunden zu haben, auf dieses Sehen, obwohl man den Eindruck hat, ins Finstere zu schauen, auf dieses Haben, obwohl man meint, verloren zu haben, kommt es im Christentum gerade an.

⁷² *MG*, 3: 82. *SW*, 16: 218. *SG*, 453: Und so auch hier. Wir müssen ihn in den Gefangenen suchen und finden. Und es ist nicht leicht.

⁷³ *MG*, 3: 82. *SW*, 16: 218. *SG*, 453: Man kann ihn auch übersehen und blind an ihm vorbeigehen.

⁷⁴ *MG*, 3: 82. *SW*, 16: 218. *SG*, 453: Was heißt nun, Christus selbst in seinen Brüdern im Gefängnis finden?

⁷⁵ *MG*, 3: 82. *SW*, 16: 218. *SG*, 453: Es heißt zunächst einmal: ehrfürchtige Demut vor dem anderen Menschen, der ein Kind Gottes und ein Bruder Jesu Christi ist, ein Berufener, ein Geliebter Gottes, ein von der Gewalt göttlicher Liebe Umfangener. Arguably, similar observations could have been given by the Jewish Biblical thinker, Emmanuel Levinas whose entire ethical thought takes *the Other* (French: *l’Autre*) into focus. See Levinas’ works: *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l’extériorité* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française [LGF], 2009 [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961, 1971]); E.T. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Duquesne Studies, Philosophical Series (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2005 [1969]); *Difficile liberté: Essais sur le judaïsme* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française [LGF], 2007 [Éditions Albin Michel, 1963 & 1976]); E.T. *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, [1963, 1990] 1997); *Entre nous: Essais sur le penser-à-l’autre* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française [LGF], 2010 [Grasset, Paris, 1991]); E.T. *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other* (Continuum Impacts; New York, NY: Continuum, 2006 [Columbia University Press, 1991, 1998]); *Le temps et l’autre* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, [1948] 1991); E.T. *Time and the Other: And Other Essays* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, [1947, 1979] 2002).

⁷⁶ Cf. Meins G.S. Coetsier, “‘Nous sommes tous responsables’: Etty Hillesum en Emmanuel Levinas,” in: Klaas A.D. Smelik and others (eds.), *Etty Hillesum in relatie* (Etty Hillesum Studies, 5; Ghent: Academia Press, 2013), 88-108; Chapters Five “Emmanuel Levinas,” and Six “The Face of the Other: Levinas and Hillesum,” in: Meins G.S. Coetsier, *The Existential Philosophy of Etty Hillesum: An Analysis of her Diaries and Letters*, Supplements to *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, 22 (Leiden/Boston MA: Brill, 2014), 263-410. See also Meins G.S. Coetsier, “Etty Hillesum and the Spiritual Search: An Analysis of the Diaries and Letters 1941-1943 in the light of Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas and Dietrich Bonhoeffer” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Comparative Science of Cultures, Ghent University, 2012).

⁷⁷ *MG*, 3: 82. *SW*, 16: 218. *SG*, 453.

As a people of faith, we stand before *the Other*, before God and our fellow human being as “one who is embraced by the power of divine love” (*ein von der Gewalt göttlicher Liebe Umfangener*).⁷⁸ Rahner elucidates his Christian anthropology for prison ministry:

We all know (and anyone who denied it would be at the very least a Jansenist heretic, doubting God’s universal will to save) that every human being still on pilgrimage through this life is called to salvation, beloved of God, and embraced by the grace of Christ, even if he has not yet freely accepted it.⁷⁹

It is important for him to emphasise that “we know that we cannot ultimately judge anybody,”

that we cannot say of anybody with absolute certainty that he is living in God’s grace, and so equally cannot say of anybody that he has lost it. And so, as we must with absolutely certain confidence in God hope in God’s merciful grace for ourselves, we have the same duty of hope (since we must love our neighbour as our self) on behalf of each of our neighbours. And we know that in every human being there is an eternal destiny in the making, coming to maturity through all the trivialities of everyday life and commonplace humanity.⁸⁰

Even if one may know all that in theory and never dispute it (*nie bestritten*), living it comes hard. Karl Rahner speaks of an “infinite dignity” (*unendliche Würde*), and of “indestructible nobility” (*unverlierbaren Adel*).⁸¹ But then again, confronted with prison life, the thought that “every human being is infinitely more than a human being,”⁸² remains even for him “to a large extent a sort of “thin Sunday-ideology” (*eine sehr dünne sonntägliche Ideologie*).”⁸³ This conception of being human as well as “infinitely more” (*unendlich mehr*), often preached during Sunday Mass, is painfully

⁷⁸ *MG*, 3: 82. *SW*, 16: 218. *SG*, 453.

⁷⁹ *MG*, 3: 82-83. *SW*, 16: 218. *SG*, 453: Wir wissen alle (wer es leugnen würde, wäre zumindest ein jansenistischer Häretiker, der am allgemeinen Heilswillen Gottes zweifeln würde), daß jeder noch in diesem Leben pilgernde Mensch zum Heil berufen, von Gott geliebt, von Christi Gnade umfassen ist, selbst wenn er sie noch nicht in Freiheit angenommen hat.

⁸⁰ *MG*, 3: 83. *SW*, 16: 218. *SG*, 453: Wir wissen, daß wir im Grunde keinen richten können, von gar niemandem mit absoluter Sicherheit sagen können, daß er in Gottes Gnade lebt, und so aber auch von gar niemandem sagen können, daß er sie verloren hat. Und so wie wir mit unbedingter Sicherheit im Vertrauen auf Gott für uns selbst die barmherzige Gnade Gottes erhoffen müssen und das ewige Heil, so haben wir dieselbe Pflicht der Hoffnung (da wir den Nächsten lieben müssen wie uns selbst) auch für jeden Nächsten. Und wir wissen, daß in jedem Menschen ein ewiges Geschick am Werden ist und in aller Belanglosigkeit des Alltags und der erbärmlichen Dutzendware Mensch heranreift.

⁸¹ *MG*, 3: 83. *SW*, 16: 218. *SG*, 453.

⁸² *MG*, 3: 83. *SW*, 16: 218. *SG*, 453: [D]ie Tatsache, daß jeder Mensch unendlich mehr ist als ein Mensch [...]

⁸³ *MG*, 3: 83. *SW*, 16: 218. *SG*, 453: [I]st bei uns weitgehend eine sehr dünne sonntägliche Ideologie.

challenged by the daily routine and reality of prison life. The actual human experiences of imprisonment, according to Rahner, pose a huge challenge to such a simplified ‘Sunday belief.’

2.1.6. *The God-Man and The Silent Void: A Death-Dealing Adventure*

In his theological explorations of human nature and of the human condition, Rahner clearly shows that a theology of prison ministry is not something we can construct with theoretical discussion alone. Rahner’s methodical reflections on human experience are interwoven with his own personal experience of the divine. Subsequently, he specifically developed the starting point of a pragmatic theological anthropology, according to which the human being is seen as a free agent before God. He reminds us of Christ, a free human being and a “God-Man,” who “experienced himself a lot further from God and many of his closest companions on earth.”⁸⁴ Correspondingly, Rahner reflects on the “silent void” (*schweigende Leere*) of the “interior man” (*inwendiger Mensch*):

Then this lonely, silent void of the interior man, who seems to have been as it were destroyed, begins to be filled with God; then we find God, we find Christ, who fell into the hands of the Father when, as he was dying, he recognised his God-forsakenness. At the beginning, this may seem alien to us; this loss of ourselves may terrify us, and the temptation may come upon us to flee in our terror back to intimacy and gratitude and the sense of being loved. Indeed it will often be right and necessary for us to do so.⁸⁵

The idea of “losing ourselves” (*dieses Sichselbstnichtmehrhaben*) is terrifying. Rahner thinks “we should gradually learn to find life in this death, intimacy in this loneliness.”⁸⁶ The challenge, he argues, is to let go and “to find God in this forsakenness.”⁸⁷

Rahner argues that only “when we can do this, when we can find and experience God himself in this

⁸⁴ Brendan Purcell, *Where is God in suffering?* (Dublin: Veritas, 2016), 11-12.

⁸⁵ *MG*, 3: 87. *SW*, 16: 220. *SG*, 456: [D]ann fängt diese einsame und schweigende Leere des inwendigen und wie verstörten Menschen an, sich mit Gott zu erfüllen, dann finden wir Gott, den Christus, der in die Hände des Vaters fiel, da er sterbend seine Gottverlassenheit bekannte. Das mag uns am Anfang ungewohnt vorkommen, dieses Sichselbstnichtmehrhaben mag uns erschrecken und uns die Versuchung überkommen, wie erschreckt in die Nähe, in die Dankbarkeit, in das spürbare Geliebtwerden zurückzuflüchten. Ja, wir werden dies sogar oft tun dürfen und müssen.

⁸⁶ *MG*, 3: 87. *SW*, 16: 220. *SG*, 456: Aber wir sollten doch allmählich lernen, in diesem Sterben das Leben, in dieser Einsamkeit die Nähe [...]

⁸⁷ *MG*, 3: 87. *SW*, 16: 220. *SG*, 456: [I]n dieser Verlassenheit Gott zu finden.

disappointment of our love for our neighbour, that our love for our neighbour becomes mature.”⁸⁸ Rahner speaks of “an act of the Holy Spirit in us.”⁸⁹ His theory is that we can endure “long-suffering” (*langmütig*) in the prison situation and be “patient” (*geduldig*). Rahner trusts in a Christian path on which we “never cease to hope” (*immer hoffend*), and are “never disillusioned” (*nie enttäuscht sein*). He is convinced that we are always able to “find God,”⁹⁰ even in utter forsakenness.

As human beings, then, we may want to create, according to Rahner, a “void within us which God then freely and mercifully fills with the unutterable intimacy of his presence.”⁹¹ However, there is a world of difference between ‘creating’ this void ourselves and being brought to it, as prisoners are. For Rahner, conversely, this does not mean that when a prisoner, “is a disappointing neighbor” (*der enttäuschende Nächste*), he should only become “a means by which we practise ascetical renunciation.”⁹² He believes that “none of this happens unless we truly love the person in question.”⁹³ According to him we must truly love and accept a prisoner for what he or she is (*wirklich annehmen*), “and not making this love into a means to anything” (*aus dieser Liebe kein Mittel macht*).⁹⁴ He writes:

But if, without aiming at it, this God-loving love to our neighbour does find God while seeking our neighbour, then this lonely experience of God, taking place within the death of all self-seeking, becomes a final possibility for us, a final source of strength for loving our neighbour “to the last.” We really die of this love; to die without despair (and despair puts an end to love) can only be done if we die into the infinite life of God. So we must love and seek our neighbour, and not our own fulfilment and perfection, but this can only be done “to the last” if we find God in it and if this true love of our neighbour is embraced and redeemed, preserved and liberated by happening within the love of God, as a finding of God in Christ.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ *MG*, 3: 88. *SW*, 16: 220. *SG*, 456: Erst wenn wir dies können, wenn wir in dieser Enttäuschung der Liebe zum Nächsten Gott selbst finden und erfahren, wird unsere Liebe zum Nächsten reif.

⁸⁹ *MG*, 3: 88. *SW*, 16: 220. *SG*, 456: Tat des Heiligen Geistes in uns.

⁹⁰ *MG*, 3: 88. *SG*, 456: Sie kann dann wirklich langmütig und geduldig, ohne Arg werden und immer hoffend und nie enttäuscht sein. Sie findet ja immer Gott.

⁹¹ *MG*, 3: 88. *SW*, 16: 220. *SG*, 456: [D]ie Gott in freiem Erbarmen mit seiner Nähe unsagbar und innig erfüllt.

⁹² *MG*, 3: 88. *SW*, 16: 220. *SG*, 456: Man muß nicht meinen, dadurch werde der Nächste und vor allem der enttäuschende Nächste nur das reine Mittel, an dem man jene Leere schaffende Ascese und Entsagung übt.

⁹³ *MG*, 3: 88. *SW*, 16: 220. *SG*, 456: Denn all das geschieht ja nur, wenn man den Menschen wahrhaft liebt.

⁹⁴ *MG*, 3: 88. *SW*, 16: 220. *SG*, 456-457: [W]enn man ihn also wirklich annimmt so, wie er ist, wenn man aus dieser Liebe kein Mittel macht.

⁹⁵ *MG*, 3: 88-89. *SW*, 16: 220-221. *SG*, 457: Aber wenn dann unbeabsichtigt die Gott liebende Liebe des Nächsten Gott findet, indem sie den Nächsten sucht, dann wird gerade diese einsame Erfahrung Gottes, die in diesem Sterben der

Karl Rahner's theology here is challenging, difficult: "We really die of this love" (*man stirbt ja an dieser Liebe*). Prison pastors, in his eyes, must have the courage to expose themselves daily with "this death-dealing adventure" (*dem tötenden Abenteuer*) of "an unconditional love" (*der bedingungslosen Liebe*) for someone who may not be capable of accepting it. They reach out to their neighbor (*zum Nächsten*), eager to find *You*, God, believing that "whoever finds God can love his neighbour as himself."⁹⁶

Rahner thinks that each prison minister could "receive that clearness of vision which belongs to the faith which sees the reality of God."⁹⁷ When he or she finds Christ's presence, as a *You* that meets *Me* – who says *I-Thou* – "even in the most abandoned of men" (*auch noch im verlorensten Menschen*), something changes.⁹⁸ In meeting prisoners, the pastor concentrates on *the Other*, "making him in all truth worthy of being loved with humble reverence."⁹⁹ Rahner's theological *prison maxim* for such a personal Christian experience of faith, for this significant existential meeting with *the Other* – with *You*, God – behind bars, reads finally (*schlussendlich*):

We find Christ our Lord in the prisoners; we have got to find him there; he is really there to be found, and to be found in such a way that our encounter with him will also be for our salvation and our happiness.¹⁰⁰

Selbstsucht geschieht, die letzte Möglichkeit und Kraft, den Nächsten bis zum Ende zu lieben. Man stirbt ja an dieser Liebe; wahrhaft sterben ohne Verzweiflung (und verzweifelt kann man nicht mehr lieben) kann man nur, wenn man in das unendliche Leben Gottes hineinstirbt. Man muß also den Nächsten und nicht seine eigene Erfüllung und Vollendung lieben und suchen, aber bis zum Ende kann man es nur, wenn man dabei Gott findet und diese wahre Liebe zum Nächsten umfaßt und erlöst, geborgen und befreit ist dadurch, daß sie in der Liebe zu Gott geschieht, als Finden Gottes in Christus.

⁹⁶ *MG*, 3: 89. *SW*, 16: 221. *SG*, 457: Wer sich also dem tötenden Abenteuer der bedingungslosen Liebe zum Nächsten aussetzt, der findet Gott, und wer ihn findet, kann den Nächsten lieben wie sich selbst.

⁹⁷ *MG*, 3: 89. *SW*, 16: 221. *SG*, 457: Er erhält die Klarheit des Blickes desjenigen Glaubens, der die Wirklichkeit Gottes [...]

⁹⁸ See Chapter Three, Section 3.2.3.2. *Begegnung pur: Prison Chaplaincy and its Expressions* in this thesis. Cf. Martin Buber, *Ich und Du*, Nachwort von Bernhard Casper (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1995); *I and Thou*, tr. Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1996); *Das dialogische Prinzip: Ich und Du; Zwiesprache; Die Frage an den Einzelnen; Elemente des Zwischenmenschlichen* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1973).

⁹⁹ *MG*, 3: 89. *SW*, 16: 221. *SG*, 457: [D]ie ihn in aller Wahrheit mit demütiger Ehrfurcht liebenswert macht.

¹⁰⁰ *MG*, 3: 89. *SW*, 16: 221. *SG*, 457: Wir finden Christus den Herrn in den Gefangenen; wir sollen ihn da finden; er ist da wirklich zu finden, so zu finden, daß wir ihm auch selbst für uns und zu unserem Heil und unserer Seligkeit begegnen. Cf. "The Spiritual Exercises" in: Joseph Munitiz and Philip Endean, *Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Personal Writings* (London/New York, NY: Penguin Books, [1996] 2004), 281-361, esp. 289 [Principle and Foundation].

2.2. Finding ourselves in the Prisoners

2.2.1. *We are the Unfree Prisoners – Running Away from ourselves*

Karl Rahner writes that “We find ourselves in the prisoners when we see in them the hidden truth of our own situation.”¹⁰¹ What is hidden, he argues, is that “every human being is continually running away from himself.”¹⁰² Time and again, we play hide and seek. Rahner states that we have to stop deceiving ourselves. In the next passage he is referring to “the perfection of a saint” and the fact that “we do not do what we ought to do”:

Only those saints who have attained perfection could say that they no longer deceive themselves about themselves. Only the perfect have stopped repressing the truth of God within them. The truth that we are sinners; the truth that we are self-seekers; the truth that in a thousand different ways, crude or subtle, we are always trying to serve God *and* ourselves; the truth that we are cowardly, easy-going, lazy, refractory servants of God; the truth that we do not do what we ought to do: love God with our *whole* heart and *all* our strength. Together with the Scriptures and the teachings of the early Church, we can express the content of this repressed truth by acknowledging that we are unfree, prisoners, unless the Spirit of God, his grace, sets us free.¹⁰³

Although “grace” can set us free, he makes the point that we forget to “love God with our *whole* heart and *all* our strength.” He makes the link metaphorically between us sinners as “the unfree prisoners” (*die unfrei Gefangenen*) and the actual men and women behind bars. As “sinful fallen creatures,” we find ourselves in these inmates.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ *MG*, 3: 89. *SW*, 16: 221. *SG*, 457: Wir finden in den Gefangenen uns selbst, indem wir in ihnen unsere eigene verborgene Situation erblicken.

¹⁰² *MG*, 3: 89. *SW*, 16: 221. *SG*, 457: Jeder Mensch läuft sich selbst immer wieder davon.

¹⁰³ *MG*, 3: 89-90. *SW*, 16: 221. *SG*, 457-458: Nur vollendete Heilige könnten sagen, da daß sie sich selbst nicht mehr über sich selbst betrügen. Nur die Vollendeten halten die Wahrheit Gottes in sich nicht mehr nieder. Die Wahrheit, daß wir Sünder sind; die Wahrheit, daß wir uns selbst suchen; die Wahrheit, daß wir in tausend groben und subtilen Weisen immer Gott und uns selbst zu dienen suchen; die Wahrheit, daß wir feige und bequeme, faule und störrische Knechte Gottes sind; die Wahrheit, daß wir das nicht tun, was wir tun sollen: Gott aus *ganzem* Herzen und mit *allen* Kräften lieben. Wir können auch mit der Schrift und den Lehräußerungen der alten Kirche diesen Sachverhalt der von uns selbst niedergehaltenen Wahrheit so aussagen, daß wir bekennen: wir sind die unfrei Gefangenen, wenn uns nicht der Geist Gottes, seine Gnade, befreit.

¹⁰⁴ See Karl Rahner’s dogmatic theology as discussed in Chapter One, Section 1.1.3.4. *Grace (Gnade) and Freedom (Freiheit)* in this thesis. *SW*, 22/2 (*Dogmatik nach dem Konzil*): 75-76. Rahner argues that we find ourselves in these inmates because we are sinful human beings. He claims, we are all “trapped in egoism with a ‘natural’ freedom that makes us guilty.” Prison pastors in their ministry may also not fully accept “the self-communication of God.” For Rahner,

The reason why Rahner believes that we find ourselves *in* prisoners is that from the start – explicitly, from a Christian perspective of ‘sin’¹⁰⁵ – we are not much better than those human beings who have committed a crime. These people show us “the hidden truth of our own situation.” We too are fallen. Moreover, we too are spiritual beings who desperately need salvation. If we do not change our lives, Rahner argues, we might be damned to imprisonment for the rest of our earthly life into eternity.

He is strongly convinced that our relationship with the one Lord, Jesus Christ – who, likewise, we should find in these prisoners – is not only the salvation for convicts but for men and women outside the gates as well. In other words, being free “in a bourgeois, legal sense” (*bürgerlich-forensischer Sinn*) without love, won’t be enough. Rahner argues:

We may be free in a bourgeois, legal sense: we may be responsible for our actions, not only in the sight of men but also in the sight of God and his most merciful and just judgement. But if we have not been set free by the Spirit of God into the freedom of Christ, then for all this earthly freedom and its corresponding responsibility in the sight of God, we are nevertheless helpless and hopeless prisoners in the prison of our guilt, our unsaved condition, our inability to perform any saving act.¹⁰⁶

this is “a state of being, where we cannot allow God to be God.” For him, “God’s grace – that is, God himself – must liberate us humans towards the freedom of God, to let essentially the God within, receive and liberate God.” Rahner encourages the prison pastors to embrace this “truth” in which our true human freedom is predicated.

¹⁰⁵ See Mary Ann Hinsdale, “‘Infinite Openness to the Infinite’: Karl Rahner’s Contribution to Modern Catholic Thought on the Child,” in: Marcia J. Bunge (ed.), *The Child in Christian Thought, Religion, Marriage, and Family* (RMF) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 406-445, esp. 429. Hinsdale writes that Rahner’s response to the “modern pastoral situation” was to explain that “original sin is only ‘sin’ in an analogous sense.” She continues: “It is not sin in the same sense as personal sin. However, since it involves something ‘that should not be,’ it ought to be regarded as sin. The doctrine of original sin is an attempt to express the role that 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.” Cf. Karl Rahner, “Ersünde und Monogenismus,” in: Karl-Heinz Weger (ed.), *Theologie der Erbsünde*, Quaestiones disputatae 44 (Freiburg-Basel-Wien 1970), 176-223; “Original Sin,” in: Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler (eds.), *Dictionary of Theology* (New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1965), 330-331; “Original Sin,” in *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (New York, NY: Seabury, 1975), 330; *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1978), 106-115. See also Brian McDermott, “The Bonds of Freedom,” in: Leo J. O’Donovan (ed.), *A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner’s Theology* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1980), 50-63.

¹⁰⁶ *MG*, 3: 90. *SW*, 16: 221. *SG*, 458: Man kann in einem bürgerlich-forensischen Sinn frei sein, man kann verantwortlich sein, nicht nur vor den Menschen, sondern auch vor Gott und seinem sehr gnädigen und gerechten Gericht: wenn man nicht vom Geiste Gottes befreit wird zur Freiheit Christi, ist man mit dieser seiner irdischen Freiheit und seiner daraus entspringenden Verantwortung vor Gott dennoch im Kerker seiner Schuld, seiner Heillosigkeit und Unfähigkeit zu jeder Heilstat rettungslos und hoffnungslos Gefangener.

2.2.2. *Imprisoned in the Dungeon of our own Finitude: that One Great Prison*

The people that prison chaplains meet and visit each day “are an image of this: an image of all those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.”¹⁰⁷ Being “imprisoned in the dungeon of their own finitude” (*eingekerkert im Verlies ihrer Endlichkeit*),¹⁰⁸ they seek a way out. Many inmates are searching deep down for a sense of meaning, for a path to re-order their lives, for a concrete future perspective. Rahner thinks that we all can be in that “dungeon of a freedom which has not yet been set free by Christ”¹⁰⁹: places where we still feel “enslaved” (*versklavt*) to sin. He speaks of “the flesh” (*dem Fleisch*) and “the power of the evil one” (*der Macht des Bösen*) which are both real and strongly present in institutions of incarceration:

The prison in which your work goes on is an image of this prison of the world, not in an external, artificial sense, through some artificial analogy, but an image in the sense of a manifestation, a true and real type, the making visible of a hidden reality which makes itself manifest and tangible in this real symbol. For no matter what may be the immediate causes of prisons and of the plight of their inmates, the one ultimate cause is the guilt of mankind from its beginnings onwards.¹¹⁰

Karl Rahner speaks of “the guilt which propagates itself through all individual personal guilt.”¹¹¹ “The same guilt,” he argues, “confronts us incarnate in poverty, sickness, and unhappiness.”¹¹² Prison ministers have to face this “guilt” (*Schuld*) which equally may have a power in their “own lives” (*eigenen Leben*) too. Rahner would go so far as to say,

that what we call prisons and penitentiaries are, to a Christian understanding of things, simply individual cells of a perceptible kind in that one great prison which Scripture calls “the

¹⁰⁷ *MG*, 3: 90. *SW*, 16: 221. *SG*, 458: [E]in Bild, ein Bild aller derer, die in Finsternis und Todesschatten sitzen [...]

¹⁰⁸ *MG*, 3: 90. *SW*, 16: 221. *SG*, 458.

¹⁰⁹ *MG*, 3: 90. *SW*, 16: 221. *SG*, 458: [I]hrer durch Christus noch nicht befreien, unter der Sünde, dem Fleisch, der Macht des Bösen versklavten Freiheit.

¹¹⁰ *MG*, 3: 90-91. *SW*, 16: 221-222. *SG*, 458: Bild dieses Gefängnisses der “Welt” ist das Gefängnis, in dem sich Ihre Tätigkeit abspielt, nicht in einem äußerlichen, künstlichen Sinn, nicht durch eine künstliche Analogie, sondern Bild als Erscheinung, als wahrer realer Typus, als Sichtbarwerden einer geheimen Wirklichkeit, die sich selbst in diesem realen Symbol ihre Erscheinung und Greifbarkeit schafft. Denn welche immer die nächsten Ursachen der Gefängnisse sein mögen und der Not ihrer Insassen, die eine und letzte Ursache ist die Schuld der Menschheit von Anbeginn an [...]

¹¹¹ *MG*, 3: 91. *SW*, 16: 222. *SG*, 458: [D]ie Schuld, die sich fortzeugt durch alle persönliche Schuld der einzelnen [...]

¹¹² *MG*, 3: 91. *SW*, 16: 222. *SG*, 458: [D]ie auch in Not, Krankheit und Unglück inkarniert uns anblickt [...]

world,” “this age”, “the evil world”, the domain of the prince of this world, the realm of the powers of darkness, death and evil.¹¹³

For him each penitentiary is a reflection of “that one great prison” (*einen großen Gefängnisses*) referred to by Scripture. For Rahner this is vital to understand the prison pastorate. When chaplains go daily from their own “surroundings” (*Daseinsraum*) into the “prisons” (*die Gefängnisse*), they do not “go out of a world of harmony, light and order into a world of guilt and unfreedom”¹¹⁴: they stay where they have been all the time, at the very heart of human existence. There is nothing in prison we meet that is not already present in ourselves in some form.

Rahner thinks that “faith alone, and no experience or pharisaic self-consciousness of ours, can give us” that personal strength.¹¹⁵ He speaks of “pursuing our pilgrimage in hope.”¹¹⁶ Despite all the ideas prison pastors may have of being “redeemed in hope” (*auf Hoffnung erlöst*), so long as we are “still marching and not yet at the goal,” we are, Rahner argues, “still as it were prisoners.”

2.2.3. *Redemption from Slavery: Opening the Prison Doors*

Metaphorically speaking, he is convinced nonetheless that the “prison door” (*Tür des Kerkers*) can “be opening at this very moment.” He sees the possibility of “an unlooked-for miracle of grace, to get up and go.”¹¹⁷ To back up his argument, he mentions Peter, who was “being struck on the side by the angel: ‘Get up quickly, dress yourself and follow me’ (Acts 12, 7-8), while the chains fall from our hands.”¹¹⁸ Speaking carefully to the audience of ministers, he tries to comfort and hearten them, saying,

¹¹³ MG, 3: 91. SW, 16: 222. SG, 458-459: [S]o daß, was wir die Gefängnisse und Zuchthäuser nennen, eigentlich für das christliche Verständnis des Daseins doch nur Einzelzellen greifbarer Art jenes einen großen Gefängnisses sind, das die Schrift die “Welt,” “diesen Äon,” die “Welt, die im Argen liegt,” den Herrschaftsbereich des Fürsten dieser Welt, den Machtbereich der Mächte der Finsternis, des Todes und des Bösen nennt.

¹¹⁴ MG, 3: 91. SW, 16: 222. SG, 459: [G]ehen nicht aus einer Welt der Harmonie, des Lichtes und der Ordnung in eine Welt der Schuld und der Unfreiheit.

¹¹⁵ MG, 3: 92. SW, 16: 222. SG, 459: [...] Hoffnung, die allein der Glaube, nicht unsere Erfahrung, nicht unser pharisäisches Selbstbewußtsein uns gibt und geben darf.

¹¹⁶ MG, 3: 92. SW, 16: 222. SG, 459: Aber auch so sind wir, solange wir in der Hoffnung pilgern [...]

¹¹⁷ MG, 3: 92. SW, 16: 222. SG, 459: [S]olange wir noch laufen und nicht am Ziel sind, immer noch so wie Gefangene, denen sich eben die Tür des Kerkers auftut, die plötzlich wie durch ein unerwartetes Wunder der Begnadigung geheißen werden zu gehen [...]

¹¹⁸ MG, 3: 92. SW, 16: 222. SG, 459: [D]ie wie Petrus vom Engel in die Seite gestoßen werden: schnell, steh auf (Apg 12, 7), gürt dich und folge mir, während eben die Ketten von unseren Händen fallen.

We are people who have entered into freedom and can be said to have attained it precisely insofar as we do not think of it as a possession that can be taken for granted; insofar as we are aware, in fear and trembling,¹¹⁹ of whence we come; insofar as we know that we can only receive this gift of the freedom of Christ with impunity, if we accept it simply and solely as our redemption from slavery by the grace of God.¹²⁰

Differentiating and making his point about “our redemption from slavery” even stronger, Rahner continues with a long “even-if-argument,” which is bracketed out here:

- a) *even if* we are “the redeemed” (*die Erlösten*);¹²¹
- b) *even if* in those who are in Christ Jesus, those who believe in him and love him, there is no longer “anything worthy of damnation” (*nichts Verdammungswürdiges*);¹²²
- c) *even if* “the ground of our being” (*der Grund unseres Wesens*), its “innermost centre” (*innerste Mitte*), is graced and filled (*erfüllt*) with the holy Pneuma of God;¹²³
- d) *even if*, then, what is in us can no longer make us, as indivisible subjects (*die unteilbaren Subjekte*) before God’s judgement (*Gericht Gottes*), worthy of damnation, yet...¹²⁴

We can take nothing for granted, Rahner argues, *all is gift* for each and everyone of us, and *all is grace* in the “slavery” of our human existence: “this “grace” is the “gift of the freedom of Christ.”¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ See also Karl Theodor Kehrbach, *Der Begriff «Wahl» bei Søren Kierkegaard und Karl Rahner: Zwei Typen der Kirchenkritik* (Würzburger Studien zur Fundamentaltheologie) (Frankfurt am Main et al.: Peter Lang, 1992). Kehrbach’s study points to the existential choice, to the fear and trembling in the conscious decision to be a Christian. He compares the “the either/or of being a Christian” in the work of the 19th century Danish thinker, Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813-1855) with the “clear yes of the individual to follow Christ” in Rahner’s theology. Kierkegaard, in particular, argues that a true understanding of the divine can only be attained by making a personal and courageous “leap of faith.” Kehrbach believes that in this way – in an ecumenical sense – the ecclesiological significance of the individual Christian becomes visible. Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling: Dialectical Lyric by Johannes De Silentio*, tr. Alastair Hannay (New York, NY: Penguin Classics, 2003 [1986]). [In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard writes under the pseudonym Johannes De Silentio]

¹²⁰ *MG*, 3: 92. *SW*, 16: 222. *SG*, 459: Wir sind die, die gerade in die Freiheit kommen, sie nur dann erlangt haben, wenn sie nicht meinen, sie sei ihr selbstverständlicher Besitz, wenn sie in Furcht und Zittern wissen, woher sie kommen, wenn sie wissen, daß sie die Freiheit Christi nur dann ungestraft als ihre Gabe empfangen können, ohne daß sie zur letzten Verdammnis wird, wenn sie als die Errettung aus der Sklaverei durch die Gnade Gottes allein entgegengenommen wird.

¹²¹ *MG*, 3: 92. *SW*, 16: 222. *SG*, 459-460: [S]elbst wenn wir die Erlösten sind [...]

¹²² *MG*, 3: 92. *SW*, 16: 222. *SG*, 460: [S]elbst wenn in denen, die in Christo Jesu sind, in den Glaubenden und Liebenden, nichts Verdammungswürdiges mehr sich findet [...]

¹²³ *MG*, 3: 92. *SW*, 16: 222. *SG*, 460: [S]elbst wenn der Grund unseres Wesens, seine innerste Mitte, begnadet und vom heiligen Pneuma Gottes erfüllt ist [...]

¹²⁴ *MG*, 3: 92-93. *SW*, 16: 222. *SG*, 459-460: [S]elbst dann also, wenn, was in uns ist, nicht mehr uns selbst, die unteilbaren Subjekte vor dem Gericht Gottes, verdamulich macht [...]

¹²⁵ *MG*, 3: 92. *SW*, 16: 222. *SG*, 459: [D]ie Freiheit Christi [...] die Errettung aus der Sklaverei durch die Gnade Gottes

2.2.4. *Heritage of the Past – “Depart from Me, for I am a Sinful Man, O Lord”*

Rahner now emphasises that the “heritage of the past” (*Erbe der Vergangenheit*) is still at the same time ultimately and indissolubly (*nicht auflösbare Gleichzeitigkeit*) still in us.¹²⁶ He then asks three questions:

- 1) Or is concupiscence not still to be found in us?
- 2) Is there not in us that which is in the world, the lust of the eyes and the flesh and the pride of life?¹²⁷
- 3) Are we not sick, compulsive, only too apt to deceive ourselves, egoists, slaves (if only in an attenuated form) to our cravings for this and that?¹²⁸

His questions are followed by a “supposing-section”:

- a) *Supposing* someone came to us –¹²⁹
- b) *supposing God* came to us, and lit up the interior of our hearts not merely with the cold inexorability of a psychotherapist but with the incorruptibility of the ultimate truth of the Thrice-Holy One;¹³⁰
- c) *supposing* he were to analyse our motives, our attitudes, our behaviour patterns, our secret impulses, hidden even from ourselves; if he were to confront us with ourselves, stripped and naked, as we are, not as we like to appear to ourselves ...¹³¹

Rahner continues and concludes his argument with a series of “should not’s” and “would not’s”:

[...]

¹²⁶ *MG*, 3: 93. *SW*, 16: 222. *SG*, 460: [A]uch dann ist in uns in einer letztlich nicht auflösbaren Gleichzeitigkeit das Erbe der Vergangenheit noch da.

¹²⁷ *MG*, 3: 93. *SW*, 16: 222-223. *SG*, 460: Oder lebt in uns nicht die Begierlichkeit, ist nicht auch in uns, was in der Welt ist: Augenlust, Fleischeslust und Hoffart des Lebens?

¹²⁸ *MG*, 3: 93. *SW*, 16: 223. *SG*, 460: Sind wir nicht die Kranken, die Triebhaften, die nur zu leicht sich selbst Betrügenden, die Egoisten, die in dieser oder jener Hinsicht (in irgendeiner leichteren Form wenigstens) Süchtigen?

¹²⁹ *MG*, 3: 93. *SW*, 16: 223. *SG*, 460: Wie, wenn einer käme [...]

¹³⁰ *MG*, 3: 93. *SW*, 16: 223. *SG*, 460: [W]enn Gott käme und nicht nur mit der kalten Unerbittlichkeit eines Psychotherapeuten, sondern mit der Unbestechlichkeit der letzten Wahrheit, welche die des Dreimalheiligen ist, uns ins Herz leuchtete [...]

¹³¹ *MG*, 3: 93. *SW*, 16: 223. *SG*, 460: [U]nsere Motive, unsere Haltungen, unsere Dressate, unsere versteckten und vor uns selbst durch uns verborgenen geheimen Antriebe analysierte, wenn er uns selbst nackt und bloß uns konfrontierte, so, wie wir sind, nicht so, wie wir gerne vor uns erscheinen [...]

- a) *Should we not*, “then have to fall down in terror before this judge of our hearts, crying ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord’?”¹³²
- b) *Would not* his grace, by which we are made holy, then appear to us as something which we simply are not;¹³³
- c) *would we not* have to say, brokenly and with tears, “That is you, that is your inconceivable love, the unreasonable prodigality, so to say, of your mercy; but I am not that; I am dull and cowardly and shut up within myself, I am a confused and tangled bundle of impulses and chances and external determinisms of which it is never possible to know at any moment what is genuinely my own, what is mere façade, what is real, whether shabbiness is the humility of the virtue that is in me or virtue is the disguise for the wretchedness in me”?¹³⁴
- d) *Should we not* have to pray with tears, “If thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who shall endure it? Enter not into judgement with me, cleanse me from my secret sin!”?¹³⁵
- e) *Should we not* then have to recognise and acknowledge that we are not so essentially different from those poor sinners whom we visit in the prisons?¹³⁶
- f) *Should we not* have to say that what distinguishes us from them is merely the fact that the *fomes peccati*, which is in us in the same way as it is in them, has not – because of circumstances which are no merit of ours but matters of situation, fate and chance – brought us into conflict, as it has them, with the external order of men and society?¹³⁷

¹³² *MG*, 3: 93. *SW*, 16: 223. *SG*, 460: [M]üßten wir dann nicht erschreckt vor diesem Richter der Herzen niederfallen: Herr, geh weg von mir, denn ich bin ein sündiger Mensch [...]

¹³³ *MG*, 3: 93. *SW*, 16: 223. *SG*, 460: [W]ürde uns dann nicht seine Gnade, die uns heiligt, vorkommen wie etwas, das wir eigentlich gar nicht sind [...]

¹³⁴ *MG*, 3: 93-94. *SW*, 16: 223. *SG*, 460: [M]üßten wir dann nicht weinend und erschüttert sagen: Das bist Du, die Unbegreiflichkeit Deiner Liebe, die wie sinnlose Verschwendung Deines Erbarmens; ich aber, ich bin das nicht: ich bin der dumpf und feig in mir selbst Verfangene, ich bin jenes wirre und verwirrte Bündel von Antrieben, von Zufällen, von äußerlich über mich verfügenden Schicksalen, bei dem man nie weiß, was jetzt das Eigentliche und Echte ist, was Fassade, was Wirklichkeit, ob das Schäßige die Demut der Tugend in mir oder ob die Tugend die Verkleidung des Erbärmlichen in mir ist?

¹³⁵ *MG*, 3: 94. *SW*, 16: 223. *SG*, 460-461: Müßten wir dann nicht weinend beten: Wenn Du der Sünde, Herr, gedenken willst, Herr, wer kann vor Dir bestehen? Geh nicht mit mir ins Gericht, vom Verhohlenen in mir reinige mich!

¹³⁶ *MG*, 3: 94. *SW*, 16: 223. *SG*, 461: Müßten wir dann nicht erkennen und anerkennen, daß wir uns von jenen armen Sündern, die wir in den Gefängnissen besuchen, nicht sehr wesentlich unterscheiden?

¹³⁷ *MG*, 3: 94. *SW*, 16: 223. *SG*, 461: Müßten wir nicht eher sagen, daß wir uns nur dadurch von ihnen abheben, daß der “fomes peccati,” der in gleicher Weise in ihnen und in uns ist, uns nur durch Umstände, die nicht unser Verdienst, sondern Anlage, Geschick, Zufall sind, nicht so wie jene auch mit der äußerlichen Ordnung der Menschen und der Gesellschaft in Konflikt gebracht hat?

Rahner then arrives at the conclusion that “we can indeed be grateful to God for these very circumstances.”¹³⁸ Not only grateful in the normal sense, nor “even extremely so” (*und sogar sehr*), simply because we are now confronted with and have arrived at “the hidden truth of our own situation.”

2.3. The Hidden Truth of Our Own Situation

2.3.1. *The One Deadly Enemy: Habit and Routine*

In conclusion, then, Karl Rahner is convinced: “we find ourselves in the prisoners, seeing in them the hidden truth of our own situation.”¹³⁹ As mentioned before, what is hidden is that we continually run away from ourselves.¹⁴⁰ For him, there remains, however, one great danger: the “one deadly enemy” (*einen Todfeind*), namely “habit and routine” (*die Gewohnheit und die Routine*). Although some habits and routines can be truly positive, in the prison context, however, they could easily turn into the *Todfeind*, he believes. They arguably tend to dehumanise the people who are subjected to them.

On the other hand, “we need habit and routine,” in every form of life, and perhaps explicitly in institutions of incarceration. One could argue, as Rahner does that “we cannot live for long without them.” Of course they “make many things easier for us which would otherwise soon be too much for our powers.”¹⁴¹ Everyone knows that certain habits “may often be a mild narcotic which God has mercifully supplied against the pain of living.”¹⁴² At times it feels great not to have to think too much, just working by routine. Rahner sees it clearly and correctly:

[T]hey [habit and routine] are also the deadly enemy of our life and of the holy office we hold. They blunt us, they keep us going long after the real substance – spirit and love – has faded out of our work. And thus they may give us a “good conscience” when what we ought to have is a bad one. They make us take credit for our good deeds instead of beating our

¹³⁸ *MG*, 3: 94. *SW*, 16: 223. *SG*, 461: Wir können Gott auch für diese Umstände dankbar sein.

¹³⁹ *MG*, 3: 95-96. *SW*, 16: 224. *SG*, 462: Es bleibt dabei: Wir finden in den Gefangenen uns selbst, indem wir in ihnen unsere eigene verborgene Situation erblicken.

¹⁴⁰ *MG*, 3: 89. *SW*, 16: 221. *SG*, 457: Jeder Mensch läuft sich selbst immer wieder davon.

¹⁴¹ *MG*, 3: 96. *SW*, 16: 224. *SG*, 462: Jedes Leben und auch das heiligste Amt hat einen Todfeind; die Gewohnheit und die Routine. Ach, wir haben die Gewohnheit und die Routine nötig. Wir können nicht lange ohne sie leben. Sie macht uns vieles leichter, was sonst bald über unsere Kräfte ginge [...]

¹⁴² *MG*, 3: 96. *SW*, 16: 224. *SG*, 462: [S]ie mag oft die milde Narkose sein, die Gott für den Schmerz des Daseins uns gnädig gewährt hat.

breasts because there is in them so little love, so little heart, so little humility and reverence for men, even those who are outcasts from society.¹⁴³

He continues with great passion speaking about “grace from God,” battling with “this deadly thing, habit” (*tötende Gewohnheit*):

We must keep fighting this deadly thing, habit, as though it were a cunning and mortally dangerous enemy. This applies to your job, too. It is a grace from God

- (1) to have his providence sustaining you in this battle,
- (2) not only through the grace of that holy joy you feel as pastors over someone whom you have been able to bring back to the love of God,
- (3) but also through all the sharp disappointments and bitterness of the job, all its failures, all the indifference which it meets, all that it can do to torment you and wear you down.
- (4) If these experiences, these hard and bitter ones, force you out of the mediocrity of habit and routine, confront you with the question of what you really are trying to do in a job like this, and compel you to think about the real meaning and grace of such a calling, then this too is God’s grace.¹⁴⁴

2.3.2. *The Gentle and Unobtrusive Workings of Grace in You*

“This too is God’s grace,” Rahner speaks of “the gentle and unobtrusive workings of grace in you.”¹⁴⁵ He believes “you should come to meet this grace, thinking and praying in the sight of God about what you are and what you are aiming at in this calling.”¹⁴⁶ Rahner describes how “splendour

¹⁴³ *MG*, 3: 96. *SW*, 16: 224. *SG*, 462: Aber sie ist auch der Todfeind unseres Lebens und unseres heiligen Amtes. Sie stumpft ab, sie bewirkt, daß wir weitermachen, obwohl das Eigentliche, der Geist und die Liebe, schon längst aus unseren Werken gewichen sind. Sie kann uns so ein “gutes Gewissen” geben, wo wir ein schlechtes haben sollten. Sie macht, daß wir auf unsere guten Taten pochen, anstatt an unsere Brust zu schlagen, weil darin so wenig Liebe, Herzlichkeit, Demut und Ehrfurcht vor den Menschen, auch vor den aus der Gesellschaft Ausgestoßenen, lebt.

¹⁴⁴ *MG*, 3: 96-97. *SW*, 16: 224. *SG*, 462-463: Wir müssen diese tötende Gewohnheit immer aufs neue wie einen listigen und tödlich gefährlichen Feind bekämpfen. Auch in diesem Ihrem Amt. Gnade Gottes ist es, wenn seine Vorsehung Ihnen in diesem Kampf beisteht, beisteht nicht nur durch die Gnade heiliger Hirtenfreude über den, den man zur Liebe Gottes heimführen darf, sondern auch durch die spürbaren Enttäuschungen und Bitterkeiten dieses Amtes, durch alle seine Erfolglosigkeit, durch all sein Unbeachtetbleiben bei den Menschen, durch alles Zermürbende und Quälende, das mit ihm verbunden sein kann. Wenn diese Erlebnisse, die harten und bitteren, Sie aus der Mittelmäßigkeit der Gewohnheit und Routine herauszwingen, wenn sie Sie vor die Frage stellen, was Sie eigentlich in solchem Amt suchen und erstreben, wenn sie Sie zur Besinnung zwingen über das, was Sinn und Gnade solchen Berufes ist, dann ist auch dies Gnade Gottes.

¹⁴⁵ *MG*, 3: 97. *SW*, 16: 224. *SG*, 463: [D]er Kraft einer leise und bescheiden kommenden Gnade [...]

¹⁴⁶ *MG*, 3: 97. *SW*, 16: 224. *SG*, 463: Und dieser Gnade sollten Sie, wieder in der Kraft einer leise und bescheiden

and grace” can achieve *something* in nothingness, making the impossible possible: meeting You God in the broken lives of men and women in imprisoned existence. “In the course of such a meditation” (*in solcher betender Meditation*), he encourages us to consider that, “in the prisoners” (*den Gefangenen*) “entrusted” (*anvertraut*) to our pastoral care,

we can truly and indeed find Christ for ourselves, and that, by encountering in them the reflection and likeness of our own situation, we may be recalled to that humility to which alone God’s grace is promised, then such a meditation may well build up to greater fullness and completeness that unity between your calling and your life, your office and your own personal existence, which is, in the nature of things, made possible to an unsurpassed degree of splendour and grace in the calling of a priest.¹⁴⁷

This final quotation sums up the essential theological meaning of Rahner’s meditation in “The Prison Pastorate” (*Gefängnisseelsorge*). The “unsurpassed degree of splendour and grace” (*Herrlichkeit und Gnade*) is the grounding experience not only of “the calling of a priest” but as this study shows of all men and women who feel called to prison ministry today by meeting *You*, God-in-prisoners.¹⁴⁸

Conclusion

This chapter outlined Karl Rahner’s thinking on prison ministry as presented at a meeting of prison pastors in Innsbruck, Austria, in 1959.¹⁴⁹ The intention is to give a clear analysis of Rahner’s theology of the prison pastorate, focusing on his pastoral insights on prison ministry. In taking Matthew 25 as his foundational scripture passage, Rahner discusses (i) the finding of Christ in prisoners; (ii) the experience of finding ourselves in the prisoners; (iii) discovering the hidden truth of our own situation. In following this spiritual thread he is aware of the human costs of Christian service behind bars. Rahner stresses theologically that prison ministry is all about seeking the Lord in

kommenden Gnade, entgegenkommen, indem Sie besinnlich und betend immer wieder vor Gott erwägen, was Sie sind und wollen in solchem Beruf.

¹⁴⁷ *MG*, 3: 97. *SW*, 16: 225. *SG*, 463: [I]n aller Wahrheit Christus auch für uns finden können, und, indem wir in ihnen unserer eigenen Situation wie im Spiegel und Gleichnis begegnen, an jene Demut erinnert werden, der allein Gottes Gnade verheißen ist, dann konnte aus solcher Meditation voller und ganzer jene Einheit von Beruf und Leben, von Amt und eigener Existenz sich bilden, wie sie an sich keinem anderen Beruf herrlicher und gnadenvoller angeboten ist als dem des Priesters.

¹⁴⁸ *MG*, 3: 97. *SW*, 16: 225. *SG*, 463. Although Rahner mainly focuses on the role of priests in prison ministry, I have broadened his focus out here, since prison chaplaincy in the twenty-first century includes permanent deacons, pastoral- and social workers, volunteers, and so on.

¹⁴⁹ Note: a further in-depth theological study and/or comparative analysis of the possible changes in Rahner’s later anthropology falls outside the scope of this study.

inmates. He reminds us that much is asked for: since we too will remain imprisoned “in the prison of our guilt,” when not “set free by the Spirit of God into the freedom of Christ.” The careful analysis of Rahner’s understanding of prison chaplaincy sets the context for our theological examination in Chapters Three and Four.

CHAPTER THREE

RAHNER'S LIMITATIONS – RESPONSES AND CHALLENGES

Introduction

Karl Rahner's anthropology in Chapter One and "The Prison Pastorate" (*Gefängnisseelsorge*)¹ in Chapter Two, have exposed some limitations in his work. Accordingly, a central part of the argument in the present chapter is that significant pastoral aspects of prison ministry have been disregarded by Rahner. "The Prison Pastorate" does not take the existing challenges, suffering and world-view of prisoners into account. Moreover, Rahner's Christian focus and rather priest-centred approach lack the kind of creativity, encounter and resources for group work and community building which is needed in the secular prison populations of today.² Accordingly, this chapter will develop this point by looking at the written accounts of some ministers working in the field in order to respond to the issues that could be identified as possible concerns in "The Prison Pastorate." In addition, the study of Rahner's texts has provoked two further questions:

- (i) Can Rahner's claims built upon Matthew 25 be developed to remain sufficiently significant when we realise how grave the situation is in today's institutions of incarceration, within their cultural, political and social-economical contexts?³

¹ See Rahner's works: *MG*, 3. *SW*, 16. *SG*.

² In his dissertation *Seelsorge im Strafvollzug* ("Pastoral Care in Prison"), Alexander Funsch sheds light on the present challenges and on the goals and specific activities of pastoral care in German prisons today, as well as describing the relationship between the pastoral workers, the prisoners and the staff. He particular deals with an area in the prison context that has so far been neglected in science and research: the development process of prison pastoral care within the context of prison law up to the current legal situation. In addition, he deals with the understanding of the purpose of punishment (*dem Strafzweckverständnis*) in the Catholic, Evangelical Churches and the pastorate as well as with their views on the goals of the prison system in Germany. Alexander Funsch, *Seelsorge im Strafvollzug: Eine dogmatisch-empirische Untersuchung zu den rechtlichen Grundlagen und der praktischen Tätigkeit der Gefängnisseelsorge* (Schriften zur Kriminologie, 5) (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2015). For current trends in dealing with crimes and offenders see also Heinz Müller-Dietz, "Aktuelle Trends im Umgang mit Straftaten und Straftätern," in: Lydia Gassner-Halbhuber, Werner Nickolai, Cornelius Wichmann (eds.), *Achten statt ächten in Straffälligenhilfe und Kriminalpolitik* (Freiburg: Lambertus, 2010), 45-73.

³ See the research of Julia Martínez-Ariño and Anne-Laure Zwillig (eds.), *Religion and Prison: An Overview of Contemporary Europe: A Contemporary Overview*, Boundaries of Religious Freedom: Regulating Religion in Diverse Societies, Volume 7 (Cham: Springer Nature, 2020). See also Andrew Coyle et al., *Imprisonment Worldwide: The Current Situation and An Alternative Future* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2016). Coretta Phillips, *The Multicultural Prison: Ethnicity, Masculinity, and Social Relations among Prisoners* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012). Phillips'

- (ii) Can Rahner's thought be expanded to really make sense in actual pastoral meetings with male and female prisoners with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds?⁴

By the end of Chapter Three, the study will have examined a broad range of implementation and/or pastoral type problems that illustrate the limitations of the approach developed by Rahner in "The Prison Pastorate" as outlined in Chapter Two. To respond to these practical pastoral issues and to the perceived shortcomings of Rahner's approach from the point of view of pastoral action, we have chosen as dialogue partners, the Swiss prison chaplain and professor, Tobias Brandner; the German emeritus chaplain of the JVA Tegel in Berlin, Rainer Dabrowski; and the Austrian prison Chaplain Dr. Christine Hubka who has ministered to prisoners in der Justizanstalt Wien-Josefstadt.

Their pastoral experiences and theological insights will be used as a response to the suggested limitations in Rahner, and exemplify what prison ministry today, within the German-speaking context,⁵ seeks to do, to give and to share. After having presented the viewpoints of these

study in particular considers "how multiple identities configure social interactions among prisoners in late modern prisoner society, whilst also recognising the significance of religion, age, masculinity, national, and local identifications."

⁴ For a contemporary study on "the current state of institutional corrections around the world, on issues facing both inmates and prison staff, and on how those issues may impede or facilitate the various goals of incarceration," see John D. Wooldredge and Paula Smith (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Prisons and Imprisonment*, Oxford handbooks in criminology and criminal justice (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018). Cf. Yvonne Jewkes and Helen Johnston, *Prison Readings* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006).

⁵ Note: We are aware that there is a vast amount of American and English literature on prison ministry published; we concentrate in this study, however, chiefly on the German-speaking context (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland) where Rahner's "The Prison Pastorate" was addressed. For a bibliography of the German prison pastorate we will use Peter Rassow's *Bibliographie Gefängnisseelsorge: Studien und Materialien zum Straf- und Maßregelvollzug* (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus, 1998) [The abbreviation that is used: "BG"] and Simeon Reininger's *Bibliographie Gefängnisseelsorge 1996-2019* (Lingen/Sögel: *Katholische Gefängnisseelsorge in Deutschland e.V.*, 2019). I am deeply grateful for the initiative of Dr. Simeon Reininger, Michael King and other colleagues of the German Catholic Prison Ministry Foundation to expand Rassow's 'Bibliography' with another more contemporary systematics (*Systematik*). For more recent American literature on the prison pastorate see: Nancy Hastings Sehested, *Marked for Life: A Prison Chaplain's Story* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019) [Hastings served as a state prison chaplain for thirteen years in two high-security prisons for men in North Carolina]; Larry Harvey and Hilary Field, *From Menace to Miracle: The True Story of How a Prisoner Became a Prison Chaplain* (Independently published, 2018); Aaron W. Mobley, *Fear No Evil: A Guide for Prison Chaplaincy* (Independently published, 2017); Whit Woodard, *Ministry of Presence* (North Fort Myers, FL: Faithful Life Publishers, 2011); Stephen B. Roberts (ed.), *Professional Spiritual & Pastoral Care: A Practical Clergy and Chaplain's Handbook* (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths, 2011); Henry G. Covert, *Ministry to the Incarcerated* (Independently published, 2014 [first published: Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 1995]); Larry Nielsen, *Thinking About Jail and Prison Ministry; a Guide for the Lay Volunteer* (Florida, FL: FBC Publications, 2005); Dennis W. Pierce, *Prison Ministry: Hope behind the Wall* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013 [2006]); Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace: Reflections of a Prison Chaplain* (Victoria, BC: Friesen Press, 2011); Robert C. Dykstra, *Images of Pastoral Care* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005); Mary Brown, *Confessions of a Prison Chaplain* (Hampshire: Waterside Press, 2014); Richard D. Shaw, *Chaplains to the Imprisoned:*

professionals, we will come back to examine our two basic questions already mentioned which underlie this chapter. The chapter itself is divided into three sections:

- (i) Where Rahner's Anthropology and "The Prison Pastorate" fall short
- (ii) Response to Rahner's Limitations
- (iii) Two Further Questions

Lastly, the aim of the chapter is to clarify the questions which arise concerning the prison pastorate and the challenges of chaplaincy today and to make them more concrete.⁶

3.1. Where Rahner's Anthropology and "The Prison Pastorate" fall short

Karl Rahner's anthropology in "The Prison Pastorate" provides a reflective introduction to the theology and the complexity of prison ministry. It is in many ways the perfect place to start in understanding Catholic social thought on pastoral service in penitentiaries. Rahner makes use of a distinctive form of argument and mode of inquiry with an exchange of questions and answers based on the Scriptures. In regard to the limitations or 'negatives' of "The Prison Pastorate" that we will discuss in this chapter, it is very important to remember what Rahner's theology has to offer and to identify 'the positives' as well. The critique can be described and divided into six missing ingredients, primarily resulting from the nature of his intervention and lecture and his worldview as well as that of the audience at the time. Rahner's aim and *Zielgruppe* ("intended audience and readership") in the late 1950s was a different one. Moreover, it is clear that his goal was not to present a coherent theology of prison ministry. So giving a balanced and insightful critique can help us to define a more contemporary theology of prison ministry in Chapter Five.

We discovered in Chapter Two, through reading and thinking critically about Rahner's anthropology in "The Prison Pastorate," that his approach is somewhat abstract for a present-day theology of

Sharing Life with the Incarcerated (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016 [1955]); Paul Gill, *Opening the Doors: A Prison Chaplain's Life on the Inside* (Hampshire: Waterside Press, 2018); Rosie Deedes, *Into the Depths: A Chaplain's Reflections on Death, Dying and Pastoral Care* (Durnham: Sacristy Press, 2019).

⁶ For a critical exploration of "the theories, policies and practices of imprisonment" and the challenges in prison today, see David Scott (ed.), *Why Prison?*, Cambridge Studies in Law and Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015 [2013]). The study analyses "why prison persists and why prisoner populations are rapidly rising in many countries."

prison ministry.⁷ Considering the fact that a chaplain's role is to encounter human beings in prison, the first question one may have is: why has Rahner in his address to prison pastors, neither incorporated the perspectives of the prisoners, nor the meetings between individuals in prisons? Especially, as his Collected Works have *anthropos*, "human kind," in mind as their main object of theological study. The second question is: since Rahner threw light on the exploration of the divine-human relationship by human beings in history, in all their complexity, (describing that exploration in such universal terms that it included even the 'anonymous Christian'), how is it that he left out the role of lay people and the future possibility of their engagement as church employees and chaplains in prisons – the nonordained men and women, who are indispensable today and who play a bigger role in prisons than he could have given them credit for?⁸

We also learned something more in Chapter Two. We learned how Rahner's theological ideas, distinctions, standpoints, assumptions, and arguments about prison ministry can be identified as valuable and yet limited in the prison context of the twenty-first century. The first part of this third chapter, therefore, plunges straight in by proposing six limitations, where Rahner's anthropology in "The Prison Pastorate" falls short. These include the different starting places, perspectives, and Catholic characteristics of pastoral approaches to prison ministry. In trying to understand Rahner and respond to the suggested limitations that we have identified, the section that follows will include the actual accounts of chaplains working in the field. All carry forward our thesis and our inquiry towards a theology of prison ministry.

3.1.1. *Limitation One: Rahner's Starting Point: How a Pastor Finds God*

Rahner takes as his starting point the chaplain's search for God and places it at the centre of his prison reflections. To take this chaplain-centred perspective from the outset challenges the very meaning of 'pastorate,' that is, in terms of an experience of "being-there-for-others" (*für-andere-*

⁷ The actual amount and range of Rahner's overall work, as indicated in the previous chapters, is theoretical, immense and theologically dense. Professor Philip Endean, who works part-time in prison chaplaincy, pointed out "in terms of what Chesterton once said about Christianity: 'It is not that Rahner's theology has been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and therefore not really tried.'" As we attempt to proceed in our reflections, we must, like Endean, not shy away from the possible complications associated with Rahnerian theological anthropology in custodial settings. Philip Endean, "Has Rahnerian Theology a Future?," in: Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 282.

⁸ For an informative background account of "the growth and development of the prison in Western society, from classical times to the present day," see Norval Morris and David J. Rothman (eds.), *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998).

dasein).⁹ One could argue that his theory lacks a convincing account of and a sensitivity to the concrete needs of human beings behind bars: prisoners are cracked, barred and forgotten (cf. Dabrowski), and desperately in need of redemption. Instead, he carefully outlines how a pastor is able to find God (*in diesem seinem Amt selbst seinen Gott findet*). More specifically, his focus is on how priests as prison chaplains, can find their Maker. Rahner states,

You, who are prison chaplains, have come together here for an *hour's meditation as priests*. The meaning of such an hour can precisely *not* be to think out how the charge laid upon you is to be made *fruitful and beneficial for those entrusted to your care*, but must be directed to considering *how such a pastor with such a charge is himself to find God*.¹⁰

The passage shows that Rahner is focused on finding God. However, he emphasises the *vertical dimension* whereas the *horizontal dimension* in the “hour’s meditation as priests” remains unreflective. Rahner’s theory neither refers to actual chaplaincy experiences, nor does he analyse the internal settings of the justice system.¹¹ The intercorrelation of the two, however, may be important, as the chaplains in the next section will show. The reality of being imprisoned and the consequences of this confinement for both prisoners and chaplains alike are not to be underrated.

Having defined a first limitation, we must keep in mind that it is also the case that Rahner seeks to help the pastors find God *so that* they will see “Christ” in the person of the prisoner and be more able

⁹ In Tegel prison in Berlin under Nazi occupation, Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s “being-there-for-others” (*für-andere-dasein*), for instance, was made possible by his “inner attitude,” and by the fact that he lived “being-there-for-others” in his own life. On August 14, 1944, Bonhoeffer wrote to Bethge that there is “hardly anything that can make one feel happier than to sense that one can be something for other people.” For Bonhoeffer see also Meins G.S. Coetsier, *The Existential Philosophy of Ety Hillesum: An Analysis of her Diaries and Letters*, 544, n. 309 [LPP, 386. DBWE 8:509. DBW 8:567: Es gibt aber kaum ein beglückenderes Gefühl als zu spüren, daß man für andere Menschen etwas sein kann. Cf. NL, A 81,205; handwritten; no date (1944).]

¹⁰ *MG*, 3: 74 [*italics* my emphasis]. *SW*, 16: 214. *SG*, 447: Wenn Sie als Seelsorger in Strafanstalten zu einer priesterlichen Besinnungsstunde zusammenkommen, dann kann der Sinn dieser Stunde gerade nicht darin bestehen, daß in ihr bedacht wird, wie dieses Amt für die fruchtbar und segensreich wird, die Ihrer Sorge anvertraut sind, sondern es muß diese Besinnung daraufhin gehen, wie dieser Seelsorger in diesem seinem Amt selbst seinen Gott findet.

¹¹ The psychologist Andreas Alter, for example, argues that the institutional ‘climate’ of a prison (*Das Anstaltsklima*) has several significant components that interact with each other: (i) the climate (*Das Klima*) among the staff; (ii) the climate within a group of prisoners and (iii); the interaction climate (*Das Interaktionsklima*) of both groups with each other (experience and behaviour). Andreas Alter, “Sicher ist sicher – fehlt da noch etwas? Soziale Sicherheit und Anstaltsklima,” *Forum Strafvollzug* 67, Number 2 (2018): 101-107, esp. 103. Cf. Frieder Dünkel and Kirstin Drenkhahn, “Strafvollzugskonzepte: Aktuelle Entwicklungen zwischen Reform und Gegenreform,” *Neue Kriminal-politik* 13 (2001), 16-21. Gordon J. Hawkins, *The Prison: Policy and Practice, Studies in Crime and Justice* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

to keep acting in love towards him/her. His meditations towards the end, one could claim, seem to be very much aimed at feeling *empathy* with the prisoners. It is a valid position to say that it is only insofar as one is able to find God oneself that one is able to love others; it is also possible to take the contrary position and say that it is by loving or “being-there-for” others that one finds God. Both are true because the great commandments of “loving God” and “loving our neighbour” are inextricably linked. Nonetheless, our observations are true and Rahner’s position is still open to critique, as the thesis argues, because it tends to be the perspective of priests and religious rather than lay people and also because he does in fact omit entirely any reference to the concrete reality of circumstances faced by both pastors and prisoners behind bars. That part of the critique is powerful and will be developed in the next sections of ‘limitation.’

3.1.2. *Limitation Two: Rahner’s Main Argument – Matthew 25*

Rahner was asked to give a paper to priests working in prisons. His goal was to give a meditative and empowering account to those who minister. He did not set out to develop a modern theology of prison ministry but grounded his message on Matthew 25: 34-40 – which primarily refers to hospitality and care. As a result, his paper has the spiritual quality of an ‘Ignatian spiritual exercise’: a well thought through meditative outline for prison pastors. Due to this particular focus, however, “The Prison Pastorate” is limited for our purposes today.¹² One could suggest, for instance, that Rahner’s paper on prison ministry omits such painful experiences of prisoners as isolation panic, self-victimisation, denial, retaliation and alienation. The human breakdown and the subsequent needs of the subculture of incarcerated men and women in prison environments are not addressed. Chaplaincy to the incarcerated may all be about finding Christ, as Rahner argues. It is about carrying

¹² See Shibi Kattikulakattu, “Theological Foundations of the Ministry of the Church in Prison Based on Two Imageries of the Church in *Lumen Gentium*: ‘the People of God’ and ‘the Body of Christ,’” *Reformative Explorations*, Volume 6, Issue 2, (April 2020): 51-83. Dr. Kattikulakattu argues that “[t]raditionally the Church explains her ministry based on Mt 25:36b: “I was in prison and you visited me.” *The limitation of the traditional approach is that it is motivated on one’s own reward for what one does towards prisoners. However, this ecclesiological approach, which is based on the images of the people of God and the body of Christ, considers all people as members of the people of God and the organs of the body of Christ. It is more Christian and agapeic, because one’s engagement in this ministry is more of “other-centered” than of “self-centered.” This agapeic love of the ministers considers prisoners as God’s own people and organs of Christ like them. Ministering prisoners nurtures this consciousness in prisoners and help them to enjoy the freedom of the Children of God and the members of the body of Christ”* (p. 75). He also admits: “Though I do not claim that this is the best way to explain the ministry of the Church in prison, I argue that it has something unique to contribute to the prison theology. I do not dare to present a pedagogy for the prison ministry in this essay but just limit to the ecclesiological foundation of the Church’s concern for the prisoners” (p. 52).

out Church services and visiting prisoners in their cells but it is also much more than that. In “The Prison Pastorate,” however, the words of Christ in Matthew 25: 34-40 stand above everything else:

“Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for ... *I was in prison, and you came to see me.*’ [...] ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’”¹³

He is convinced that these words of Matthew 25 in themselves are enough to undertake this ministry¹⁴: “They [Christ’s words] apply to you without any kind of translation.”¹⁵ Rahner strongly believes that prison chaplains have to believe (*glauben*), to trust (*vertrauen*), and to accept these words in all humility (*ehrfürchtige Demut*) without interpretation and to “take them as true” (*wahr sein lassen*).¹⁶ Prison chaplains, he considers, have one mission: to seek closeness with God through serving their neighbour. Without this seeking and finding, he argues, a prison pastor won’t be truthful. This is true and yet Christ’s words need a “kind of translation”: a theology of prison ministry *must* be applied directly to our neighbour and to the prisoners’ coping structures with the pain and stress of imprisonment. We have to get to know them in order to serve them well and faithfully.

The difficulty with Matthew 25 is that Rahner does not really differentiate: Jesus spoke about neighbourly love and about ordinary human visits [in the world of 1st century Judaism], and not about carrying out a profession in maximum-security prisons [created by a complex 21st century society].¹⁷ One could argue that the real focus of Christ’s message in this passage is on engaging in a

¹³ *MG*, 3: 77 [*italics* my emphasis]. *SW*, 16: 215. *SG*, 449: Und nun lesen wir das Wort Christi, das unglaubliche, aufreizende, abenteuerliche Wort: Kommt, ihr Gesegneten meines Vaters, nehmt das Reich in Besitz, das euch seit Anbeginn der Welt bereitet ist ... *denn im Gefängnis war ich und ihr seid zu mir gekommen* ... Da werden die Gerechten fragen: Herr, wann haben wir Dich im Gefängnis gesehen und sind zu Dir gekommen? Der König wird ihnen zur Antwort geben: “Wahrlich, ich sage euch: was ihr auch nur einem von meinen geringsten Brüdern getan habt, das habt ihr mir getan” (Mt 25: 34-40).

¹⁴ For various German dioceses, the passage of Mt 25 is the guiding principle (*Leitmotiv*) for pastoral ministry in prisons. Cf. Bistum Essen, Bischöfliches Generalvikariat: „*Ich war im Gefängnis...*“ Mt 25, 36. Leitbild der Gefängnisseelsorgerinnen und -seelsorger im Bistum Essen. Essen 2005.

¹⁵ *MG*, 3: 77. *SW*, 16: 215. *SG*, 449: Es gilt Ihnen, es gilt ohne jede Übersetzung Ihnen, so, wie es damals gesprochen wurde. Es braucht nicht übersetzt, angepaßt, auf neue Verhältnisse übertragen zu werden.

¹⁶ *MG*, 3: 79, 82. *SW*, 16: 216-217, 218. *SG*, 451, 453.

¹⁷ For the tensions caused by “the pursuit of security” in prisons see Deborah H. Drake, *Prisons, Punishment and the Pursuit of Security*, Critical Criminological Perspectives (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Drake draws on research in “men’s long-term, maximum-security prisons,” and she examines “three interconnected problems: the tendency of the prison to obscure other social problems and conceal its own failings, the pursuit of greater levels of human security

genuine relationship with the other person rather than on the missionary objective to search for God.¹⁸ Moreover, there is no hermeneutical meaning of 'prison' or 'prisoner' in "The Prison Pastorate." Prisons as we know them today didn't exist in biblical times.¹⁹ And the prisoners who are mentioned in scriptural literature were often not guilty in terms of our modern understanding. Those who were guilty in ancient times were likely to be executed or scourged but not imprisoned.²⁰

Rahner's abstract methodology in reading Scripture in "The Prison Pastorate" appears to be somewhat fragmentary, and his position on this particular point of Matthew 25 is rather one-sided. The thesis, therefore, must seek to identify which significant pastoral areas of prison ministry Rahner may have disregarded and/or overlooked. With the chaplains in the field, then, we will search for a more robust and constructive theological answer "outside Matthew 25."²¹

3.1.3. *Limitation three: Rahner neglects the Worldview (Weltanschauung) of the Prisoners*

"The Prison Pastorate," one may argue, portrays the incarcerated obscurely because of the way it ignores their biography: all the details that make up their lives; their personal histories; their upbringing, their relationships and family, their values and morals along with the findings of the police and the justice department concerning their actions have all been omitted.²² Rahner did not

through repressive and violent means and the persistence of the belief in the problem of 'evil.'"

¹⁸ See Hubka below in Section 3.2.3.1. *Critique – Rahner's lack of Human Encounter*.

¹⁹ In Acts, however, several forms of "prison(s)" are mentioned, and the Romans apparently imprisoned debtors. Cf. Ac 8:3; 9:2; 9:21; 12:1; 12:4; 12:5; 12:9; 12:17; 16:16; 16:23; 16:25; 16:26; 16:27; 16:37; 16:39; 16:40; 20:23; 22:4; 22:5; 23:18; 24:27; 25:14; 25:27; 26:10.

²⁰ Linda Lee Smith Barkman makes a similar argument in her online published essay "Towards a Missional Theology of Prison Ministry," 39. Retrieved: 21 January 2019 from the website of the School of Intercultural Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary: <https://agts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/38-53-Barkman-Theology-of-Prison-Ministry.pdf>

²¹ See Barkman's careful analysis of the academic literature discussing prison ministry with Matthew 25 in her study "Towards a Missional Theology of Prison Ministry," esp. p. 38. Using her own past experience – "her experiential credentials of 30 years of simultaneous incarceration and lay ministry in prison" –, Barkman focuses "outside Matthew 25" on the real need of the subculture of incarcerated women in prison. Cf. Aylwyn Walsh, *Prison Cultures: Performance, Resistance, Desire* (Portland, OR: Intellect, 2019). Walsh's study explores "how the development of a theory of resistance and desire is central to the understanding of women's incarceration." For subculture in German prisons see also Matthias Morgner, "Subkulturen im System Gefängnis," in: Matthias Geist (ed.), *Das Menschenbild im Strafrecht: Internationale Tagung in Wien [...]* (Wien/Graz: NWV Verlag, 2010), 51-60.

²² There is a danger inherent in Karl Rahner's views on the prison pastorate and that is a loss of connection with the personal lives of the prisoners, and all things relevant to their lives, their faith and culture, as well as to the concrete circumstances of their prison existence. Rahner may have taken comfort in the timeless message of Matthew 25 and the theological reflections and ideas that he produced at the time. But if, as the typical Christian convict believes, there is a heaven and a hell, and if it is true that "whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world" (Jerusalem Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 4:1 [22a]) then our theology of prison ministry must bring something more important to the prisoners than what Rahner has to offer in "The Prison Pastorate." To put it with Matthew 16:26: "For what profit is it to a man if

address the most intimate concerns of those with whose care chaplains have been entrusted: the inmates. He doesn't focus on the "how" – that is, on how the prison pastorate can be made "fruitful and beneficial" (*fruchtbar und segensreich*) for "those [prisoners] entrusted to your [the chaplain's] care."²³ The particular choice he makes here, to talk *to* priests *about* priests finding God in prison, is appropriate for his meditation at the time but rather onesided to face the challenges in prisons today. For us, prison ministry must all be about the people in whom we hope to find God: the prisoners. They come first.²⁴

Instead, Rahner prioritises the priest's search for God as the pre-eminent concern and thrust of his theological thinking together. He also adopts a rather abstract ideal of "Christ"²⁵ without referring to the actual human experiences of the convicts where this "Christ" should be found. It may not be Rahner's conscious intention but it comes across as if the human person of flesh and blood, who has a name and a story, is eclipsed by theory. He fails to incorporate the worldview (*Weltanschauung*) and suffering of the prisoners – their thoughts and feelings, their hopes and dreams, their pain and their personal faith in God. This gives today's theologians more than enough reason to re-examine the theology of prison ministry.

The limitation is obvious: Rahner's theory aims at priests who minister in prison but does not take into account real encounter (see 3.2.3. Hubka) with the pain and the misery of the inmates themselves – 'their Cross.' The pastoral relevance of his views for these encounters in prison ministry today is thus seriously in question, particularly, when when one considers that the

he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" In other words, reflections on the prison pastorate, as in Rahner's case, may be theologically interesting but profit no one if one loses connection with "those entrusted to (y)our care": the prisoners.

²³ *MG*, 3: 74. *SW*, 16: 214. *SG*, 447: [D]ann kann der Sinn dieser Stunde gerade nicht darin bestehen, daß in ihr bedacht wird, wie dieses Amt für die fruchtbar und segensreich wird, die Ihrer Sorge anvertraut sind [...]

²⁴ Cf. Michael Drescher, "Der Auftrag der katholischen Kirche im Gefängnis: 'Denkt an die Gefangenen, als wäret ihr mitgefangen,'" *Bewährungshilfe: Soziales, Strafrecht, Kriminalpolitik* 55 (2008): 18-28. Die Deutschen Bischöfe, "Denkt an die Gefangenen als wäret ihr mitgefangen" (*Hebr 13,3*). *Der Auftrag der Kirche im Gefängnis*, Die deutschen Bischöfe, 84, 2. Aufl. Bonn, 2015.

²⁵ Rahner's motivation for focusing on prison chaplains is nonetheless comprehensible: The inner world of prisoners is most likely something he himself was less familiar with. The unforeseen consequence of his approach, however, is the proposition that prisoners – human beings – could be treated by the pastor as *a means to an end*, namely to 'find God.' The Ignatian idea of "indifference" to all created things (including other human beings) may have been of influence here. "Indifference" (*ser indiferente*) is one of the key concepts in *The Spiritual Exercises* (see Exx. 23, 157, 179), "yet easily misunderstood if taken in a philosophical rather than a religious sense; one may 'feel' far from indifferent, but be prepared to wish to relinquish something out of love of God." Joseph Munitiz and Philip Endean, *Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Personal Writings* (London/New York, NY: Penguin Books, [1996] 2004), xvii, 289, 313, 318. [cf. esp. "Principle and Foundation"].

incarcerated do urgently need guidance (*Begleitung*) and human support. They need empowerment, shared meetings of hope and dialogues from heart-to-heart as they undertake problem solving and decision making in ways that may be new and deeply challenging to them. Here, truly, “deep calls to deep” (Psalm 42) as the chaplain seeks to understand their pain, their shame and humiliation,²⁶ and provide meaning by communicating reasons for hope, and a faith to live by. This is what is important in prison ministry and what needs to be prioritised. We all need confidence and a sustaining power in our weakness that tells us that we can be redeemed after all.²⁷

3.1.4. *Limitation four: Rahner lived in another Epoch*

“The Prison Pastorate” of Rahner, one could claim, suffers from various limitations simply due to the fact that he lived in another time, in another epoch. One cannot blame him for this but his theology can never fully represent prison ministry in our day. The social, cultural and religious context of the 1950s and 60s was radically different. What may have worked for Rahner and his generation of prison chaplains, would not necessarily work in the high-tech security facilities of our time. The dependency needs of prisoners are increasingly complex: the changing social and psychological needs and the alienation and disconnectedness resulting from urban sprawl, generations of dysfunction within families and over-dependence on technology for communication. Furthermore, the concerns addressed and the chaplaincy programmes offered by married chaplains and female pastors, may differ from the activities and self-understanding that ordained priests and/or religious bring into correction systems.²⁸ In the light of these historical developments, “The Prison Pastorate” can be considered a significant missionary document of its time. Its theological message has bearing

²⁶ For “shame” see Robert H. Albers, *Shame: A Faith Perspective* (New York, NY: The Haworth Press, 1993). Albers incorporates theological reflection upon the human experiences of humiliation, disgrace, guilt and shame. The value of addressing these issues in prison is by “naming” its phenomenon and talking about it seriously. Prison chaplains can speak about this human experience with the inmates, either in group meetings or in more private one to one conversations in the hope to identify the resources for dealing effectively with this experience. The prison pastorate may suggest for ways in which shame might eventually be dismantled from the perspective of faith.

²⁷ Linda Lee Smith Barkman makes a similar point in her reflections. Cf. “Towards a Missional Theology of Prison Ministry,” 38-51.

²⁸ Married chaplains and female pastors may arguably think faster out of the ‘Catholic-religious-box.’ With a “Prison Dog Program,” for instance, or with other creative pastoral initiatives that are not directly Church related but effective. See the study Mary Renck Jalongo (ed.), *Prison Dog Programs: Renewal and Rehabilitation in Correctional Facilities* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2019). The study *Prison Dog Programs* shows that “many correctional facilities have implemented prison dog programs that involve inmates in the care and training of canines, not only as family dogs but also as service dogs for people with psychological and/or physical disabilities.” *Human-animal interaction* (HAI) is a field of research that spans different disciplines (corrections, psychology, education, and social work) which may be of future interest to theology and prison ministry as well.

for us today yet lacks the practical resources to navigate creatively the negative world of incarceration in the 21st Century.

Cultural, political and religious settings have been changing dramatically over decades. Christianity in secular Europe is no longer the status quo.²⁹ This has an effect on ministry in the justice system: lay men and women, religious and non-religious alike from various backgrounds search for and find ways to collaborate. Muslim, Catholic and Protestant ministers must all work together in collegial cooperation within the prison structures.³⁰ Consequently, their daily tasks and experiences of prison ministry diverge significantly from the content of “The Prison Pastorate.” Religious apathy, atheism, fundamentalism and extremism among the incarcerated are not new to these ministers. Due to the radical changes within today’s societies, their pathway behind walls is strikingly different from Rahner’s original starting point as we will see further on in this Chapter.

3.1.5. *Limitation five: Rahner’s Pastorate is limited to Word, Sacraments, and Grace*

Prison chaplaincy does not end with the inner religious life of the Catholic priest, as Rahner suggests but includes the mindset of the lay chaplain and the prisoner as well. The role of ministry in “The

²⁹ For pastoral care in a secular context cf. Sarah J. Jahn, “Säkularisierte Gefängnisseelsorge. Seelsorgearbeit in einer religionspluralen Gesellschaft,” *AndersOrt* 2 (2018): 26-29; “Religiöses Feld im rechtlichen Raum: Religion im Strafvollzug,” in: Peter Antes, et al. (eds.), *Konflikt. Integration. Religion: Religionswissenschaftliche Perspektiven* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 121-137. Cf. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 13. Charles Taylor in *Sources of the Self* refers to the emphasis that secular cultures place on avoiding suffering, and so, one could argue, ignoring Christianity’s understanding of ‘the Cross.’ Taylor writes: “[W]e don’t see any point in ritually undoing the terrible crime in an equally terrible punishment. The whole notion of a cosmic moral order, which gave this restoral its sense, has faded for us. The stress on relieving suffering has grown with the decline of this kind of belief. It is what is left over [...] after we no longer see human beings as playing a role in a larger cosmic order or divine history.”

³⁰ In Germany there is an official contract between the Church and the State. Consequently, the Protestant and Catholic ministers have privileges within the prison system that other religious pastors don’t have. The reason for this goes back to the system and/or internal organisation of each religion. Moreover, since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, interest in Islam and the way of life of Muslims has increased significantly. In addition, the steadily increasing number of Muslims in Germany and a growing religiousness among them result in an increase in everyday religious conflicts that have to be resolved legally. In the study *Muslimen im Strafvollzug*, Vigor Fröhmcke deals with the legal status of Muslim prisoners. There are many tensions in the penal system between the fundamental right of religious freedom and the interests of the penal system, e.g., in prison catering, in the question of admitting Muslim clergymen to pastoral care, or in merging Muslim prisoners with prisoners of other faiths. For this and other related themes see Vigor Fröhmcke, *Muslimen im Strafvollzug: Die Rechtsstellung von Strafgefangenen muslimischer Religionszugehörigkeit in Deutschland* (Schriften zur Rechtswissenschaft, 41) (Berlin: wvb Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Berlin, 2005). Cf. Sarah J. Jahn, “Gilt der Gleichheitsgrundsatz (Art. 3 Abs. 3 GG) auch für muslimische Inhaftierte?” *Religion-Staat-Gesellschaft* 2 (2011): 425-436.

Prison Pastorate” is reduced to the task of “mediat[ing] to men, in his word, his sacraments, and his grace.”³¹ Leaving aside the glaring use of what would be called today non-inclusive language, it is clear that in today’s context of secularism and interreligious dialogue, other effective pastoral ways are needed to mediate the gift and the experience of God in prison.³² Chaplaincy in European institutions of incarceration cannot be limited to a Catholic theology of word, sacraments, and grace.³³ Something much broader, more spiritual and human is required to face the emotional pain, loneliness, depression and anger experienced by prisoners in the various stages of incarceration.³⁴

Prison ministry is not, as Rahner suggests, only looking after “Christ” in individual prisoners. Chaplaincy service includes all those who work in prison: the guards, the psychological- and pedagogical-, as well as medical staff, and so on. Even those outside the gates are invited to encounter the prison chaplain, to participate in the shared human experience of searching for and finding God.³⁵ Building these bridges of human connection in the midst of people who feel utterly alone and rejected is vital. Furthermore, it is important – in contrast to Rahner’s claim – to notice how chaplaincy activities concretely affect the inmates, the prison environment and the justice system.³⁶

³¹ *MG*, 3: 74. *SW*, 16: 214. *SG*, 447: [...] in seinem Wort, in seinen Sakramenten und seiner Gnade den Menschen vermitteln sollen [...]

³² Prison chaplain Michael King, webmaster of the official online portal of the German Catholic Prison Ministry Foundation (*Katholische Gefängnisseelsorge in Deutschland e.V.*), is reporting on a daily basis about the various ways Catholic pastors try to creatively reach out in their prison ministry. See: <https://gefaengnisseelsorge.net/>

³³ For the “role of prisons in Europe” see Tom Vander Beken, *The Role of Prison in Europe: Travelling in the Footsteps of John Howard*, Palgrave Studies in Prisons and Penology (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). Vander Beken’s creative study discusses “the role of the prison in Europe across a divide of over 200 years.” He is inspired by “the travels of the prison reformer John Howard (1726-1790), who visited prisons across Europe in the eighteenth century.” Vander Beken reflects on “centuries of the practice of locking people up as punishment,” and is inspired by Howard’s travels across Europe to visit prison institutions, with a simple method: “he travelled and knocked on prison doors on his journey and entered the premises. He then observed the situation in the prison, took notes and left to visit other locations.” Adopting the contemporary methods of “prison tourism research,” Vander Beken follows in Howard’s footsteps, drawing on extensive research conducted in prisons across six countries: England, Norway, the Netherlands, France, Italy and Azerbaijan. Cf. John Howard, *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales: With Preliminary Observations and an Account of Some Foreign Prisons* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

³⁴ See Chapter Four, Section 4.2. *Three Mental Stages* in this thesis.

³⁵ See Marie-Pierre Lassus et al., *Le Jeu d’Orchestre: Recherche-Action en Art dans les Lieux de Privation de Liberté* (Villeneuve d’Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2015). This French study argues that for ordinary citizen, “prison” remains a “gray area which marks a dividing line between two worlds and between two kinds of people: those inside and those outside.” The authors searched for ways, “to bring” these two worlds together and build a common space,” a “space” with the separated world behind bars which is also “a place of life.” They found an answer in “music as a medium,” that is, as an “individual and collective source,” and invited people to actively participate in an orchestra. This connects prisoners and gives them a feeling that they belong.

³⁶ This commitment as chaplain goes as far as to become acquainted with criminal theories (*Straftheorien*), for instance, which deal with the question of how criminal punishment can be justified. In her work *Straftheorien* (Tübingen: Mohr

In “The Prison Pastorate,” Rahner does not mention any creative and/or interdisciplinary group work with the prisoners to endorse positive values, goals and hopes. He seems not to have been aware of the possibility of experiencing “Christ” through chaplaincy and community programmes which often reduce the ongoing tensions and animosity (*öffentliches Spannungsfeld*) within the daily grind of incarcerated life.³⁷ Then, there is the central role of literature, music, film or theatre,³⁸ bible-groups or sport, as possible occasions of ‘consolation’ to *be* human behind barbed wire.³⁹ These “sacraments of the present moment”⁴⁰ are equally graced instances of divine providence. The experience of God can be found too in human *togetherness* and *dialogical consciousness*,⁴¹ as we will see in the pastoral perspectives of contemporary chaplains in the field.

Siebeck, 2011), Tatjana Hörnle explores expressive theories of punishment and the legitimacy of criminal punishment. It is this kind of dilemma that prison chaplains are often confronted with in practice: the inmate who complains that his sentence is not justified, and/or too long or is out of proportion compared to another prisoner’s verdict. Prison pastors may want to help prisoners to form a more objective perspective, although this is generally very difficult, or, at least, it can result in questions of difficulty. Cf. Ulrich H.J. Körtner, “Muß Strafe sein? Menschenbild und Strafrecht aus theologischer Sicht,” *Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik* 54, Heft 2 (2013): 105-120; “Muß Strafe sein? Menschenbild und Strafrecht aus theologischer Sicht,” in: Matthias Geist (ed.), *Das Menschenbild im Strafrecht: Internationale Tagung in Wien* [...], 10-36 (Wien/Graz: NWV, 2010); “Muß Strafe sein?” *Christ in der Gegenwart* 61, Number 50 (2009): 565f. Axel Montenbruck, *Deutsche Straftheorie. Ein Lehrbuch* (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2018).

³⁷ Gerhard Ding, “Gefängnisseelsorge Seelsorge in einem öffentlichen Spannungsfeld,” in: Wolfgang Drechsel and Sabine Kast-Streib (eds.), *Seelsorgefelder: Annäherung an die Vielgestaltigkeit von Seelsorge* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2017), 63-84. Cf. Veronika Hofinger and Thomas Schmidinger, *Endbericht zur Begleitforschung Deradikalisierung im Gefängnis* (Wien: IRKS, 2017).

³⁸ For “theatre” in prisons see Michael Balfour (ed.), *Theatre in Prison: Theory and Practice* (Portland, OR: Intellect, 2004). This collection of thirteen essays explores “the rich diversity of innovative drama works in prisons.” The study analyses and reflects on “theoretical notions and practical applications of theatre for and with the incarcerated”: That is to say, “from role-plays with street gangs in the USA to Beckett in Brixton; from opera productions with sex offenders to psychodrama with psychopaths.” For creative “dance” in prisons see also Sylvie Frigon et Claire Jenny, *Chairs incarcérées: une Exploration de la Danse en Prison* (Montréal: Les éditions du remue-ménage, 2009).

³⁹ One is reminded of the Roman senator and philosopher of the early 6th century Boethius (477-524 AD), who was imprisoned and executed. While incarcerated, Boethius composed his philosophical treatise ‘Consolation of Philosophy,’ which became one of the significant works of the Middle Ages. See Henry Chadwick, *Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990). Boethius’ treatise is “bound up with his other writings on mathematics and music, on Aristotelian and propositional logic, and on central themes of Christian dogma.”

⁴⁰ For “Abandonment to Divine Providence” or “The Sacrament of the Present Moment” cf. Jean-Pierre de Caussade, *The Sacrament of the Present Moment* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1982). First published in France as *L’Abandon à la divine providence* (Desclée de Brouwer: Paris, 1966).

⁴¹ Cf. Meins G.S. Coetsier, “‘You-Consciousness’ – Towards Political Theory: Ety Hillesum’s Experience and Symbolization of the Divine Presence,” in: *Spirituality in the Writings of Ety Hillesum: Proceedings of the Ety Hillesum Conference at Ghent University, November 2008*, Supplements to *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, 11, eds. Klaas A.D. Smelik, Ria van den Brandt & Meins G.S. Coetsier (Boston: Brill, 2010), 103-124. For a wider cultural context of ‘dialogical consciousness’ see the works of Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Emmanuel Levinas, Mikhail Bakhtin, Tzvetan Todorov and Julia Kristeva.

3.1.6. *Limitation six: Rahner had no Personal Experience of Prison Ministry*

Because Rahner's theory has no real personal experience of prison chaplaincy to back it up, one must take this pastoral *absence* seriously. Of course, it is true that one does not have to experience prison chaplaincy, or incarceration to be able to write or think about this subject, nonetheless would it be of great value and insight when one has. The overall problem of "The Prison Pastorate" – simultaneously the main reason for writing this Thesis – is that it does not support the prisoners' sense of value and self-esteem. One cannot really hold this against Rahner, and yet, it is an invitation to make the necessary pastoral modifications in order to develop a more contemporary theology of prison ministry that does take seriously the rehabilitative efforts of the incarcerated. Practical experience and intellectual knowledge should go hand in hand. In "The Prison Pastorate," even Rahner admits this,

There is no need for me to remind you of your own experience as prison chaplains. This experience, in all its bitterness and horrible realism, *is more present to you than anything I could describe or suggest of it*: the experience of shattered human existences [...] you have often been struck with horror by the humanity you encounter there.⁴²

In this passage, Rahner describes and explains prison reality as a negative environment.⁴³ This is something of which he himself had no direct experience: "You know," he says, "all that better than I do."⁴⁴ He recognises that he is on a theological edge regarding the demanding experiences of prison chaplaincy (*Erfahrung als Strafanstaltsseelsorger*). In his reflections, however, Rahner thoughtfully communicates with the professionals in the field. In many abstract learned and profound German sentences he articulates his theological starting point: the Christological message that chaplains must find Christ, as well as themselves, in prisoners.

⁴² *MG*, 3: 76. *SW*, 16: 215. *SG*, 448-449 [*My Emphasis*]: Ich brauche Sie nicht an Ihre Erfahrung als Strafanstaltsseelsorger zu erinnern. Sie haben diese Erfahrung, die bittere, die grausig-realistische, selbst besser, als ich sie Ihnen schildern und nahe bringen könnte: die Erfahrung der gescheiterten menschlichen Existenzen [...] Menschen, so hat Sie doch schon oft ein Grausen über diese Menschheit gepackt, die Ihnen da begegnet.

⁴³ For an in-depth research on "the impacts of jail and prison environment" today see Richard E. Wener, *The Environmental Psychology of Prisons and Jails: Creating Humane Spaces in Secure Settings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014 [2012]). The study considers "the nature of environment and behavior in correctional settings and more broadly in all human settings, and presents a "contextual model for the way environment influences the chance of violence."

⁴⁴ *MG*, 3: 76. *SW*, 16: 215. *SG*, 448-449.

The conceptual gap, however, between Rahner's lack of practical experience of incarceration and his intellectual knowledge about ministry in prisons must be well-thought-out. He did not experience the alienation, humiliation, and dehumanisation processes that change people so badly nor did he ever sense the very heavy weight of this profession himself. For the greater part of their working day, for instance, chaplains have to undergo the experience of incarceration themselves and are thus working in conditions which are, in and of themselves, oppressive, and experience which can weigh heavily on the spirits of some. Moreover, the structure of today's security systems evoke the question what the pastoral and practical applicability of Rahner's theology for prison chaplains is, particularly as, nowadays, more and more people in prisons are non-religious, psychologically damaged and even antagonistic to the pastors serving them.⁴⁵

3.2. Response to Rahner's Limitations

Having carefully presented and identified six possible limitations where Rahner's thinking conceivably falls short, I will now turn to the contributions of a number of prison pastors coming from a German-speaking context. Drawing on their chaplaincy experiences and insights, I will reflect on how they can respond to Rahner and suggest possible alternatives. This material will constitute the groundwork for Chapters Four and Five, and is a direct application of the experience of actual ministry to the incarcerated within the German/European setting.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ex-prisoner and author Hubertus Becker, for instance, dissects prison as "the alien organism": the regulated and at the same time illegal network of relationships between administration, specialist services [read: chaplains], guards, prisoners, their relationship to guilt and innocence, law and enforcement law. What will become, however, Becker wonders, of perpetrators and their self-image? Under what circumstances do they become "refusers," "conformists," "pragmatists," and "rebels" who open up criminal areas that were taboo for them before they went to prison? Who can imagine "outside" what it means to have "lost control of your own life"? Hubertus Becker, *Ritual Knast: Die Niederlage des Gefängnisses – eine Bestandsaufnahme* (Leipzig: Forum Vlg Leipzig, 2008).

⁴⁶ For a further analysis on "how prisons meet challenges of religious diversity, in an era of increasing multiculturalism and globalization," see Irene Becci and Olivier Roy (eds.), *Religious Diversity in European Prisons: Challenges and Implications for Rehabilitation* (Cham: Springer, 2015). This study reveals that social scientists studying corrections have noted: "the important role that religious or spiritual practice can have on rehabilitation, particularly for inmates with coping with stress, mental health and substance abuse issues. In the past, the historical figure of the prison chaplain operated primarily in a Christian context, following primarily a Christian model. Increasingly, prison populations (inmates as well as employees) display diversity in their ethnic, cultural, religious and geographic backgrounds. As public institutions, prisons are compelled to uphold the human rights of their inmates, including religious freedom. Prisons face challenges in approaching religious plurality and secularism, and maintaining prisoners' legal rights to religious freedom." This research clearly shows that theology of prison ministry today should take into account "the challenges of religious diversity and multiculturalism in prison."

3.2.1. Tobias Brandner: Beyond the Walls of Separation

3.2.1.1. Critique – Rahner's Denial of the Cultural and Social-Political Reality of the Cross

The focus of Karl Rahner in “The Prison Pastorate” lies, as presented in Chapter Two, predominantly on the priest who finds Christ (L1).⁴⁷ He neglects the surroundings, and the contextual reality that affects the personal growth and health of prisoners (L3). Rahner does not listen carefully to the social realities and interpretations of people in their prison communities, thus not only avoiding the theological significance of the city in which the prison is built but also the architecture itself.⁴⁸ He neither addresses the cultural, historical and political context, nor does he refer to the psychological and relational dimension of prison work (L4/5).⁴⁹ The wider prison situation today, however, challenges us to go beyond these limitations of Rahner's perspective.

To illustrate this, the study examines the experiences of a minister of the Swiss Reformed Church, prison chaplain and Professor Tobias Brandner.⁵⁰ As chaplain and scholar in the field, Brandner is chosen as a contemporary dialogue partner precisely to respond to Rahner on this particular point: “The Prison Pastorate” lacks the cultural and the social-political reality of the cross (L4/5).

⁴⁷ “L” is the abbreviation used to remind us of the six limitations found in “The Prison Pastorate”: L1 (Rahner's Starting Point: How a Pastor Finds God); L2 (Rahner's Main Argument – Matthew 25); L3 (Rahner neglects the Worldview (*Weltanschauung*) of the Prisoners); L4 (Rahner lived in another Epoch); L5 (Rahner's Pastorate is limited to Word, Sacraments, and Grace); L6 (Rahner had no Personal Experience of Prison Ministry)

⁴⁸ It is relevant to our study to understand the theological significance of architecture in the life of the prisoners and in the prison pastorate. The type of building strongly determines the incarcerated and affects their psychological and spiritual wellbeing. Prison architect Andrea Seelich argues in her study *Handbuch Gefängnisarchitektur: Parameter zeitgemäßer Gefängnisplanung* that law, psychology and psychiatry have successfully developed their own forensic fields in recent years. The development of prison architecture, however, has been stagnating for over a hundred years. Many of the buildings erected at that time are still in operation today. Due to technical progress and the transition from closed custody to open forms of custody measures, it is necessary to adapt the old buildings. Despite numerous laws, there are hardly any guidelines for the construction of prisons. A major handicap in planning is, among other things, the ignorance of the architects about everyday prison life and the ignorance of the prison staff about the possibilities and the effects of the architecture. Andrea Seelich's research takes up all the necessary aspects to unite architects and planners. Andrea Seelich, *Handbuch Gefängnisarchitektur: Parameter zeitgemäßer Gefängnisplanung* (Wien/New York, NY: Springer, 2009); “Auswirkungen der Architektur auf die psychische Gesundheit der Inhaftierten,” *BAG-S Informationsdienst Straffälligenhilfe* 27, Number 1 (2019): 17-22; “Käfighaltung ist nichts für Menschen. Interview mit einer Gefängnisarchitektin. (Das Interview führte Jessica Schober),” *BAG-S Informationsdienst Straffälligenhilfe* 26, Number 1 (2018): 34-36; “Wie bekommt man die Menschenrechte in die Gefängnisarchitektur? Menschen – Rechte – Architektur – Gefängnisbau,” *Kriminalpädagogische Praxis* 40, Heft 48 (2012): 31-34.

⁴⁹ For a pastoral approach in prisons and psychotherapeutic pastoral care cf. Samuel Buser, *Psychotherapie und Seelsorge im Strafvollzug: Unterschiede und Gemeinsamkeiten*, Europäische Hochschulschriften (Frankfurt am Main et al.: Peter Lang, 2007).

⁵⁰ Tobias Brandner (* 1965 in Auenstein) is a Swiss prison chaplain in Europe and Asia, and associate Professor at the Divinity School of Chung Chi College, Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Professor Brandner has written a theological guidebook for chaplains and volunteers working in the prison context. Unlike Rahner, his theology of the prison pastorate addresses not only priests but also lay people working within the prison system. Brandner is thus in a different situation, where he is able to focus on all those who are either professionally or through family links related to those in prison.⁵¹ Although Rahner may have contributed generally to widespread growth in pastoral theology,⁵² Brandner's theological thought raises awareness of the social dimension of power and inequality, and is sensitive to the suffering and alienation that individual prisoners experience (L3). His approach works directly with the pain and suffering of the poor and oppressed.

With many years of working in prison ministry in different cultural contexts and with inmates from many and various nations, Brandner's theology has something to offer. Building on his experiences and insights in this study, we go beyond Rahner by suggesting principles of "communication," of "creativity" and "encounter," as ways to help prisoners nurture a spiritual and more meaningful life.⁵³ Having served as a prison chaplain in different countries, Brandner has gained through his experiences a deep understanding of life behind bars which was lacking for Rahner (L6).

3.2.1.2. *The Upside Down Logic of Christian faith*

Karl Rahner's starting point is the experience of Christ. What follows is the clarification of his argument that prison chaplains can "draw near to God *by* serving our neighbour."⁵⁴ In *Beyond the Walls of Separation: Christian Faith and Ministry in Prison*, Tobias Brandner also writes about "encountering Christ in prison." Brandner refers to the same scripture passage: Matthew 25.⁵⁵ Though it is not his main argument, he embraces its content and goes beyond it (L2), thinking that

⁵¹ For "prison and family" see the 2019 study of Marie Hutton and Dominique Moran (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Prison and the Family*, Palgrave Studies in Prisons and Penology (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). This handbook brings together "the international research focussing on prisoners' families and the impact of imprisonment on them." Hutton and Moran recognise "the autonomy and value of prisoners' families" as a future research subject in their own right. Something pastoral theology eventually might pick up on. Cf. Megan Comfort, *Doing Time Together: Love and Family in the Shadow of the Prison* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁵² See the study of Bridget Agnes Downing who focuses on "the pastoral character of Rahner's theology." Downing examines Rahner's contribution to pastoral theology, "showing it to be a discipline in its own right and a systematic reflection on the self-realization of the entire Church." Cf. Bridget Agnes Downing, "Karl Rahner's Pastoral Theology: A Study of its Implications for the Christian in the Modern World," Ph.D. Dissertation, Fordham University, 1986.

⁵³ Tobias Brandner, *Beyond the Walls of Separation: Christian Faith and Ministry in Prison* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 157. Henceforth, the abbreviation used will be: "BWS." The entire book contains, for whatever reason, no reference to or awareness of Karl Rahner's work.

⁵⁴ *MG*, 3: 75. *SW*, 16: 214. *SG*, 448: [M]an nähert sich Gott, indem man dem Nächsten dient [...]

⁵⁵ *BWS*: 180-183.

“God reveals himself in prison,” but also “among the poor, the sick and the refugees.”⁵⁶ In an approach somewhat different to Rahner, he speaks of a logic that helps us to understand “prisons as places of God’s revelation.”⁵⁷ For him the theology of prison ministry is contextual and a reflective practice which essentially is also a collaborative enterprise with “a horizon of hope.”⁵⁸

Brandner asks, “Why is it so? Why do we encounter Christ in them?” He traces the “radical shift,” the “upside down logic of Christian faith,” and the “inner logic to God’s choosing such a specific form of revelation.”⁵⁹ He points to the experiences of human suffering in prison, “where we stand in sheer nakedness, ... [and] we rediscover our complete dependence on a grace that gives us life, love, and strength.”⁶⁰ Speaking about the rediscovery of grace he gives, unlike Rahner, a practical example. He cites Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor and prisoner of the Nazis,⁶¹ who carefully described his experiences in his letters from prison (L3): “Life in a prison cell⁶² may well be compared to Advent; one waits, hopes, and does this, that, or the other – things that are really of no consequence – the door is shut, and can be opened only from the outside.”⁶³ Brandner continues:

What Bonhoeffer describes as waiting, as total dependence on the person opening the door

⁵⁶ BWS: 181.

⁵⁷ BWS: 181.

⁵⁸ BWS: 196-197.

⁵⁹ BWS: 181.

⁶⁰ BWS: 181.

⁶¹ The theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, both Lutheran minister and one-time prisoner, was looked after by the prison chaplain (*Gefängnispfarrer*) Harald Poelchau during his time in Berlin-Tegel prison. From 1933 to 1945, Poelchau visited the prisons of Tegel, Plötzensee and Brandenburg. He visited Bonhoeffer on a daily basis (bringing him literature etc.), and accompanied over a thousand people, including close friends and fellow combatants from his own circle of resistance, to their execution. The stories of Bonhoeffer and Poelchau, and of other pastors during the atrocities of war, testify to the importance of pastoral commitment in prisons under the most difficult of circumstances. Harald Poelchau, *Die Ordnung der Bedrängten: Erinnerungen des Gefängnisseelsorgers und Sozialpfarrers (1903-1972)* (Berlin: Hentrich und Hentrich Verlag, 2004).

⁶² For a contemporary study on “the prison cell” see Jennifer Turner and Victoria Knight (eds.), *The Prison Cell: Embodied and Everyday Spaces of Incarceration*, Palgrave Studies in Prisons and Penology (Cham: Springer Nature, 2020). Turner and Knight’s *The Prison Cell* reflects on the “conceptualisations and empirical understanding of the prison cell.” The study looks at “the complexities of this specific carceral space and addresses its significance in relation to the everyday experiences of incarceration.”

⁶³ BWS: 181 [Bonhoeffer Letter on Nov. 21, 1943]. For Dietrich Bonhoeffer see: Eberhard Bethge (ed.), *Widerstand und Ergebung: Briefe und Aufzeichnungen aus der Haft* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1951; expanded editions, 1970, 1985). Translated by Reginald H. Fuller as *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Edited by Eberhard Bethge. Translation revised by Frank Clark et al.; additional material translated by John Bowden for the enlarged edition (London: SCM, 1971; New York, NY: Macmillan, 1972; New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1997). Ruth-Alice von Bismarck and Ulrich Kabitz (eds.), *Brautbriefe Zelle 92: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Maria von Wedemeyer, 1943-1945* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1992; 5th edition, 2006). Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologe, Christ, Zeitgenosse* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2005).

from outside, is our total dependence on the grace of God to create, sustain, and redeem us. Experiencing this dependence most strongly is the privilege, albeit an involuntary one, of people in situations of suffering. Visiting them is a journey into our own basic and existential dependence.⁶⁴

In this way but also in the light of Rahner's considerations, Brandner who keeps the incarcerated in mind (L3), makes similar statements concerning faith and the mystery of the experience of God. "Faith," he writes, "is, in a basic form, the art of keeping the question open."⁶⁵ After working as a prison minister over more than twenty years, he believes it is vital to serve our neighbour with openness, and thus "to surrender to this openness."⁶⁶

The question means the questions of our being: Why are we at all? Why are we the way we are? Where do we come from? Where do we go? – The problem of Christian faith expression, in individual and corporate forms of faith, is that we are in a constant danger of appropriating *the One we refer to and of turning the mystery of our being into an answer.*⁶⁷

If chaplains want to serve Christ and experience God in prison,⁶⁸ they must be careful not to turn "the mystery of our being into an answer," which is the danger with Rahner's reading of Matthew 25 (L2). "The Prison Pastorate" is at risk of turning the mystery of faith into a single concept that says that we can only find "Christ" in prisons by "visiting" the inmates. Brandner writes that the prison experience includes this important dimension but at the same time is more complex than Rahner seems to suggest. Prisoners, and indirectly their ministers, have to cope with "one of the most serious crisis experiences one can imagine, causing high levels of stress and disruption to life."⁶⁹ Life in incarceration strips away humanity. The person one encounters behind the walls of separation is repeatedly and utterly in distress (L3/6). This suffering is socially, psychologically, as well as politically prejudiced (L4/5). "The Prison Pastorate" neglects the critical social-political or psychological reflections of a dehumanising system that "tries to maintain social cohesion and order

⁶⁴ BWS: 181.

⁶⁵ Retrieved: 1 May 2018. Brandner's website: www.theology.cuhk.edu.hk/en/academics/teaching-staff/tobias-brandner

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid. [*Italics my emphasis*]

⁶⁸ Cf. Edwin Erhard, *Mit Gott durchs Jahr und durchs Gefängnis*, Knastpredigten 2 (Aschaffenburg: Verlagsatelier Michael Pfeifer, 2009). Christine Drexler, "Im Gefängnis befreiend von Gott sprechen? Merkmale und Mechanismen eines disziplinären Systems als theologische Herausforderung" (Dissertation, Kath.-Theol. Privatuniv. Linz, 2006). [Christine Drexler is prison minister (*Gefängnisseelsorgerin*) in Linz und Garsten.]

⁶⁹ BWS: ix, 69.

by sacrificing some individuals for the common good, as much political propaganda does.”⁷⁰

In light of Brandner's *Beyond the Walls of Separation*, one could critique Rahner's thoughts in “The Prison Pastorate,” for neither taking into account the social-political context, nor expanding upon the “doctrine of humanity's creation in the image of God” in a more pastoral and psychologically concrete way (L4/5), which in Brandner's words, would be “mindful of penal elements that unnecessarily aggravate the suffering of imprisonment and that undermine the dignity of those in prison.”⁷¹

As already mentioned earlier in this Chapter, Rahner's aim and target audience (*Zielgruppe*) in the late 1950s was a different one, nonetheless, a practical theology of prison ministry must address, as Brandner shows, the wider cultural and the social-political reality that affects people in security environments. The Gospel message and prison chaplaincy is “based on the faith that men and women are created in Gods image.” Accordingly, Brandner affirms the following principles that could respond to some of Rahner's limitations (L3/4/5):

- (a) Remember that each person in prison equally shares in the joys and wounds, in the hopes and disappointments, in the excitements and frustrations of all humankind.
- (b) Broaden the scope of prison ministry to include awareness of where the penal system threatens inmates' dignity.⁷²

Brandner drew from “the work of the social sciences, theology, and the tradition of pastoral care in the church.”⁷³ As a prison chaplain, he learned from his own experiences and came to the conclusion that we use scripture and the word “God” too lightly especially in the custodial context (L2), “as if we knew what it stands for”:

From a word that stands for the big question, *it is turned into an answer that fills in the gaps of our understanding and knowledge*. Instead of being a community that celebrates the open questions, Christianity presents itself as the community that gives answers. Against *this*

⁷⁰ BWS: 190.

⁷¹ BWS: 190.

⁷² BWS: 190.

⁷³ BWS: ix.

tendency of appropriating God, theology leads Christian faith back to its mysterious origin.⁷⁴

Brandner tries to understand theologically the divine-human experience behind bars. He wants to comprehend the movement of the various “appropriations of the mystery” that is – God. Meditating on “love” as “transforming and transcending,”⁷⁵ he focuses on, “Jesus’s criticism of legalistic interpretations of the Torah and his interpretation of God’s commandment that dissolves the boundaries of law towards love.”⁷⁶ Going beyond Rahner’s literal reading of Matthew 25 (L2), Brandner points to “a movement of love” in John’s Gospel. This enables the prison chaplain, by following Jesus, to reject “the logic of condemnation for the logic of forgiveness,”⁷⁷ as in the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:2-11).⁷⁸ He argues,

This same movement continues in the ministry of the resurrected Christ when, after his resurrection, he first appears to his disciples by passing through the door they had locked in anxiety (John 20:19). Ever since then, Christian love has continued to break through human divisions and segregation. Today’s prison ministry extends this movement as it continues to pass through closed doors and beyond walls of separation – the visible walls of stone, the invisible walls of social exclusion, and the emotional walls of shame and self-imposed isolation.⁷⁹

The apparent lack of Rahner’s sensitivity to the pain and suffering of the incarcerated, (which Brandner describes as, “emotional walls of shame and self-imposed isolation”) is one of the problems facing “The Prison Pastorate.”⁸⁰ Brandner’s views on prison ministry help us to respond to Rahner with a pastoral theology that resonates more with the physical and mental experience of this demanding ministry (L6): Firstly, he encourages prison chaplains to accept their own vulnerability “when reaching out in love.” Secondly, Brandner points to the ability to forgive a criminal which “is

⁷⁴ Retrieved: 1 May 2018. Brandner’s website: www.theology.cuhk.edu.hk/en/academics/teaching-staff/tobias-brandner [*italics my emphasis*].

⁷⁵ *BWS*: 186-188.

⁷⁶ *BWS*: 188.

⁷⁷ Cf. Jussuf Windischer, “Im Gefängnis von Vergebung sprechen? Erfahrungen eines Gefängnisseelsorgers,” *Lebendige Seelsorge: Vergebung* 66, Number 3 (2015): 200-204.

⁷⁸ *BWS*: 188.

⁷⁹ *BWS*: 188.

⁸⁰ From “shame” (*Scham und Beschämung*) to recognition and human dignity cf. Stephan Marks, “Von Scham und Beschämung zu Anerkennung und Menschenwürde,” in: Lydia Gassner-Halbhuber, Werner Nickolai, and Cornelius Wichmann (eds.), *Achten statt ächten in Straffälligenhilfe und Kriminalpolitik* (Freiburg: Lambertus, 2010), 183-198.

not a sign of weakness but of strength.” Thirdly, he shows that there is significance in detecting “where walls of separation hinder the flow of God’s love.”⁸¹ Finally, he argues that the people we encounter in prison are *Other*: humans who are at the crisis points of their life. Brandner suggests ways to help the incarcerated nurture spiritual life with sensitivity to the suffering and alienation that individual prisoners experience.

3.2.1.3. *In Prisoners, We See Christ; in Christ, We See God.*

Prisoners for Brandner are the “lens through which to see God: *In them, we see Christ; in Christ, we see God.*”⁸² They are different from what we originally think of them. Similar to Rahner’s account of Matthew 25, he finds Christ in the prisoners. Through his experiences, however, Brandner arguably dives deeper existentially by arguing for a shift in cultural and social-political perception (L4/5),⁸³ for a letting go of our bias toward those in prison.⁸⁴ He uses different scriptural references to Rahner and says that “God’s shift in seeing us invites us equally to see people not in the shadow of their past crime(s) but in the light of their new life.”⁸⁵ Prison chaplains must learn “to refrain from seeing

⁸¹ *BWS*: 188.

⁸² *BWS*: 180.

⁸³ *BWS*: 184-186.

⁸⁴ In contrast to “The Prison Pastorate,” this thesis includes the argument for a shift in cultural and social-political perception. It is important to become aware of the personal experiences of the inmates, of their different socio-cultural backgrounds, and of the related events in their lives that formed and influenced them. See James Areechira, “A practical and theological reflection on Hong Kong prison ministry,” *Reo Journal of Theology and Ministry*, The Hindmarsh Research Centre for Mission and Ministry, Stirling Theological College, Volume 25, Batch 2 (2019) [Retrieved from: <http://www.hindmarshresearch.com>]. Visiting prisoners for more than 20 years and listening to thousands of prisoners’ stories, Areechira encountered the innumerable influences of “ethnicity, religion, class, race, age, profession, [...] group identities – all mingled with individual personality and prediction.” Reflecting on his experiences with inmates, he summarises the main causes for their crimes in seven broad categories:

- (1) *Money*: (a) A desire for wealth; (b) A desire for independence, self-sufficiency in money, and independence from parents’ financial support; (c) A desire to make extra “pocket money”; and (d) Corruption.
- (2) *Worldly attractions and situations*: (a) Desire to visit tourist attractions and eat at expensive hotels; (b) Political situation in one’s own country; and (c) Desire to acquire branded goods and the latest technology.
- (3) *Love and pleasure*: (a) Relationships based on lust; (b) Abuse of others for self-enjoyment and pleasure; and (c) Broken love relationships.
- (4) *Family situations*: (a) Desire to get out of abusive and complicated family situations; and (b) Family difficulties.
- (5) *Bad friends and gangs*: (a) Influenced by bad classmates and friends; (b) Gang influence; (c) Accidentally ended up in the company of bad people.
- (6) *Own challenges*: (a) Feelings of inferiority; (b) Ego-centricity; (c) Low education; (d) Bullied by classmates; (e) Abuse of own children; and (f) Abuse of employees.
- (7) *Addictions*: (a) Gambling addiction; and (b) Drug or alcohol addiction.

James Areechira thinks that “the most basic causes are greed, the abuse of power, ego-centricity, ignorance, addictions and the desire for love and pleasure.”

⁸⁵ *BWS*: 186.

people simply as the products of a background of brokenness and a history of rebellion.”⁸⁶ Brandner's theology opts for an openness to discover “in each one the creating and re-creating presence of God.” He writes,

Aware of the harm that most prisoners have inflicted on others, prison ministry starts with a conversion and assumption of a positive bias towards those in prison. Conversion starts with our looking at inmates in a new light rather than with our encouraging them to convert. For ministry in prison, this means the following: Remember how perspective shapes reality. How you see inmates is how you affect them. Learn to define a person not by what he or she is but by what he or she could be.⁸⁷

Brandner describes how visitors, who leave the prison, are often surprised looking back on what they have experienced (L6).⁸⁸ Astounded to discover that inmates are not always necessarily the bleak, harsh and rough characters (*wüste Rohlinge*) they had expected them to be – could Christ truly be present in them? Instead prisoners are often friendly, even “well-mannered people” (*ganz gesittete Menschen*) who do not express themselves badly and who clearly express their gratitude for the visit. Brandner's experiences of the actual encounter with inmates over years differ from some of the initial descriptions Rahner gives in his writings (L3/6). Specifically, where Rahner refers negatively to inmates as

the unstable characters; the psychopaths; the vicious, the smooth, the cynical, the hypocrites and liars; the merely impulsive, the victims of circumstances, of addiction; the inevitable recidivists, the religiously impervious, the poor devils, the imbeciles.⁸⁹

In his theology of prison ministry, Brandner neither compares his views with Rahner's nor with *Gaudium et Spes*,⁹⁰ and although one could see each of these descriptions as being accurate, they

⁸⁶ *BWS*: 186.

⁸⁷ *BWS*: 186.

⁸⁸ *BWS*: 1. Cf. Tobias Brandner, *Gottesbegegnungen im Gefängnis: Eine praktische Theologie der Gefangenenenseelsorge* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Otto Lembeck, 2010 [2009]), 19. Henceforth, the abbreviation used will be: “GG.”

⁸⁹ *MG*, 3: 76. *SW*, 16: 215. *SG*, 448-449: [D]er Labilen, der Psychopathen, der Boshaften, der Hochstapler, der Zynischen, der Heuchler und Lügner, der bloß Triebhaften, der Opfer der Verhältnisse, der Süchtigen, der haltlos Rückfälligen, der religiös Unempfänglichen, der armen Teufel, der Imbezillen.

⁹⁰ *Gaudium et Spes* mentions human sinfulness and the Cross but also focuses on accessibility to God, that is, on “a message of salvation for all of humanity,” which in the context of this thesis, as discussed in Chapter One, includes those human beings behind bars. GS 1. *VCII*, 163. Par. 1, “De intima coniunctione Ecclesiae cum tota familia gentium.”

nonetheless contrast starkly when one reads the following passage:

Inmates are ordinary people who have, among many other things in life, committed a crime, and who have been unsuccessful – or perhaps simply unlucky – enough to be caught. They maybe good husbands or not, they may be good fathers or not, they may be good citizens or not. At some point in their life, whether early or late, they transgressed the boundaries of what society considered acceptable and were caught in crime.⁹¹

Furthermore, Brandner, in contrast to Rahner's speculations concerning a priest's faith in prison, introduces the "*social environment* that shapes inmates' faith and life, the environment that provides the context in which Christian faith is received and responded to."⁹² The main thrust of Brandner's study reflects prisoners' viewpoints and perspectives. He argues that the "feelings of inmates, their suffering, and the important issues in their life are, in many ways, similar and comparable despite the cultural differences."⁹³ He discusses such questions as: "Who are the people in prison?" "How do they live?" "What do they feel, think, and hope?"⁹⁴ Brandner dismantles the negative stereotypical images that today's media communicates, with those phantasmagorias of prison inmates that dominate the public perception, formed by American blockbusters in the cinemas, and by reality shows on television (L4).⁹⁵

Brandner is aware that the first impression of prison life is not "the whole reality, but it is an important starting point" for our ministry.⁹⁶ This is true especially if we want to understand something of the painful and shattered human experiences of the person, and of the experience of God in the 'warehouse of the oppressed.'⁹⁷ The inmates we minister to are human beings, again this is what Rahner believes too, and yet, Brandner sees it more practically: People who, along with

⁹¹ BWS: 1. GG: 19: Insassen sind Menschen, die, neben vielem anderen, das sie im Laufe ihres Lebens getan haben, ein Verbrechen begangen und dabei das Unglück oder Pech hatten, gefangen zu werden. Sie mögen gute oder weniger gute Ehepartner und Väter, gute oder weniger gute Bürger sein – zu einem früheren oder späteren Zeitpunkt in ihrem Leben haben sie die Grenzen des gesellschaftlich Erlaubten überschritten und sind kriminell geworden.

⁹² BWS: 1. GG: 19.

⁹³ BWS: 1. GG: 19.

⁹⁴ BWS: 1. GG: 19.

⁹⁵ BWS: 1. GG: 19: Besucher, die das Gefängnis verlassen und auf das Erlebte zurückschauen, stellen regelmässig überrascht fest, dass Insassen nicht wüste Rohlinge sind, sondern freundliche, oft auch ganz gesittete Menschen, die sich gar nicht schlecht ausdrücken und die deutlich ihre Dankbarkeit für den Besuch zeigen. Die Begegnung mit den wirklichen Insassen steht in starkem Kontrast zu den stereotypen Bildern, welche die Medien zeichnen und die die öffentliche Wahrnehmung von Gefängnisinsassen beherrschen.

⁹⁶ BWS: 1. GG: 19: Natürlich, der erste Eindruck ist nicht die ganze Realität, aber er ist ein wichtiger Ausgangspunkt [...]

⁹⁷ Pierce, Chapter 2, "Prisons: Warehousing the Oppressed," in: *Prison Ministry: Hope behind the Wall*, 57-67.

anything else they did, have committed a “crime” (*ein Verbrechen*) and thereby had the “misfortune or bad luck” (*Unglück oder Pech*) to be caught. They may be excellent or less decent spouses and fathers, good or bad citizens. At an earlier or later stage in their lives, they crossed the boundaries of the socially permissible (*Grenzen des gesellschaftlich Erlaubten*) and became criminal.⁹⁸

Rahner is convinced that despite everything that happens in our lives, pastors can experience God in inmates. Prisoners too can still be human carriers of meaning, of the divine, and being sinners like the rest of us, followers of Christ. Or even stronger: Christ is present in them. Rahner's Catholic self-understanding as a priest is clear: to care selflessly for others – for prisoners – with neighbourly love. That's why he argues affectionately that we “have got to take pains over our nearness to God if we are to be able to serve our neighbour, and we draw near to God *by* serving our neighbour.”⁹⁹

For Rahner, “each depends on the other, and yet they are not both the same thing.”¹⁰⁰ In short: We can experience God by serving our neighbour, the inmate in jail. Brandner, who is not a Catholic priest and yet a prison minister, has perhaps a more modern understanding of who Christ is in imprisonment (L6): “Discover Christ in the face of the suffering: this restores inmates' dignity and affirms their subject status, which has been stripped by the depersonalizing routine of imprisonment.”¹⁰¹ In light of Brandner's prison experiences, we can see that Rahner's understanding of the prison pastorate is valuable but not sufficient in dealing with the serious demands of incarcerated life. Today we'll have to find a more practical meaning-centred approach (L4/5) to prison ministry. There is a need for a wider pastoral understanding than solely the traditional Christian virtue of self-giving and neighbourly love. In contrast to Rahner, Brandner's custodial experiences have pointed out that ministers are summoned to *be-there-present* creatively: empowering prisoners to recover their imagination and find meaning in their lives. That is, in a human, Christian but perhaps less religious – less Catholic sacramental worldview – sense (L5).

3.2.1.4. *Mixed Realities, but God is Already Powerfully Present in Prison*

Brandner goes pastorally beyond Rahner's theory (L3) by saying that “the experience of failure” of

⁹⁸ *BWS*: 1. *GG*: 19.

⁹⁹ *MG*, 3: 75. *SW*, 16: 215. *SG*, 448: So muß man sich um seine eigene Nähe zu Gott bemühen, um dem Nächsten dienen zu können, und man nähert sich Gott, indem man dem Nächsten dient.

¹⁰⁰ *MG*, 3: 75. *SW*, 16: 215. *SG*, 448: [J]edes hängt vom anderen ab und beides ist doch nicht dasselbe.

¹⁰¹ *BWS*: 183.

prisoners “can turn into a place of God’s revelation,” and “that there is no need to hide, that from failure the transformation of individual lives and of whole societies takes its beginnings.”¹⁰² With a message of hope to all of us, his response and his theology of prison ministry reminds Christian ministers:

- (a) to keep alive the vision of liberation as a holistic vision that includes liberation from the reality of prison as much as liberation from spiritual captivity;
- (b) to discover the reality of hope in symbolic representations: individual transformations and simple steps of care point to the ongoing power of resurrection;
- (c) to allow the liberty that you proclaim to the captives already to take its form in your mindset.¹⁰³

Rahner could not have anticipated today’s mixed realities: that pastors as well as prisoners from various denominations – including Russian Orthodox, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and others – have to tolerate one another behind bars.¹⁰⁴ They have to accept the diversity of religious customs, visions and symbols within the custodial setting (L4/5). Echoing Rahner’s reading of Matthew 25, Brandner’s advice to all of them is clear: to “start prison ministry with an attitude of deep respect for those in prison and with the knowledge that they are lenses through which to see God.”¹⁰⁵

From a Christian viewpoint Brandner argues that Jesus is generous with his time and that he doesn’t care about “missionary efficiency.” Moreover, Jesus Christ is aware of “the symbolic character of his ministry – all add up to a ministry of presence.”¹⁰⁶ Where Rahner’s approach was influenced by the missionary and priestly ideals of the Jesuits (L1), Brandner sees “prison ministry as a ministry of presence.”¹⁰⁷ This means that with a “continual visiting presence” in mind, we can move towards a theology of prison ministry in terms of *empowerment*. “The convivial fellowship,” however, “points to the Church’s existence not for others,” as Rahner argues in his Meditation (L2), “but *with* others.” For Brandner this means, “to visit” in the sense of spending “time with, to establish relationship and

¹⁰² BWS: 198.

¹⁰³ BWS: 198.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Ahmet Özdemir, “Was können Juden, Christen und Muslime voneinander lernen? Islamische Gefängnis-seelsorge in Deutschland,” in: Bülent Ucar and Martina Blasberg-Kuhnke (eds.), *Islamische Seelsorge zwischen Herkunft und Zukunft: Von der theologischen Grundlegung zur Praxis in Deutschland* (Reihe für Osnabrücker Islamstudien, 12) (Frankfurt am Main et al.: Peter Lang, 2013), 141-150.

¹⁰⁵ BWS: 183.

¹⁰⁶ BWS: 196.

¹⁰⁷ BWS: 196.

personal contact.” For a practical theology of prison ministry today this means one needs to:

- a) Enter the alien world of prison with humility and respect for the existing rules of the prison and for the inmates' culture.
- b) Trust in the transforming power of visiting and convivial fellowship.
- c) Remember that presence and life together build the basis for properly understanding inmates.¹⁰⁸

Rahner's reflections on “finding Christ” are theoretical and yet concerned with salvation in the concrete Christian missionary sense (L1/5). Brandner's reflections on the “ministry of presence” and his warning against the tendency to appropriate God help us to put Rahner's theoretical account (on the experience of God and on serving our neighbour) into a more pastoral (and less dogmatic) perspective. Brandner invites us to be Christian in a real and more hands-on sense (L5/6), approaching “the ministry of visitation as a learning process and as an opportunity to grow spiritually,”¹⁰⁹ always ready to think anew of that mystery in human experience called “God.”¹¹⁰ In response to Rahner's limitations and as a concrete step towards a theology of prison ministry, Brandner convincingly argues that

¹⁰⁸ BWS: 196.

¹⁰⁹ BWS: 183.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Annice Callahan, “Traditions of Spiritual Guidance: Karl Rahner's Insights for Spiritual Direction,” *The Way*, 29/4 (October 1989): 341-348, esp. 341. Professor Annice Callahan refers to Rahner's Christian “God” (*Gott*), “as the mystery in human experience”: “Rahner asserts that to speak of the human is to speak of the divine and vice versa. He describes God as the mystery in human experience. For him, then, God is the depth dimension in experiences such as solitude, friendship, community, death, hope and, as such, is the orientation toward the future.” To speak of human prison reality, then, is to speak of matters divine. “God,” the mystery in human life, according to Rahner, is the “depth dimension” in experiences such as incarceration. “Rahner goes so far as to say,” Callahan continues, “*that loneliness, disappointment and the ingratitude of others can be graced moments because they open us to the transcendent*. The silence of God, the toughness of life and the darkness of death can be graced events. *This mystery of grace discloses itself as a forgiving nearness, a hidden closeness, our real home, a love which shares itself*, something familiar which we can turn to from the alienation of our own empty and perilous lives. When we are in touch with ourselves authentically, we experience God” [Note: Rahner's ‘God,’ however, is not merely an extension/expansion of the self]. Cf. Karl Rahner, “Experience of Self and Experience of God,” in: *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 13 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975), 122-132; “Experience of the Holy Spirit,” in: *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 18, 189-210; *Foundations of Christian faith: an Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York, NY: Seabury, Crossroad Book, 1978), 131; “Glaubensmitte – Lebensmitte,” *Geist und Leben*, 46 (1973): 241-246; “Reflections on the Experience of Grace,” in: *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 3, 86-90; and “Theology and anthropology,” in: *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 9, 28-45. See also Karl Rahner, *The Practice Of Faith: A Handbook of Contemporary Spirituality*, eds. Karl Lehmann and Albert Raffelt (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1986); *Prayers for a Lifetime*, ed. Albert Raffelt (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1984); James C. Bacik, “A Spirituality for the Future: Situational and Systematic,” in: Robert J. Daly, ed. *Rising from History: U.S. Catholic Theology looks to the Future* (New York, NY: University Press of America, 1987), 184-191.

- (i) Chaplains should “respond to the power of sin with pastoral care instead of moral reasoning”;
- (ii) In dealing with criminals and crime we must not think “in moral but existential categories” – that is to say, observe “the lack of love” in a prisoner’s life;
- (iii) “Avoid identifying sin with a person and an act.”¹¹¹

Finally, Tobias Brandner and Karl Rahner are both aware of Christianity’s “mysterious origin.” The latter encourages Catholic pastors in the bustle of circadian prison ministry, “to take to heart our concern over our own salvation in the midst of our task.”¹¹² The former knows what it means to *be* human “in the midst” of such a pastoral and salvific undertaking. Brandner states that the consequence of our ministry to the incarcerated, will always be a *responsibility* to “take suffering seriously and avoid glossing it over with spiritual enthusiasm.”¹¹³ Christ does *not* need to be brought to jail; God is already powerfully present in prison. This becomes particularly noticeable with the power of “music.” In the end, some of Brandner’s most “precious experiences in prison” had much “to do with music.”¹¹⁴

Singing is a powerful way of tapping into life’s emotional dimensions; it is a channel for expressing joy or venting anger; it often has a direct, positive, immediately tangible impact on one’s mood; and it doesn’t distinguish between believer and nonbeliever. Music is a low-threshold entry point for people who are skeptical about or not ready for a clear religious commitment. *It is a tremendously important form of receiving healing in prison: the joint singing is not only a deep experience of fellowship but also a touching moment of*

¹¹¹ *BWS*: 193.

¹¹² *MG*, 3: 75. *SG*, 448: Und darum sind wir in einer solchen Besinnungsstunde auch von der Aufgabe und vom Amt her geheißen, uns die Sorge für unser eigenes Heil mitten in unserer Aufgabe zu Herzen gehen zu lassen.

¹¹³ *BWS*: 183.

¹¹⁴ *BWS*: 54. Rahner’s views on prison ministry, understandably, present a relevant theological argument and an anthropological understanding of the issues. However, the present thesis is also strengthened by the argument of experience and practical wisdom. Again, in the account of Professor Brandner, we find a concrete example of someone who wrote about his prison experiences, discovering in the midst of his pastoral ministry what really works, that is, both humanly and spiritually: e.g., music. In that sense we can never get away from the argument of experience in relation to a theology of prison ministry, for which one could arguably criticise Rahner. “The Prison Pastorate” lacks to a certain extent a degree of ‘emotional insight,’ and the ‘being-in-touch’ *with* the prisoners and their struggles behind bars. Regarding the experience of music in prison that Brandner refers to, see also the examination of “the therapeutic potentials of creating and performing music within the context of prisons” in Lucy O’Grady, “The Therapeutic Potentials of Creating and Performing Music with Women in Prison: A Qualitative Case Study,” *Qualitative Inquiries in Music Therapy*, 6 (2011): 122-152.

*reconnecting with dimensions of life beyond the visible.*¹¹⁵

Lastly, he states,

*The music in prison stands in radical contrast to the surrounding atmosphere. Some of my most precious experiences in prison have much to do with music: the sonority of powerful male voices audible throughout the prison; the soft, meditative worship and a tranquillity hard to imagine in a place like prison; the concentrated participation of inmates momentarily forgetting where they are. Music provides a good first opportunity for inmates to take up leadership or to participate with guitars or other instruments and thus to have a chance to learn something meaningful.*¹¹⁶

3.2.2. Rainer Dabrowski: *Cracked, Barred, Forgotten*

3.2.2.1. Critique – Rahner's Unfamiliarity with the Hardships of Prison Life

To respond to Rahner's limitations as well as further developing our understanding of prison ministry, we now turn to the experiences and to the reflections of the German prison chaplain Rainer Dabrowski who worked for twenty-three years in the JVA Tegel in Berlin.¹¹⁷ In his 2015 book *Verknackt, vergittert, vergessen – Ein Gefängnispfarrer erzählt*,¹¹⁸ Dabrowski pastorally enhances and offers a practical alternative to Rahner's views on the prison pastorate. He writes for interested lay people, for experts and ministers alike, reflecting on his pastoral experiences in Berlin's Tegel prison.¹¹⁹ Dabrowski states:

At least I got some answers to the questions that I posed to myself and to others during my ministry. And in this book I will try to give you a little insight into my unusual work. I will let

¹¹⁵ BWS: 54 [*italics my emphasis*].

¹¹⁶ BWS: 54 [*italics my emphasis*].

¹¹⁷ My translation of the title: "Cracked, Barred, Forgotten – A Prison Pastor Tells." Rainer Dabrowski, *Verknackt, vergittert, vergessen – Ein Gefängnispfarrer erzählt* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2015), 7. Henceforth, the abbreviation used will be: "VVV."

¹¹⁸ I am grateful to the prisoners in the JVA Hünfeld, who recommended this book to me. They enjoyed reading it and they affirmed that from their perspective, the author had "hit the nail on the head."

¹¹⁹ VVV: 7: Zurückblickend auf diese Jahre, fühle ich mich nun reif genug, um zu verstehen, was ich dort tat und warum dies ausgerechnet an jenem für viele "fürchtbaren Ort" geschehen musste. ["Looking back on these years, I now feel mature enough to understand what I was doing there and why this happened in a residence that for many is indeed a 'terrible place.'"]

you look behind the scenes, with the goal of understanding what “pastoral care in a prison” – here in a closed male custodial institution – means.¹²⁰

Prison minister Dabrowski is a gifted storyteller and his considerations of the prison pastorate give us the possibility of revisiting Rahner's meditation by shedding another light on the practicality, as well as on the more nuanced pastoral details and hardships of prison life (L6). Especially now when the German justice system and prison society are changing so rapidly.¹²¹

3.2.2.2. *Time and Work Pressure and the Problem of Trust*

Karl Rahner cannot be criticised for what he could not have foreseen in his day. Nonetheless, it is important to our thesis to stress the problems occurring in the new Millennium (L4/6) to emphasise the need for a theology of prison ministry that goes beyond his understanding in “The Prison Pastorate.” Problems, for instance, concerning the ever growing time and work pressures in modern prisons are challenging both pastors and prisoners alike in ways it did not do before. Dabrowski states,

In the last few years of my work in Tegel, I was the last pastor with a full position. In addition, there was only a colleague with half a position and a pensioner who was hired through an aid association (church in prison) and worked on an hourly basis.¹²²

In dealing with the stress associated with time pressure, a prison pastor has to consider a variety of pastoral strategies for managing his situation (L5). On top of this ‘time stress,’ Dabrowski points to another major difficulty in prison ministry: the fact that behind walls it is difficult to trust anyone. The various nationalities, languages and/or religions, including radical alliances within prison, do not

¹²⁰ VVV: 7 [*my translation*]: Auf die Fragen, die ich mir und anderen während meines Dienstes stellte, erhielt ich zumindest ein paar Antworten, und in diesem Buch werde ich versuchen, Ihnen einen kleinen Einblick in meine so unübliche Arbeit zu gewähren. Ich werde Sie hinter die Kulissen schauen lassen, mit dem Ziel zu verstehen, was “Seelsorge in einem Gefängnis” – hier in einem geschlossenen Männervollzug – bedeutet.

¹²¹ For a detailed analysis of “penal power and its impact on prisoner adaptation and social life, including interpersonal relationships, hierarchies and everyday culture” in an English prison context see Ben Crewe, *The Prisoner Society: Power, Adaptation and Social Life in an English Prison*, Clarendon Studies in Criminology (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009). The study explains “how power is exercised by the institution, individualising the prisoner community and demanding particular forms of compliance and engagement.”

¹²² VVV: 26 [*my translation*]: In den letzten Jahren meiner Tätigkeit in Tegel war ich der letzte Seelsorger mit einer vollen Stelle. Hinzu kamen nur noch eine Kollegin mit einer halben Stelle sowie ein Pensionär, der über einen Hilfsverein angestellt wurde (Kirche im Gefängnis) und stundenweise tätig war.

necessarily help to create an atmosphere of dialogue and trust.¹²³ He writes: “One begins to become suspicious and to question the stories of the prisoners.”¹²⁴

In “The Prison Pastorate,” Rahner is of course not aware of these contemporary dynamics that affect today’s prisons such as Islamisation, and other radical tendencies (L4).¹²⁵ He could not have anticipated in the last century, how time stress and the breakdown of trust would affect prison ministry today. Dabrowski’s insights, therefore, are particularly valuable in dealing with the limitations identified in “The Prison Pastorate.” Dabrowski describes the alienated reality of how “cracked, barred and forgotten” (*Verknackt, vergittert, vergessen*) prisoners really are (L4/3). He shows in his book that chaplains have to move beyond their God-seeking clericalism and idealism (L1/2) to really touch the broken lives of the incarcerated.¹²⁶

Prison chaplaincy in Rahner’s theology, is primarily about “finding Christ” and “ourselves” in prisoners. Dabrowski’s reflections break open basic issues of human existence, perspectives that are different to Rahner’s, perhaps less ‘theological’ but real. This is not only because of the fact that people in prison nowadays tend to be highly manipulative and impulsive characters. They tend to be self-centred, and recurrently lie to others, Dabrowski states. The incarcerated have absolutely “hard shells” (*harte Schale*) built around themselves, and yet, their “soft core” (*weicher Kern*),¹²⁷ he has experienced too. In conversations, the inmates would reveal to him their numerous “fears” (*Ängste*):

Somehow, everything was always about some form of fear: The fear of losing the wife or

¹²³ For in-depth examination of “the struggle for equal opportunities in a multi-faith society” and its effect on the “relations between the Church, the state and religious minorities,” see James A. Beckford and Sophie Gilliat, *Religion in Prison: ‘Equal Rites’ in a Multi-Faith Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹²⁴ VVV: 32: Man beginnt, allmählich misstrauisch zu werden und die Geschichten der Gefangenen zu hinterfragen.

¹²⁵ In Germany, detention centres work with the concept of “de-radicalization” which includes relying on data exchange with the police and “the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution” (*dem Verfassungsschutz*), but it goes even further. Behind prison walls, “structural observers” (*Strukturbeobachter*) are trained to pay careful attention to all forms of Islamisation, and other radical tendencies. They prevent the formation of inappropriate cliques and groupings, if necessary by relocating ringleaders. Such a concept, for instance, was not needed in Rahner’s time. For “Muslims in prisons” see also J. Beckford, D. Joly, and F. Khosrokhavar (eds.), *Muslims in Prison: Challenge and Change in Britain and France*, Migration, Minorities and Citizenship (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). The study *Muslims in Prison* reveals that authorities in Europe have responded differently “to the challenges presented by Muslim prisoners in each country.” After three years of intensive research their findings are interesting: “in a variety of prisons show that British prisons facilitate and control the practice of Islam, whereas French prisons discourage it and thereby sow the seeds of extremism.” The policy implications of these ironic findings reflect something of the situation and ongoing challenges that face German prisons today.

¹²⁶ See esp. VVV: 26-57.

¹²⁷ VVV: 74.

girlfriend; the fear of being in jail and family members outside who could die. Yes, the fears of dying in jail themselves.¹²⁸ These fears are not even exaggerated. Frequently we had to deliver to prisoners the death notice of a family member. Nobody likes that, especially since grief in prison cannot be lived out in any healthy way. Nor does the prisoner get released because of that, usually he is not even allowed to attend the funeral. He hears the message – and nobody talks to him about it. Nobody catches his grief and goes to him.¹²⁹

In contrast to Rahner, Dabrowski, as a practising chaplain, knows the prison situation inside out (L6). In the midst of all the possibilities, the restrictions and the limitations of the custodial setting in Berlin, he had to make the prison pastorate work. The kind of ministry that he describes reflects back the essential fact that prison chaplaincy is not a theory: it can only *be* and *do* so much within the confines of the justice system. He is aware of how difficult it is, for some chaplains and especially for the prisoners, to be alone in this kind of man-made-system. Especially, when an inmate hears of the death of a loved one, a family member, Dabrowski writes,

If we had the time, we sat in the church and lit a candle. But even we could not help but sooner or later lock him up in his lonely cell. The German prison system ensures every prisoner a single accommodation. There then, the mourner sits and is alone with his thoughts. Sometimes, prisoners did tell us what was going on in their minds. With others it broke out later.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Detainees cannot freely determine how and where they die. None of us really can, however, the issue of dignified dying requires special attention in prisons. Based on a research project, Ueli Hostettler, Irene Marti, and Marina Richter, present in their study the perspectives of the various parties involved: the experiences, questions, needs, fears and visions of prisoners, of employees and of authorities are vividly illustrated using material from interviews and observations. The different stages up to the end of life and death, from their perspective, need to be carefully reflected upon. Ueli Hostettler, Irene Marti, and Marina Richter, *Lebensende im Justizvollzug: Gefangene, Anstalten, Behörden* (Bern: Stämpfli Verlag, 2016). Cf. Josef Bausch-Hölterhoff, “Es kommt nicht so sehr darauf an, wo ein Mensch stirbt, wichtig ist, wie er stirbt – Zur Situation todkranker und sterbender Patienten in Vollzugseinrichtungen,” *Zeitschrift für Strafvollzug und Straffälligenhilfe* [...] 53 (2004): 96-99.

¹²⁹ VVV: 74 [*my translation*]: Ich habe bisher kaum über den Inhalt meiner Gespräche mit Inhaftierten gesprochen. Irgendwie drehte sich alles immer um eine wie auch immer geartete Form der Angst. Die Angst davor, die Frau oder Freundin zu verlieren. Die Angst davor, im Knast zu sitzen und draußen könnten Familienangehörige sterben. Ja, die Angst davor, selbst im Knast zu sterben. Diese Ängste sind nicht einmal übertrieben. Wie oft mussten wir Gefangenen die Botschaft vom Tod eines Familienangehörigen überbringen. Das tut niemand gern, zumal Trauer im Gefängnis in keiner gesunden Art und Weise ausgelebt werden kann. Weder bekommt der Gefangene deswegen seine Strafe erlassen, meist darf er ja nicht einmal zur Beerdigung. Er hört die Nachricht – und keiner spricht mit ihm darüber. Niemand fängt seine Trauer auf und geht auf ihn ein.

¹³⁰ VVV: 74 [*my translation*]: Natürlich taten wir, was möglich war. Hatten wir die Zeit, setzten wir uns in die Kirche und zündeten eine Kerze an. Doch auch wir kamen nicht darum herum, ihn früher oder später wieder in seine einsame Zelle

3.2.2.3. *Other Roles Needed*

In contrast to Rahner's model of the celibate priest who first seeks Christ (L1), Dabrowski, who is married and father to three children, sees the part of the prison pastor differently. Rather than a direct religious or priestly single-mindedness focused on finding God, as in Rahner's "The Prison Pastorate," he would argue that the lifestory of the individual prisoner who is "cracked, barred, and forgotten," comes first and must be the main focus of attention for the chaplaincy service (L3).¹³¹ The prison pastor, he argues, is invited to meet that which is *human* in the other, taking the prisoner's personal experiences as one's pastoral orientation rather than the religious quest to seek "Christ."¹³²

For Dabrowski, pastoral ministry is all about mutual respect and human dignity. This means that a celibate person and ordained priest may be an excellent prison pastor in the way Rahner describes: the person may discover Christ and see what is truly human in the inmates. A present-day chaplain with children and a partner, however, may well bring another human dimension to prison work, due to the family experiences and personal sufferings that s/he shares with the fathers and mothers in jail. Furthermore, being a chaplain is different from the role of the prison guard, of the psychologist or the social worker, who generally tend to have fewer possibilities within the German custodial structures.

Dabrowski is convinced that, for today's pastors, it is not appropriate to pass a verdict or any further judgement on the criminal, nor is any theological 'saving-construct' really helpful to serve the inmates (L2/5). Prison ministry, then, for him, is not so much about the priest's own search for God but all about a 'hands-on theology' of human support and creating instant possibilities for the prisoners in an inflexible system that has removed their personal freedom.

We supported the inmates by talking to the prison management and took part in their conferences [*Vollzugsplankonferenz*], in which a decision was made about the further course

zu sperren. Der deutsche Strafvollzug sichert jedem Gefangenen Einzelunterbringung zu. Da sitzt der Trauernde dann und ist mit seinen Gedanken allein. Manchmal berichteten uns Gefangene davon, was da so in ihren Köpfen vor sich ging. Bei anderen brach es später heraus.

¹³¹ VVV: 7.

¹³² For an exploration of "the way in which criminal punishment is interpreted and narrated by offenders," see Marguerite Schinkel, *Being Imprisoned: Punishment, Adaptation and Desistance*, Palgrave Studies in Prisons and Penology (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). Schinkel examines "the meaning offenders ascribe to their sentence and the consequences of this for future desistance."

of detention. We were the ones who could accompany inmates in their first moments outside the prison [*Ausgängen*], especially when the prison-staff were preoccupied or absent. We were able to bring the girlfriend, mother or wife to the pastor's office, where a prisoner could fall into one another's arms relatively "unattended."¹³³

In contrast to Rahner's theory, Dabrowski shows with a few practical details, what makes the prison pastorate *pastoral* (L4/5/6). To juxtapose, however, academic theory here with the ability to be pastoral – as in Rahner's "The Prison Pastorate" vs. Dabrowski's custodial experience – has of course its own limitation. Since both authors can arguably be critiqued on their own grounds. Rahner is not wide of the mark, for instance, with his focus on "Christ." He sincerely seeks to communicate his own humanity, and recognise the humanity of the other, in his address to prison pastors, and indeed in many of his writings. Conversely, Dabrowski claims that the chaplain's own piety and theological competence in modern prisons are not the main concern (L1/5). The question for him is rather whether one is flexible and able to communicate one's own humanity to others on the front lines of prison ministry; whether one can provide a trustworthy environment where inmates can share their pain and problems of frustration. Rahner's views on the prison pastorate, in the light of Dabrowski's ministry, do not fully echo this pastoral frontline experience.

Today's ministers, as Dabrowski points out, know too well that most of the inmates are not interested in theology or religion, nor do they care if the chaplain is a man or a woman, is single, married, or ordained, Catholic or Protestant. There are offenders who don't mind what their pastor thinks or believes or whether a priest is able to find Christ in them. For more and more convicts in the German-speaking world today, religious praxis is of no importance whatsoever. What the incarcerated do notice, however, is that for certain 'pastoral reasons' (supported by German law),¹³⁴ the ministers are allowed to organise events in prison and do things for them that others can't. They can allow for visits and additional phone calls and give out chocolate, hand out books and rosary beads or order music instruments. While this helps the chaplain to forge a rapport with individual

¹³³ VVV: 30 [*my translation*]: Wir setzten uns bei der Anstaltsleitung für Häftlinge ein und nahmen an den Vollzugsplankonferenzen teil, in denen über den weiteren Haftverlauf entschieden wurde. Wir gehörten zu denjenigen, die Häftlinge bei ihren ersten Ausgängen begleiten konnten, gerade dort, wo oft das Anstaltspersonal fehlte. Wir waren in der Lage, die Freundin, die Mutter oder Ehefrau ins Pfarramt zu holen, wo man sich relativ "unbeaufsichtigt" in die Arme fallen konnte.

¹³⁴ Cf. Johannes Feest, "Bilanz der Strafvollzugsgesetzgebung. 40 Jahre Strafvollzugsgesetz–Errungenschaften und Liegegebliebenes," *Forum Strafvollzug* 65, Number 1 (2016): 12-14.

prisoners, it also means that “[t]he door to abuse,” as Dabrowski argues, is thus always present.¹³⁵

Prison chaplains struggle frequently with their own conscience. It is not easy to decide what to accept and what to reject, which request (*Anliegen*) to fulfil or to simply deny.¹³⁶ Prisoners in ‘survival mode’ can be very refined in their subtle manipulations and in their bribery tactics. One has to learn to deal with these strategies as well as with the inmates’ fears and needs. Dabrowski claims that prison chaplains therefore have to learn to accept other roles: be that the character of a sexual therapist or that of a “heavenly comedian” (*Himmelskomiker*). Pastors are not only playing “Santa Claus” (*Weihnachtsman*) but are frequently perceived as a kind of substitute ‘dad’ or ‘grandpa.’ This human reality with its underlying vein of humour definitely goes beyond Rahner’s serious theory of the chaplain’s role in “The Prison Pastorate” (L1-6).¹³⁷ Dabrowski writes,

In the parish office we were not only the “heavenly comedians” who believe in everything good in humans, but also the “Santas” with a rich cornucopia. We owe our popularity mainly to this role. Our theological or pastoral competence follows only in second or third place.¹³⁸

Later in his book, he affirms this again, at the same time asking who these pastors really are who are sent as chaplains to jail:

We had to learn to be flexible in our work in taking on various roles in our ministry. This could be the role of the pastor but also that of a sex therapist, Santa Claus or a father figure [*Übervater*]. As professionals we had to learn to act on our feet and deal with almost anything. Yet who are these men and women who are being sent by the Church to work in prisons?¹³⁹

¹³⁵ See Hans-Ulrich Agster’s practical advice of the do’s and don’ts in German prisons. Hans-Ulrich Agster, “Stolpersteine für Dienstanfänger und alte Hasen in der Gefängnisseelsorge.” Manuskript, 2011. Cf. Marek M. Kaminski, *Games Prisoners Play: The Tragicomic Worlds of Polish Prison* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018). [<http://gefaengnisseelsorge.net/>]

¹³⁶ VVV: 31.

¹³⁷ VVV: 30.

¹³⁸ VVV: 30 [*my translation*]: Im Pfarramt waren wir nicht nur die an alles Gute im Menschen glaubenden “Himmelskomiker,” sondern auch die mit einem reichen Füllhorn versehenen “Weihnachtsmänner.” Dieser Rolle verdanken wir hauptsächlich unsere Beliebtheit. Erst in zweiter oder dritter Hinsicht folgt unsere theologische oder seelsorgerische Kompetenz.

¹³⁹ VVV: 47 [*my translation*]: Wir mussten in unserer Arbeit vieles sein. Vom Seelsorger bis hin zum Sexualtherapeuten, Weihnachtsmann oder auch der Übervater, der professionell eine Menge wegstecken musste. Wer sind sie also, die von der Kirche da in den Strafvollzug geschickt werden?

Christian ministry in prison, for Dabrowski, is all about being wise; learning to intelligently interpret the situation. What really counts for him, in contrast to Rahner's concept (L3), is to understand the language of the inmates, and to accept their thoughts and feelings, to respect their broken personalities and lives behind bars. Being an ordained priest or minister, for him, is only of secondary importance (L1). Prisoners, he believes, want to experience 'ordinary' human life: they want to make a phone call, to smoke a cigarette and to drink coffee, and talk about what goes on in the world. They dislike civil service 'mumbo-jumbo' and aggressive missionary activity. What they really need, according to Dabrowski, is concrete human support with a personal touch that means something to them. He refers to the chaplain's office:

The prisoners liked our offices simply because, unlike the stereotypical civil servants' offices, they had a more personal note. In addition, I realistically admit, our rooms sparked off a lot of cravings and pleadings. There were freely available telephones and internet connections, not to mention coffee, cookies and tobacco. We had the luxury of free time and kept no prisoner files. Everyone could rely 100 percent on our confidentiality.¹⁴⁰

For Dabrowski, a chaplain has to learn to adapt and to discern with *empathy* the needs of the moment.¹⁴¹ This includes the concrete needs and desires of the prisoners (L3), and also the need for prison pastors to open themselves to the inmates and learn from them. Dabrowski writes,

I have learned a lot, also on a human level, from the detainees. For example, what it means *to practise solidarity, to develop courage, to be creative and to preserve humour in all circumstances*. I realised what tremendous energy potential is lost in jail just because the prisoners did not learn to use their skills in their favour. In their jail life, the field of criminal energy is irrigated, when it should have been lying fallow.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ VVV: 29-30 [*my translation*]: Den Gefangenen sagten unsere Büros schon deshalb zu, weil sie, anders als die stereotypen Beamtenbüros, eine persönlichere Note aufwiesen. Außerdem weckten unsere Räumlichkeiten, das gestehe ich realistischer Weise ein, viele Begehrllichkeiten. Dort gab es frei verfügbare Telefone und Internetanschlüsse. Ganz zu schweigen von Kaffee, Keksen und Tabak. Wir verfügten über den Luxus der freien Zeit und führten keine Gefangenenakten. Jeder konnte sich zu 100 Prozent auf unsere Schweigepflicht verlassen.

¹⁴¹ See Edith Stein, *The Collected Works of Edith Stein, Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Discalced Carmelite*, Volume 3, *On The Problem Of Empathy*, tr. Waltraut Stein (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1989). Early in Edith's Stein philosophical output stands her doctoral dissertation, *On The Problem Of Empathy*, defended in 1916 at Freiburg-im-Breisgau, the fruit of several years' work with Husserl, the director of the dissertation.

¹⁴² VVV: 60 [*my emphasis and translation*]: Ich habe viel, auch menschlich, von den Inhaftierten gelernt. Zum Beispiel was es heißt, Solidarität zu üben, Mut zu entwickeln, kreativ zu sein und den Humor in allen Lebenslagen zu bewahren. Ich erkannte, welch ungeheuer großes Energiepotenzial im Knast verpufft, nur weil die Gefangenen es nicht gelernt

3.2.2.4. 100 Percent Pastoral Care, Life Experience and General Knowledge

Karl Rahner is convinced: “We find Christ our Lord in the prisoners...”¹⁴³ Dabrowski prompts us to ask a similar question: But where is Christ in forsakenness? Where is God in the pain and suffering of the inmates? Is there a ‘God’ out there in the midst of all the pastoral challenges in prison? Is there any meaning to what pastors are doing there? Dabrowski observed that most prison chaplains at the beginning of their service become hardened by their fate:

Hardly anyone ever had an inner willingness to have an affinity with the prison system. Many were thus pushed into the lion’s den which could not but awaken all of their defence mechanisms. So how does a discharged candidate for public service react when he is placed in a position that is generally not conducive to his career? His resolute demeanour subsequently transforms this position into the most important position of the church.¹⁴⁴

Dabrowski, focuses in this passage on the prison chaplain, as Rahner did. However, he goes into more detail describing the role(s), the person, as well as the situation of appointment. In addition to candidates, for example, who are more or less “forcibly assigned” (*Zwangszugewiesenen*) to prison, he explains that there are also church men and women who freely apply for the job. They are, however, “not doing much better,” he states, as they too fall “into daily prison life completely unprepared” and suffer “various breakdowns.”¹⁴⁵ It is clear that “The Prison Pastorate” has not integrated and anticipated such mental breakdowns of the chaplain (L4/6). Dabrowski is clear that “no study of theology in the world imparts that knowledge” which prison pastors have to “painfully acquire through their everyday work in prison.”¹⁴⁶ Not least because they work mostly on their own

haben, ihre Fähigkeiten zu ihren Gunsten zu nutzen. In ihrem Knastleben wird das Feld der kriminellen Energie bewässert, welches eigentlich hätte brach liegen sollen.

¹⁴³ MG, 3: 75. SW, 16: 215. SG, 448: Wir finden Christus den Herrn in den Gefangenen.

¹⁴⁴ VVV: 48 [*my translation*]: Kaum einer besaß je eine innere Bereitschaft, eine Affinität zum Strafvollzug herzustellen. Viele wurden also in eine Löwengrube gestoßen, welche alle Abwehrinstinkte in ihnen wachrufen musste. Wie reagiert also ein “Abschusskandidat” im öffentlichen Dienst, wenn er auf eine Stelle gesetzt wird, die seiner Karriere gemeinhin nicht dienlich ist? Er formt in der Folge durch sein resolutes Auftreten diese Stelle in die allerwichtigste Position dieser Landeskirche um. [Note: Dabrowski refers to the *Landeskirche*, hence the situation in the German protestant church]

¹⁴⁵ VVV: 48 [*my translation*]: Außer den “Zwangszugewiesenen” arbeiteten auch normal »freiwillige« Brüder und Schwestern in den Anstalten. Ihnen erging es nicht viel besser. Auch sie fielen völlig unvorbereitet in den Knastalltag und zogen sich diverse Brüche zu.

¹⁴⁶ VVV: 48 [*my translation*]: Kein Theologiestudium der Welt vermittelte das Wissen, das wir uns schmerzlich durch die alltägliche Arbeit im Knast erwerben mussten.

(*als Einzelkämpfer*) in a quarantined system.¹⁴⁷

Some people, who visited Dabrowski in jail, couldn't believe his response, when he said, "that the most important thing in pastoral care is a functioning coffee machine as well as an ability to look at others at eye level. A computer only comes at 20th place."¹⁴⁸ As prison chaplain, Dabrowski frequently directed young trainees, theology students who were interested in doing an internship behind bars. In meeting them, he realised how important general knowledge and education is for the prison pastorate, something very practical that "The Prison Pastorate" doesn't mention (L4/5/6).

The interns always looked well-behaved. But appearances can say little about inner qualities. Besides, I thought I noticed that they were becoming increasingly speechless. Fear of contact with the prisoners increased steadily and most interns lacked a minimum of charisma. Their poor level of education was also significant: not necessarily with regard to the degree of elementary theological understanding but as far as general knowledge or the natural sciences were concerned. Politically, they were often completely uneducated and uninterested. In short, they lacked every aspect of common sense knowledge that one should have to provide basic answers regarding the fundamental questions of life.¹⁴⁹

Dabrowski emphasised to those men and women who were interested in the prison pastorate that it's important to read and that it is essential to "have an interest in God and the world." He strongly believes that prison chaplains have to become more than a pastor in the Rahnerian sense (L1/2/3), namely "an interesting personality," simply because "a personality can have a say," since he or she "has something to say."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ VVV: 49.

¹⁴⁸ VVV: 132 [*my translation*]: [Dass] das Wichtigste in der Seelsorge eine funktionierende Kaffeemaschine sowie ein Blick auf Augenhöhe sei. Ein Computer rangiert da höchstens auf Platz 20.

¹⁴⁹ VVV: 132 [*my translation*]: Die Praktikanten sahen immer brav aus. Doch Äußerlichkeiten können über die inneren Qualitäten wenig aussagen. Ich meinte allerdings bemerkt zu haben, dass sie zunehmend sprachloser wurden. Die Berührungssängste den Gefangenen gegenüber nahmen stetig zu, und den meisten Praktikanten fehlte es an einem Mindestmaß an Ausstrahlung. Erheblich war ebenfalls ihr mangelhafter Bildungsstand. Nicht unbedingt, was das theologische Grundwissen anbelangte, in jedem Fall aber was das Allgemeinwissen oder die Naturwissenschaften anging. Politisch waren sie oftmals völlig ungebildet und desinteressiert. Kurz, es fehlte ihnen jener Aspekt weisheitlichen Denkens, der über die allgemeinen grundlegenden Lebensfragen Auskunft geben sollte.

¹⁵⁰ VVV: 132 [*my translation*]: Ich habe all jenen mit auf den Weg gegeben zu lesen, was das Zeug hält. Denn nur der, der ein Interesse an Gott und der Welt aufbringt, avanciert zu einer interessanten Persönlichkeit. Einfach deshalb, weil die Persönlichkeit mitreden kann, weil sie etwas zu sagen hat.

With approximately half of the apprentices the chaplaincy assignments didn't work out. Dabrowski explains that some couldn't handle the emotional weight and toughness of the prison scenery; others just didn't turn up any longer.¹⁵¹ Consequently, he became doubtful about the Church sending young trainees into prison ministry.¹⁵² A profession “with almost 100 percent pastoral care,” he believes, needs real life experiences: It requires men and women who are educated, who live life to the full and have a broad interest in almost everything. He writes,

Good. In our work we are dealing with almost 100 percent pastoral care. The prisoners crave talks, small or large aids with life and practical advice. Some want to talk their burden off their shoulders; others have specific wishes, for example, in case of trouble with the girlfriend. Others just want a break from their permanent boredom and to leave their small dog-kennel-cell. It is a very interesting and varied job. But I think that the requirements can only be met after a long period of maturing. I have my doubts about young professionals, so soon after graduation. The church shares this thinking and first of all sends all graduates to a parish for several years.¹⁵³

In “The Prison Pastorate,” Rahner neither mentions this problem of age nor does he address the issue of intellectual and social maturity on the part of the chaplain (L4/6). Dabrowski argues that prison chaplains nowadays have a responsibility to communicate their experiences to the outer world, to the media.¹⁵⁴ This too was not part of Rahner's priestly mindset in the 1950s (L4/5). Dabrowski, however, is convinced that nowadays we should talk publicly about the prison pastorate. To overcome the irrational fantasies (*manifeste Fantasiegebäude*) that people in society but also in the

¹⁵¹ VVV: 133.

¹⁵² Cf. Markus-Liborius Hermann, “AndersSein am AndersOrt: Vom Kirche-sein an der Peripherie,” *AndersOrt 2* (2018): 30-33.

¹⁵³ VVV: 136 [*my translation*]: Gut. Wir haben es in unserer Arbeit auch mit fast 100 Prozent Seelsorge zu tun. Die Gefangenen gieren nach Gesprächen, nach kleinen oder großen Lebenshilfen und nach praktischen Ratschlägen. Manche wollen sich ihre Last von den Schultern reden, andere haben konkrete Wünsche, etwa bei Ärger mit der Freundin. Andere möchten nur einmal ihre permanente Langeweile durchbrechen und ihre hundehüttenkleine Zelle verlassen. Es ist eben eine sehr interessante und abwechslungsreiche Arbeit. Nur denke ich, dass man diesen Anforderungen nur nach langer eigener Lebensreife gerecht werden kann. Bei Berufseinsteigern, so kurz nach dem Studium, habe ich meine Bedenken. Die Kirche teilt diese Bedenken und schickt erst einmal alle Absolventen für viele Jahre in eine Gemeindepfarrstelle.

¹⁵⁴ This transparency and communication to the outer world is very important to avoid the systematic abuse of power. Cf. Franziska Dübgen, “Strafe als Herrschaftsmechanismus. Zum Gefängnis als Ort der Reproduktion gesellschaftlicher Machtverhältnisse,” *Kritische Justiz* 50 (2017): 141-152. In *Theorien der Strafe* (Hamburg: Junius Hamburg, 2016), Dübgen shows “radical alternatives to the current neo-liberal lust for punishment by presenting restorative and transformative theories of justice as well as the African concept of Ubuntu.” Chaplains can (and perhaps should) be dialogue partners about the various possible “theories of justice.”

Church have about this kind of profession,¹⁵⁵ prison chaplains must be encouraged to represent their valuable insights and experiences to the wider public. He states,

We pastors are encouraged to represent our concerns to the public, to visit them in order to advertise our tasks and activities there. Now it is difficult to advertise a correctional facility. The prison is hardly looking for members. However, we can promote our work and report on our work in order to reduce existing prejudices. For this purpose we go out into the world and are invited by communities or other institutions; an exciting and at the same time difficult task. I often thought: where do our fellow citizens get their views from? Who spreads such nonsense when it comes to questions of punishment and detention, guilt and atonement? As for forgiveness?¹⁵⁶

3.2.2.5. *Christian Life, Church Service and Theology in Jail?*

Is a Christian life, in terms of Rahner's "mysticism of everyday faith,"¹⁵⁷ possible behind barbed wire? Dabrowski would argue that as far as church services are concerned, one should be realistic: the prison chapel on Sunday is mostly visited by the prisoners because of their desire to see and hear something different (L1/4). Chaplains shouldn't be too theological about it. They might get disappointed in the long run. It is not uncommon, for example, during a prayer service or in a sermon to be confronted with the resistance and boredom of the inmates. Dabrowski states,

I would now say that the Church service is no longer a relevant event. Then I would have a pious minority against me. But I stick to it; the prisoner attends the service because he seeks variety and a feeling of community. The message is completely uninteresting. A sermon was judged on whether something from their reality was addressed. The reactions on site were

¹⁵⁵ VVV: 139.

¹⁵⁶ VVV: 139 [*my translation*]: Wir Pfarrer sind dazu angehalten, unser Anliegen gegenüber der Öffentlichkeit zu vertreten, diese aufzusuchen, um dort für unsere Aufgaben und Tätigkeiten zu werben. Nun kann man schlecht für eine JVA werben. Mitglieder sucht der Knast kaum. Wir können aber für unsere Arbeit werben und über unsere Arbeit berichten, um vorhandene Vorurteile abzubauen. Zum diesem Zweck begeben wir uns in die Welt und lassen uns von Gemeinden oder anderen Institutionen einladen. Eine spannende und zugleich schwierige Aufgabe. Oft dachte ich, woher beziehen unsere Mitbürger eigentlich ihre Ansichten? Wer verbreitet nur solchen Quatsch, wenn es um Fragen von Strafe und Haft, um Schuld und Sühne geht? Um Vergebung?

¹⁵⁷ See Annice Callahan, "Traditions of Spiritual Guidance: Karl Rahner's Insights for Spiritual Direction," *The Way*, 29/4 (October 1989): 341, 342, 347. For Callahan, Karl Rahner's theology speaks of "God as the mystery in human experience," of "mysticism of everyday faith," and of "surrender of the heart and love of neighbour as love of God."

often very spontaneous. If it got too boring, they yawned demonstratively and loudly. Conversely, people also laughed heartily and happily.¹⁵⁸

In “The Prison Pastorate,” Rahner does not really take into account the direct encounters and lively reactions of the prisoners. Dabrowski shows that one can draw insight and wisdom, if not a theological argument from these experiences (L3). After celebrating various church services, he noticed, e.g., that paedophile sex offenders often criticised him for his relaxed and humorous manner and for his liberal sermons. Life’s lesson from jail: Why they? “Well,” he explains, “for many years they had to show camouflage of righteousness and self-righteousness and a startling conservatism so as not to draw attention because of their inclinations.”¹⁵⁹ Due to such pastoral experiences in prison (L6) and subsequent insights, Dabrowski also makes a distinction that Rahner doesn’t (L1/4/5), namely that daily pastoral work and Sunday service are two different things:

I myself have noticed over the years that my daily work and Sunday service were two completely different sides of the coin. You had to strictly separate them. I have among other things seen from the example of Catholic colleagues that non-ordained theologians, i.e., pastoral workers, did an excellent pastoral job during the week. They were at least as qualified as the ordained priests who were flown in on Sundays only to celebrate the Eucharist.¹⁶⁰

Dabrowski has both experienced and witnessed the value of the “non-ordained theologians,” of “pastoral workers” and lay people who do “an excellent pastoral job” in prison and still the Catholic Church even today sends “ordained priests” to fly “in on Sundays only to celebrate the Eucharist”

¹⁵⁸ VVV: 152 [*my translation*]: Ich könnte jetzt sagen, dass der Gottesdienst eben keine zeitgemäße Veranstaltung mehr ist. Dann hätte ich eine fromme Minderheit gegen mich. Doch ich bleibe dabei, der Gefangene besucht den Gottesdienst, weil er Abwechslung und das Gefühl von Gemeinschaft sucht. Die Botschaft ist völlig uninteressant. Eine Predigt wurde an dem gemessen, ob etwas aus ihrer Wirklichkeit angesprochen wurde. Die Reaktionen vor Ort waren oft sehr spontan. Wurde es zu langweilig, gähnten sie schon mal demonstrativ und laut. Umgekehrt wurde aber auch herzlich und gerne gelacht.

¹⁵⁹ VVV: 152 [*my translation*]: Oft kritisierten mich pädophile Sexualstraftäter für meine lockere und humorvolle Art und meine doch alles in allem liberalen Predigten. Warum gerade sie? Nun, sie mussten über viele Jahre eine Tarnung der Rechtschaffenheit und Selbstgerechtigkeit sowie einen mich verblüffenden Konservatismus an den Tag legen, um nicht wegen ihrer Neigungen aufzufallen.

¹⁶⁰ VVV: 152 [*my translation*]: Ich selber habe mit den Jahren bemerkt, dass meine tägliche Arbeit und der sonntägliche Gottesdienst zwei völlig verschiedene Seiten der Medaille waren. Man musste sie strikt voneinander trennen. Ich habe das u.a. am Beispiel der katholischen Kollegen gesehen. Nicht ordinierte Theologen, also Pastoralreferenten, leisteten unter der Woche eine hervorragende seelsorgerische Arbeit. Sie waren mindestens ebenso qualifiziert wie die geweihten Priester, die sonntags nur für die Eucharistie “eingeflogen” wurden.

(L4/5). It becomes evident that the views expressed by Rahner reflecting the Catholic priesthood of the 1950s, have not gone away. Dabrowski's account shows, as this thesis argues, that greater pastoral appreciation is needed in today's prisons for the role that lay people as well as prisoners play as contributors in their own right.

Ordained ministers do not necessarily have more human talents or spiritual gifts than lay people in order to reach out to prisoners and touch their lives. Dabrowski speaks about some colleagues who happen to be very bad at preaching. He makes the point that despite their lack of charisma, he never noticed any difference in the number of those attending the church services in jail. On the whole, he remarks, "nobody has ever bothered about the content of a sermon or the content of prayers." He himself "'proclaimed' what fit into the theological stuff." Only in his Bible study group did he try to dive deeper and get into touch about the simple daily things of faith.¹⁶¹

Dabrowski assessed the role and effect of *theology in prison*, and asks the question whether theology is "a high-ranking academic science" or a "practical help in life, as Jesus probably understood it."¹⁶² This means, for him, that one needs to figure out what one 'gets' from believing or, better, what other people – prisoners – get from us if we believe (L1/L3). Dabrowski is convinced that there must be some pragmatic pastoral answer. Theologians often reject this, he states, especially in Germany there are academic theologians who say that one should not ask (L2).¹⁶³ He continues,

I do it nonetheless! Bearing in mind the fact that the Bible, although it speaks continuously of God, requires us to believe only in a few points: Waiting for Christ's return, that is, the appearance of the Messiah is one such point; or the resurrection of Jesus. Everything else can also be agreed to by a true humanist.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ VVV: 153: Bei den Kollegen – es gab auch sehr schlechte Prediger – habe ich nie einen Unterschied im Gottesdienstbesuch feststellen können. Im Großen und Ganzen hat nie jemand Anstoß am Inhalt einer Predigt oder am Inhalt der Gebete genommen. Was mir in den theologischen Kram passte, habe ich "verkündigt." Einzig und allein in meiner Bibelgruppe versuchte ich, über einfache Glaubensdinge miteinander ins Gespräch zu kommen.

¹⁶² VVV: 155: Also die Frage, ob die Theologie eine abgehobene akademische Wissenschaft sei oder praktische Lebenshilfe, wie Jesu sie wohl verstand.

¹⁶³ VVV: 155: Was hat man vom Glauben oder, besser, was haben andere von uns, wenn wir glauben? Es muss doch irgendeine pragmatische, abrechenbare Seite geben, die als Ergebnis unserer Frömmigkeit für uns und andere ins Auge springt. Theologen sagen oft, so darf man nicht fragen.

¹⁶⁴ VVV: 155 [*my translation*]: Ich tue es aber! Eingedenk der Tatsache, dass ja auch die Bibel, obwohl sie laufend von Gott spricht, nur in wenigen Punkten von uns wahren Glauben abverlangt. Das Warten auf die Wiederkunft Christi, also das Erscheinen des Messias, ist so ein Punkt. Oder die Auferstehung Jesu. Alles andere lässt sich auch für einen wahren Humanisten gut unterschreiben.

“Not stealing, killing, not breaking marriage or lying, these are fundamental humanistic values,” he argues. “People have acquired these over millennia in order to survive well. But such values have very little to do with God.”¹⁶⁵ Next, Dabrowski seems to answer his own question and argues that theology can be of practical value. Pastoral care in prisons, he believes, must embrace “its purest form.” If we emphasise the value and agency of human beings in prison, we do more than just social work, and more than pastoral care in a secular sense. It is prison ministry: a pastoral chance to share the love of God. He claims,

The fact that the Bible says that we should feed the hungry and visit the sick and prisoners does not in itself contain anything theological. This is humanism in its purest form and certainly much older than the texts in the Bible. The fact that so many people believe in another God and are no less successful in life than those who do not believe in a God should make us more thoughtful in devaluing nonconformists. Added to this is the fact that every person generally believes only what father and mother believed, which in turn often has something to do with the place of birth. I am a Berliner and Evangelical. Of course, the same person in Ankara would be a devout Muslim. Or, in Tibet born a fervent Buddhist.¹⁶⁶

3.2.2.6. *Revisiting Matthew 25: “Visit Prisoners ... and to Set Them Free”*

Rather than developing theological concepts (L1), Dabrowski favours a strong pastoral focus on the concrete issues and the desires of the incarcerated (L3). They are in need if not in danger. He elucidates that in the German-speaking world, like anywhere else, nobody in society is really waiting for a (ex-) criminal once he is released.¹⁶⁷ Dabrowski argues therefore that “the day of release” (*Tag der Entlassung*) is a serious matter of concern. The moment of the prisoner’s freedom may have

¹⁶⁵ VVV: 155 [*my translation*]: Nicht zu stehlen, zu töten, nicht die Ehe zu brechen oder zu lügen, sind humanistische Grundwerte, die sich Menschen über Jahrtausende angeeignet haben, um gut zu überleben. Sie haben aber mit Gott herzlich wenig zu tun.

¹⁶⁶ VVV: 155 [*my translation*]: Auch die Tatsache, dass in der Bibel steht, wir sollten Hungrige ernähren sowie Kranke und Gefangene besuchen, trägt an sich nichts Theologisches in sich. Das ist Humanismus in Reinform und mit Sicherheit viel älter als die Texte der Bibel. Die Tatsache, dass so viele Menschen an einen anderen Gott glauben und nicht weniger erfolgreich im Leben dastehen wie die, die an keinen Gott glauben, sollte uns in der Abwertung Andersdenkender nachdenklicher werden lassen. Hinzu kommt noch die Tatsache, dass jeder Mensch in der Regel nur das glaubt, was Vater und Mutter geglaubt haben, was wiederum häufig auch etwas mit dem Geburtsort zu tun hat. Ich bin ein Berliner und evangelisch. Natürlich wäre dieselbe Person in Ankara ein gläubiger Moslem. Oder, im Tibet geboren, ein glühender Buddhist.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Eckart Wragge (ed.), *In Deutschland freut sich niemand, dass du lebst: Inhaftierte zu Glauben, Liebe und Hoffnung* (Berlin: Wichern 2014). Frieder Dünkel, et al. (eds.), *Kriminalität, Kriminalpolitik, strafrechtliche Sanktionspraxis und Gefangenenraten im europäischen Vergleich* (Mönchengladbach: Forum Vlg Godesberg, 2010).

come but he or she may prefer to ignore the day.¹⁶⁸ For many prisoners this phase of incarceration is when sheer panic arises: they will now be “uprooted” (*entwurzelt*) and “taken out” (*herausgerissen*) again. They have to leave their familiar surroundings and comfort-zones, exchanging them for the complete unknown that is awaiting them. The world outside too has changed significantly. Dabrowski writes,

I have had to use a lot of energy to motivate so-called “long-time prisoners” – namely, prisoners with a 10-year sentence of imprisonment or more – to accept a relaxing of restrictions as pre-discharge measures. They simply did not want to leave their sheltered biotope, because every citizen of this country knows one thing: as a disabled person, a foreigner or a prisoner, nobody will embrace you with open arms into our society. Sociologists therefore repeatedly emphasise that fear of other people, of the stranger, and therefore also fear of criminals, is genetically predisposed in humans. What used to serve our protection or our survival has proved to be a counterproductive element for a successful rehabilitation.¹⁶⁹

Dabrowski is aware that Christian pastoral care of detainees, as mentioned in “The Prison Pastorate,” has been traditionally based on Matthew 25. Theologians like Karl Rahner, who discuss prison ministry in light of this passage, consider visiting inmates as one of the seven works of charity. The passage emphasises the Old Testament’s invitation to care for the orphan, the widow, and the stranger by providing water and food, shelter and clothing, and remedial care. For Rahner, this constitutes the chaplain’s one goal: “to find Christ.” Problematic for Dabrowski is the fact that Matthew 25 refers primarily to hospitality and care. It fails to address the underlying issues of today, such as mass

¹⁶⁸ Peter Asprion, for example, reports in his book on the difficult road back to freedom for people who have been in custody for years. Peter Asprion, *Gefährliche Freiheit? Das Ende der Sicherheitsverwahrung* (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 2012).

¹⁶⁹ VVV: 216 [*my translation*]: Ich habe viel Energie darauf verwenden müssen, sogenannte “Langstrafer” zu motivieren, also Inhaftierte mit einer etwa 10-jährigen Freiheitstrafe dazu zu bringen, Vollzugs-lockerungen als entlassungsvorbereitende Maßnahmen zu akzeptieren. Sie wollten einfach nicht mehr raus aus ihrem geschützten Biotop, denn eines weiß jeder Bürger dieses Landes: Als Behinderter, Ausländer oder Inhaftierter nimmt dich niemand mehr mit offenen Armen in unsere Gesellschaft auf. Soziologen betonen deshalb immer wieder, dass die Furcht vor den anderen Menschen, den Fremden, also auch die Furcht vor Kriminellen, beim Menschen genetisch prädisponiert ist. Was früher unserem Schutz oder unserem Überleben dienlich war, erweist sich heute als kontraproduktives Element für eine gelungene Resozialisierung. Cf. Tobias Brandner, “Gefängnisseelsorge und Rehabilitation,” *Wege zum Menschen* 56 (2002): 391-406. Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *Prison Religion: Faith-Based Reform and the Constitution* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

incarceration, and the resocialisation of prisoners and their re-entry into society.¹⁷⁰

Dabrowski's outlook augments "The Prison Pastorate" (L1/2). He gives an alternative interpretation of the traditional seven works of mercy (*sieben Werke der Barmherzigkeit*).¹⁷¹ "Consistently inferred" (*konsequent geschlussfolgert*), Dabrowski argues, essentially it should be: "visit prisoners ... and set them free" (*Gefangene besuchen... und befreien*). This means to empower and liberate them. For only "visiting a hungry or thirsty person" as suggested in Rahner's meditation on finding Christ, would be "the height of tastelessness" (*Gipfel der Geschmacklosigkeit*), Dabrowski believes.

He is convinced that this is not what it says. In the Bible we simply read: "to visit" (*besuchen*). In contrast to "The Prison Pastorate" (L1), for Dabrowski prisoners should be visited 'purpose-free' (*zweckfrei*), that is to say, without any agenda or ulterior motive!¹⁷² Only then will we find Christ! Prisoners should neither be saved nor misused for a chaplain's own purposes, which is the danger we find in Rahner's theoretical approach (L1/5). By focusing solely on our theology of "Christ" and the finding of "ourselves" in the prisoner, one could easily forget that to visit is to count on the person as an Other, equally deserving of respect as ourselves. Rahner's meditation arguably lacks this insight of mutuality, that is, an eye-level contact between the priest and the prisoner (L1/3).

It does not matter in pastoral terms, Dabrowski argues, whether you are ill, a stranger or being imprisoned. There is a human being in need, full stop. Something Rahner in principle would agree with. He or she asks us to voluntarily accompany him/her a short while on the path of life.

¹⁷⁰ Barkman, "Towards a Missional Theology of Prison Ministry," 39. "Resocialisation" has a central meaning in the German prison system and is integrated by law. It is understood as a priority as well as an implementation goal. In the resocialization process, the profession of social and chaplaincy work with its specific field of action to help people behind bars play a significant role. Cf. Marie-Therese Reichenbach, and Sabine Bruns, (eds.), *Resozialisierung neu denken: Wiedereingliederung straffällig gewordener Menschen als gesamtgesellschaftliche Aufgabe* (Freiburg: Lambertus, 2018). Stefan Altrogge, *Auftrag Resozialisierung. Alltag im Strafvollzug* (Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2017). Frieder Dünkel, "Vollzugslockerungen und offener Vollzug – die Bedeutung entlassungsvorbereitender Maßnahmen für die Wiedereingliederung," *Forum Strafvollzug – Zeitschrift für Strafvollzug und Straffälligenhilfe* 58, 4 (2009): 192-196. Markus Höbel, *Was kommt nach dem "Drinnein": Gefangeneenseelsorge und Strafvollzug zwischen Restriktion und Resozialisierung* (St. Ottilien: EOS-Verlag, 2009).

¹⁷¹ VVV: 58. The seven "corporal works of mercy" include: (1) to feed the hungry; (2) to give water to the thirsty; (3) to clothe the naked; (4) to shelter the homeless; (5) to visit the sick; (6) to visit the imprisoned, or ransom the captive; and (7) to bury the dead. For "justice" and "mercy" see the Dutch publication of Ryan van Eijk, Gerard Loman, Theo de Wit (eds.), *For Justice and Mercy: International Reflections on Prison Chaplaincy*, Part 8 of Publicatiereeks Van Het Centrum Voor Justitiepastoraat Series (Oisterwijk: Wolf Legal Publishers, 2016).

¹⁷² VVV: 58 [*my translation*]: Konsequent geschlussfolgert, müsste es eigentlich heißen: Gefangene besuchen... und befreien. Denn einen hungrigen oder durstigen Menschen nur zu besuchen, wäre ja der Gipfel der Geschmacklosigkeit. So heißt es aber nicht! In der Bibel steht einfach nur "besuchen." Gefangene werden besucht, und zwar zweckfrei!

Dabrowski, however, emphasises the importance of seeing first the human person, in contrast to Rahner, who first wants to see and find “God” (L1/2). The prisoner, for Dabrowski, is the image of God: the *imago Dei* shaped by various biographical circumstances. As human persons, he argues, we are not much different from one another. If the inmates want, Dabrowski writes, they can tell the chaplain their own personal story, the circumstances of their crimes. This will distinguish each individual from all the others.¹⁷³

3.2.3. *Christine Hubka: Encounters (Begegnungen) in Prison*

3.2.3.1. *Critique – Rahner's lack of Human Encounter*

Karl Rahner's reflections in “The Prison Pastorate” are rooted in his theological anthropology but do not discuss the human role of interpersonal encounters in prison as a possible place where faith can emerge and a healing ministry can take shape/be developed (L1/3). This is essential, however, for prison chaplaincy in the 21st Century. To develop our thesis towards a theology of empowerment in Chapter Five, we must acknowledge the need of prisoners for human encounter in isolated confinement. The Austrian prison chaplain Dr. Christine Hubka, who has ministered to prisoners in der Justizanstalt Wien-Josefstadt, argues that prison ministry today is all about meeting and human relationship (L4). In her book *Die Haftfalle* (“Prison-Trap”),¹⁷⁴ Hubka expresses this need for human encounter with the incarcerated. For her, there are no hopeless cases, as she helps the inmates to find inner strength and the courage to look forward. As a female prison minister, Hubka tries with small gestures and friendliness to make the day of the prisoners a little brighter. Her conversations have a purpose: “to prepare a way” and “make straight the paths” (Mt 3:3). Furthermore, she brings people who have been hostile to one another, in her ministry together again. In this respect, Hubka has indirectly implemented Rahner's theology, surpassed it, and adapted his thought for the twenty-first century.

¹⁷³ VVV: 58-59: Sie sollen weder gerettet noch missioniert oder für eigene Zwecke missbraucht werden. Besuchen heißt, sich auf den Menschen als Gegenüber einzustellen und nicht auf seine Persönlichkeit als Straftäter. Rein seelsorgerisch spielt es also keine Rolle, ob er krank, fremd oder inhaftiert ist. Da ist ein Mensch in Not, und er bittet mich, ihn freiwillig ein Stück weit zu begleiten. Ich habe also den Menschen zu sehen, so wie er, durch viele biografische Umstände geprägt, vor mir steht. Bis zu diesem Punkt unterscheidet uns nicht viel voneinander. Wenn er möchte, berichtet er mir von den Umständen seiner Tat, dem Punkt, der uns aller Wahrscheinlichkeit nach unterscheidet.

¹⁷⁴ Christine Hubka, *Die Haftfalle: Begegnungen im Gefängnis* (Wien: Edition Steinbauer, 2013). Henceforth, the abbreviation used will be: “HBG.” Cf. *Ibidem*, “Die heilsame Wirkung von gelebter Rechtfertigungslehre,” *Wege zum Menschen: Monatsschrift für Seelsorge und Beratung, heilendes und soziales Handeln* 69, Number 3 (2017): 239-250.

3.2.3.2. *Begegnung pur: Prison Chaplaincy and its Expressions*

Karl Raher in “The Prison Pastorate” speaks of visiting prisoners but seems to reflect little about real encounters in jail.¹⁷⁵ Rahner tends to neglect the many possible expressions of chaplaincy that one could develop in prison environments (L3/4/5). Due to her ministry experiences with the incarcerated, Hubka helps us to become aware of such pastoral expressions, and of this deeper interpersonal level in prison ministry. “Pastoral care in prison is pure encounter,”¹⁷⁶ Hubka states. To find ourselves and to discover our shared human dignity, she believes, we must risk true meeting (*Begegnung*).¹⁷⁷ Chaplaincy work with the incarcerated, for her, is “anything but a one-way street” (*alles andere als eine Einbahnstrasse*), which is the potential danger in Rahner’s more ‘priestly approach.’ Hubka explains what she means by *Begegnung pur*:

The relationship between the prisoners and me as a chaplain is marked by a clear wilfulness: I come voluntarily into the prison, to a particular section, to this or that prisoner. They volunteer to share with me as much or as little as they want. They talk about anything that’s on their minds and hearts. I do not have to write any reports, assessments or diagnoses when I visit someone. I do not prepare nor do I have any specific topic in mind but I am open to any theme the inmate suggests. My opinion about a person does not affect his/her trial or the decision whether the person is to be released on parole or should “serve” his sentence until the last day.¹⁷⁸

In relation to Hubka’s ministry approach, it is worth mentioning here the Jewish thinker Martin

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Klaus Walch, *Mauern überspringen: Erfahrungen im Besuchsdienst bei Strafgefangenen* (Jestetten: Miriam, 2009).

¹⁷⁶ *HBG*: 14: Seelsorge im Gefängnis ist Begegnung pur. Cf. Klaus Hoffmann, “Der Strafgefangene als Subjekt der Behandlung – zum Spannungsverhältnis von Menschenwürde und Vollzugsziel,” *Zeitschrift für Strafvollzug und Straffälligenhilfe* 52 (2003): 207-212.

¹⁷⁷ For a careful analysis of pastoral conversations in prison see the study of Dr. Ralf Günther. He argues that every pastoral conversation takes place on a communicative threshold. People from often different social environments and biographical contexts meet each other in prison and have to interact with these varieties of worlds. In the prison pastorate this is particularly hard but an experience that has to be mastered by both sides. Ralf Günther, *Seelsorge auf der Schwelle: eine linguistische Analyse von Seelsorgegesprächen im Gefängnis* (Arbeiten zur Pastoraltheologie; 45) (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005).

¹⁷⁸ *HBG*: 14 [*my translation*]: Die Beziehung zwischen den Gefängenen und mir als Seelsorgerin wird von einer klaren Freiwilligkeit geprägt: Ich komme freiwillig ins Haus, auf die Abteilung, zu diesem oder jener Gefangenen. Sie sprechen freiwillig mit mir, so viel oder so wenig sie wollen. Sie reden von dem, was ihnen gerade im Sinn und auf dem Herzen liegt. Ich habe kein Thema, wenn ich jemanden besuche, sondern lasse mich auf sein Thema ein. Ich verfasse keine Berichte, Gutachten und Diagnosen. Meine Meinung über einen Menschen beeinflusst weder sein Gerichtsverfahren noch die Entscheidung, ob er auf Bewährung entlassen wird oder seine Strafe bis zum letzten Tag “absitzen” muss.

Buber (1878-1965), who lived at the same time as Rahner when he wrote “The Prison Pastorate.” Buber’s idea of ‘I-Thou’ moments in relationships seems to be what Hubka is getting at in her concept of ‘pure encounter.’¹⁷⁹ It shows the underlying philosophical basis of her theological thinking in the prison context. For Hubka, to find ourselves in the incarcerated, we must be able to open our hearts to the person in front of us with “the primary word *I-Thou*.”¹⁸⁰ This form of prison ministry is based on compassion, as was Rahner’s but with another focus and activities in mind: to pay attention to the prisoners’ needs and interests and providing community care; to ensure that prisoners as well as prison staff are aware of one another.

Buber felt that humans have two different ways of engaging the [prison] world (*die Welt ist dem Menschen zwiefältig*).¹⁸¹ Hubka shows in a Buberian way to respond to Rahner by speaking “the primary word I-Thou” with her whole being. She is saying that to empower prisoners means to be “open to any theme *the inmate* suggests.”¹⁸² This means, being able to put one’s own ‘priestly’ and ‘pastoral’ agenda aside for the ‘encounter’ (*Begegnung*): the mode of *I-Thou*. This means that the *I* and the *Thou* in the encounter ‘chaplain-prisoner’ are transformed by the relationship (*Beziehung*) between them.¹⁸³

To be effective in prison ministry today, one must speak the primary words (*Grundworte*) *I-Thou*, that is, “the truth” to the prisoners, and do more than what is suggested in “The Prison Pastorate,” namely to *empower* the incarcerated by getting creatively involved in their lives for purpose of easing their pain. At the same time, such an approach to ministry demands of any minister the courage to appropriately communicate him-/herself to *the Other*. This means allowing for a certain degree of vulnerability in the presence of a person who has a criminal record and who may have

¹⁷⁹ In his main work *Ich und Du* (E.T., *I and Thou*; D.T., *Ik en Jij*) Buber carefully evokes and articulates two fundamentally different orientations a person [prisoner/chaplain] enters into – on the one hand, relating to another person as another person, which he terms *Ich-Du* (“I-Thou,” “Ik-Jij”), and on the other hand, dealing with a thing or a person as an object, which he terms *Ich-Es* (“I-It,” “Ik-Het”). *I-Thou* orientations are reciprocal relationships of dialogue between (*zwischen*) one subject (*Ich*, “I,” “Ik”) and another (*Du*, “Thou,” “Jij”). See Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, tr. Ronald Gregor Smith (London & New York, NY: T. & T. Clark; a Continuum Imprint, 2003), 15. *Ibidem*, *Ich und Du*, Nachwort von Bernhard Casper (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1995), 3.

¹⁸⁰ Note: The German prison context tends to be very strict, formal and reserved when it comes to the use of language. German has both a formal and a familiar form of “you” (*Sie* and *Du*). The formal *Sie* is the only form allowed in the justice system to address the prisoners, as opposed to the familiar *Du* which is used for family and relatives, for close friends, young children, pets, and for God. So in a system where the *Ich-Du* literally cannot be spoken, the *I-Thou* must become a spiritual attitude and/or an inner conviction as Christine Hubka’s argument shows.

¹⁸¹ Coetsier, *The Existential Philosophy of Etty Hillesum*, 178.

¹⁸² HBG: 14

¹⁸³ Coetsier, *The Existential Philosophy of Etty Hillesum*, 179.

violent or dangerous tendencies. As such, chaplains have to take calculated risks in order to relate and to be human.

Hubka gives a few practical guidelines that could support prison ministers in their concrete meetings with inmates. Where Rahner's theology in "The Prison Pastorate" tends to be fairly elaborate in wording (L1/2/5), Hubka argues that pastoral care in prison should not be fussy (*Seelsorge betüttelt nicht*).¹⁸⁴ Prison chaplaincy in the custodial setting, she believes, should neither be trivial in its relation to the inmates, nor should ministers be afraid of friction (*Seelsorge scheut sich nicht vor Reibung*).¹⁸⁵ The grounding attitude should be one of a movement toward healing and comfort: a deep love of humanity, with a warm heart for the ones who are locked away.¹⁸⁶

The men and women who dedicate themselves to pastoral ministry, Hubka believes, should open themselves to a "pure encounter" with others (*Seelsorge ist Begegnung pur*).¹⁸⁷ This means, instead of being the one ('the priest') who gives out the sacraments (L1/5), modern-day ministers, she thinks, must learn to gain the trust of the inmates with their own person and humanity; with their emotional and authentic reactions (*Seelsorge ist mit emotionalen und authentischen Reaktionen vertrauen gewinnen*).¹⁸⁸ In her book *Die Haftfalle: Begegnungen im Gefängnis*, Hubka explains that every now and then she speaks with the prisoners about her own life:

Sometimes I also talk about myself. One day, I visited the prison with a black and blue face but neither focused on nor made my injuries an issue. Everyone I talked to that day, however, wanted to know the cause of my injuries. It was a bicycle accident. I did not experience this questioning by the inmates as a matter of courtesy, but as a genuine interest in my well-being. A year later, a prisoner who now lives in another prison wrote me on my birthday: "Now you are a year older, take care of yourself whilst cycling."¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ HBG: 180.

¹⁸⁵ HBG: 180.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Petrus Ceelen, *Hinter Gittern* (Gersthofen: Mühlberger, 1991); "Strafe, Schuld, Reue, Sühne, Versöhnung," *Diaconia Christi* 54, Number 1 (2019): 65-70.

¹⁸⁷ HBG: 14-15, 179.

¹⁸⁸ HBG: 180.

¹⁸⁹ HBG: 14-15 [my translation]: Zuweilen erzähle ich auch von mir. Als ich eines Tages blau im Gesicht auf Besuch kam, habe nicht ich meine Blessuren zum Thema gemacht. Alle, mit denen ich an diesem Tag sprach, wollten die Herkunft meiner Verletzungen, es war ein Fahrradunfall, genau wissen. Dieses Nachfragen empfand ich nicht als reine Höflichkeit, sondern als echtes Interesse an meinem Wohlergehen. Noch ein Jahr danach schrieb mir ein Gefangener, der inzwischen in einem anderen Gefängnis lebt, zu meinem Geburtstag: "Passen Sie auf sich auf, wenn Sie im neuen Lebensjahr mit dem Rad unterwegs sind."

Although human exchange with convicts tends to be seen as very critical by the justice department, in the sense of ‘getting too close,’ Hubka is able to be in relationship with a variety of persons who are incarcerated. Moreover, she finds herself in the inmates, something Rahner too recognised but in a more intellectual way. For her, it is the direct conversation and the “genuine interest” that prisoners have shown in her “well-being” that draws her into a relationship of genuine mutual concern. Prisoners show a real concern for her wellbeing: An interest and care that she receives in return for her own generosity and openness to them. As such “pastoral care in prison” can at various moments become significant and alive through “pure encounter.”

Hubka's words *Begegnung pur* respond to Karl Rahner's theology of prison ministry. When we desire to discover the hidden truth of our own situation, as Rahner asserts, we have to risk “encounter” (*Begegnung*) as Hubka understands it: that is, an encounter with our fellow human beings; an encounter with God – read Christ – and not forgetting an encounter and confrontation with ourselves. The latter means, for Rahner too, that we finally become aware of our own humanity and mortality. This awareness can show us that compassion in prison, as lived by Hubka, is the human bond that holds us on course: compassion gives *witness* to Christ's empowering presence among the incarcerated. Similar to Rahner, Hubka tries to unravel something of this divine mystery of human encounter in an environment that gives little hope. The prison circumstances today are tough and disheartening,¹⁹⁰ and yet, as Menke puts it: “Then we “whisper, sing, stand in the way, hold out, ask questions, offer our help, contradict, and are ready for dialogue! We hope anyway, and as pastors we say clearly: We stand for reconciliation!”¹⁹¹

3.2.3.3. *Human Beings in Prison and the Wider Political Community*

For Christine Hubka, the prison minister (*der Seelsorger*) is in the first place “a human being” (*ein Mensch*), who also shows his or her own personal opinions and emotions in the encounter with inmates. The priestly role or even the position as female chaplain within the justice system emerges as only secondary. Nonetheless, chaplains should be an authority who respects others because of

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Anais Denigot, “Gefängnis: ‘ein unerfüllbares Märchen?’” *BAG-S: Informationsdienst Straffälligenhilfe* 26, Heft 2 (1918): 14-19.

¹⁹¹ Georg-D. Menke (ed.), *Denen, die im Elend leben – seine Liebe*. Eindrücke aus dem Gefängnis, Band 4 – Zum 125 jährigen Jubiläum. *Denkschrift*. Zum 125 jährigen Jubiläum der katholischen Seelsorge an der JVA Butzbach (JVA Butzbach, 2019), 16: [...] Dann flüstern, singen, stehen [wir] im Weg, halten aus, fragen nach, bieten unsere Hilfe an, widersprechen, sind zum Dialog bereit, hoffen trotzdem, sagen wir Seelsorger deutlich: Wir stehen für Versöhnung! [*my translation*] Henceforth, the abbreviation used will be: “*DESL*.”

their unique position in this particular state institution. Accordingly, he or she may say things that other professionals, as Dabrowski also pointed out, cannot say because of their distinctive role within the prison system. Moreover, the prison minister has an absolute duty not to disclose anything personal that they learn from inmates during the course of their conversations (*Schweigepflicht*).¹⁹²

Similarly to Tobias Brandner and Rainer Dabrowski, Christine Hubka believes that it is vital “to represent the prison community within the wider political community” (*Repräsentation hinein in die politische Gemeinde*), so as to build bridges,¹⁹³ something Rahner did not address in “The Prison Pastorate” (L4/6). He didn’t see prison chaplaincy in terms of public representation. For Hubka, the prison minister is someone who together with the community and with the detainees is “looking for a better future” (*Zukunftsperspektive*).¹⁹⁴ She is aware of the role of Christian faith (L2/5) but more specific than Rahner when it comes to *caritas*: The bringing of calendars, tobacco and Bibles (*der begehrte Gegenstände*) to inmates is as much of a pastoral service to them, as organising “face-to-face meetings” (*Begegnungen von Angesicht zu Angesicht*) with groups of people from outside, and helping prisoners in their processes of “reconciliation” (*Versöhnung*).¹⁹⁵

The wider political community, the media and local citizens can directly contact the chaplain in prison either by mail or telephone.¹⁹⁶ Most ministers in the German-speaking world have an office in prison. They can write letters to both the prisoner inside as well as to the ex-prisoner outside.¹⁹⁷ They are professionals and yet personal, Hubka writes. She speaks about her own feelings in prison ministry: Of the moments of departure, for instance, where she says goodbye to her “dialogue

¹⁹² HBG: 176. Cf. Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (ed.), *Zeugenaussage Zeugnisverweigerungsrecht und Schweigepflicht: Ein juristischer Leitfaden für Seelsorger zum Schutz des Beicht- und Seelsorgegeheimnisses* (Arbeitshilfen; 222) (Bonn, 2008).

¹⁹³ HBG: 176. Cf. Uwe Hoffmann, “Brücke zwischen drinnen und draußen. Seelsorge im Gefängnis,” *Nachrichten der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Bayern* 68, Number 8 (2013): 243-245.

¹⁹⁴ HBG: 174.

¹⁹⁵ HBG: 147, 160-161, 169. “Reconciliation” (*Versöhnung*) is of great importance in the German prison context. The ethical position, for instance, of “the Catholic Federal Working Group” (*Katholische Bundes-Arbeitsgemeinschaft Straffälligenhilfe*) in Germany on criminal aid integration is: “integration” instead of “exclusion,” “reconciliation” instead of “punishment.” Lydia Halbhuber-Gassner, and Barbara Kappenberg (eds.), *Integration statt Ausgrenzung: 90 Jahre Katholische Bundes-Arbeitsgemeinschaft: Straffälligenhilfe gestern, heute, morgen* (Freiburg, Lambertus, 2017). Cf. the diaries and writings of Franz Stock, a pioneer of reconciliation. In the Wehrmacht prisons, the pastor of the German community in Paris stood by the French prisoners and accompanied those sentenced to death to execution. His memoirs are a unique document of Franco-German history and an important contribution to a Europe of reconciliation and humanity. Franz Stock, *Wegbereiter der Versöhnung: Tagebücher und Schriften*, edited by Jean-Pierre Guérend, tr. Andreas Förster (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 2017).

¹⁹⁶ VVV: 29-30. KGH: 13-14.

¹⁹⁷ HBG: 60, 63.

partner” (*Gesprächspartner*), a farewell to another human being, who is being dismissed.¹⁹⁸

Prison chaplains, she believes, can very much use their skills; their languages and communication talents,¹⁹⁹ their creativity and learned knowledge, to help people behind bars to get in touch with themselves and with others.²⁰⁰ Both inmates and prison staff may need the chaplain's language skills, for example, to assist with concrete “translation issues” (*Übersetzungsprobleme*).²⁰¹ What is more, chaplains can raise awareness regarding the kind of language that is used with the inmates and about general verbal speech in custodial situations.²⁰² Language can break people as well as build them up. The latter is preferable since it is not only the prison wall that imprisons people; it is our attitude and the words we use.

3.2.3.4. *Offering a Framework and Advocating the Creativity and Spirituality of the Prisoners*

Prison ministers, according to Hubka, are not only there to celebrate and worship in church (*Gottesdienste*) and to reach prisoners with words, as Rahner tends to suggest (L5).²⁰³ A minister acts as a “guide” (*der Begleiter*) and is there *present* for the prisoners and for the staff as “a dialogue partner” (*Gesprächspartner*). On a regular basis ministers speak with the inmates, and when needed, with their families and children.²⁰⁴ Rahner neglected this relational and practical aspect in his conceptual views on the prison pastorate. With telephone calls and special visits, for instance, chaplains can organise a direct contact with relations and friends.²⁰⁵ They provide “consolation” (*Trost*) in times of grief and offer “a possible framework” (*Rahmen des Trauerns*), where inmates can

¹⁹⁸ HBG: 166.

¹⁹⁹ For pastoral communication cf. Stefan Gärtner, “Fremdheit und Differenz. Pastorale Kommunikation in der Spätmoderne am Beispiel der Gefängnisseelsorge,” *Theologie und Glaube* 105, Number 1 (2015): 20-34; “Pastoraltheologische Überlegungen zur Identität von SeelsorgerInnen im Gefängnis,” *Mitteilungen*, Number 1 (2010): 18-28.

²⁰⁰ For the ‘communicative cosmos’ of prisoners, cf. Bertram Scheufele et al., *Der kommunikative Kosmos von Gefangenen: Eine sozialkonstruktivistische Studie zum Strafvollzug in Baden-Württemberg* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2019). Scheufele explores the kind of ideas prisoners have of the communicative cosmos in prison.

²⁰¹ HBG: 162.

²⁰² HBG: 158. For “the language use in prisons” see the study of Andrea Mayr, *Prison Discourse: Language as a Means of Control and Resistance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). Andrea Mayr's research “clarifies the role that conversational analysis can have within a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective.” Her study gives “a detailed linguistic analysis of the language use of prison officers and prisoners involved in a prison based course.” The shifting power relations of control and resistance in prison institutions are made clear.

²⁰³ HBG: 121-122.

²⁰⁴ HBG: 140-143.

²⁰⁵ HBG: 130.

mourn for their losses and deal with their bereavement.²⁰⁶

In contrast to Rahner's theological focus on "the role" (*Amt*) of the pastor, Hubka emphasises the creative potential of ministry as "activity" (*Tätigkeit*) and meeting one another in the presence of God. The prison chaplain today, who can also be a woman, may inspire the prisoner to be creative and make a personal contribution, for example, to present a poem or a drawing in church, or to join the pastors in their latest project (*bei einer Seelsorge-Aktion*).²⁰⁷ In this way, the poem, "It has become quiet around me" (*Es ist ruhig um mich geworden*) both illustrates the inmate's creative expression as well as the prisoner's deep human longing for personal encounter in prisons:

I don't sing in the cell.
Whistles are also far away.
Because I'm not that happy any more.
I can hear the birds chirping.
The sun is shining outside,
but only electric light in here.
In all kinds of ways, noises fill the old building.
They make me mute. I don't like to interpret them.
Everyone is on his own, behind these iron doors.
Me too.²⁰⁸

Because "everyone is on his own, behind these iron doors," Hubka wants to empower through 'Encounter.' Where Rahner in "The Prison Pastorate" endorses the male spirituality of "splendour and grace in the calling of a priest,"²⁰⁹ Hubka focuses on promoting the individual spirituality and creative talents of the prisoners (*die Spiritualität der Gefangenen*).²¹⁰ The prison minister, she holds,

²⁰⁶ HBG: 108-110.

²⁰⁷ HBG: 118.

²⁰⁸ DESL: 9 [my translation]: Es ist ruhig um mich geworden. Ich singe nicht in der Zelle. Auch Pfeifen liegt mir fern. Denn so vergnügt bin ich nicht mehr. Ich höre die Vögel zwitschern. Die Sonne scheint draußen, aber hier drinnen nur elektrisches Licht. / In verschiedenster Art erfüllen Geräusche das alte Gebäude. Sie machen mich stumm. Ich mag sie nicht deuten. Hinter den Eisentüren bleibt jeder für sich. Auch ich [...] F.D., Gefangener.

²⁰⁹ MG, 3: 97. SW, 16: 225. SG, 463.

²¹⁰ HBG: 114. For the "role of religion and spirituality in desistance from crime and disengagement from gangs," see Ross Deuchar, *Gangs and Spirituality: Global Perspectives* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). Deuchar's research offers "unique empirical findings about the role that religion and spirituality can play in enabling some male gang members and offenders to transition into a new social sphere characterised by the presence of substitute forms of brotherhood and trust, and alternative forms of masculine status." The study presents "critical insights into the potential

should help to ensure the right of the prisoners to be human, to be creative and to practise religion in jail (*Religionsausübung zu gewährleisten*).²¹¹

Prisoners in their suffering especially crave for expression, for *Begegnung pur* and for symbols of meaning. They seek unassuming conversations where they are humanly accepted and treated with respect. As humans with broken lives, they yearn for freedom, and seek future perspectives. They desire to be understood, accepted and cared for. They love to talk. In contrast to Rahner, Hubka demonstrates that prison ministers can play a significant spiritual role in these human encounters, simply by realising that

[d]etainees bring their own, sometimes very private and unusual forms of spirituality into prison and to the church services. Their life stories, their backgrounds, their experiences with others shaped their personal beliefs, and formed their faith. In this, they are the same as and do not much differ from Church-goers “outside.”²¹²

“Finding ourselves in prisoners” through pastoral service, is as indispensable for Hubka as it is for Rahner. Hubka is convinced, however, that human beings who are incarcerated are in need of creativity and of spiritual participation. Prison ministers have a role to understand and uphold this basic human aspiration of the prisoner. As *Seelsorger* (‘caretaker of souls’), for her, this includes seeing the actual circumstances of the inmates as well as serving concretely the truth of dignity and human rights within the justice system.²¹³ She is clear: the prison chaplain should feed the spiritually

relationship between religious and spiritual participation and the emergence of coping strategies to deal with the ‘stigmas’ that gang masculinity leaves behind.” Cf. Mitchel P. Roth, *Power on the Inside: A Global History of Prison Gangs* (London: Reaktion Books, 2020).

²¹¹ *HBG*: 106-107.

²¹² *HBG*: 114 [*my translation*]: Inhaftierte bringen ihre ganz eigene, zuweilen auch eigentümliche Spiritualität mit ins Gefängnis und in die Gottesdienste. Ihre Lebensgeschichte, ihre Herkunft, ihre Erfahrungen mit anderen prägten ihren Glauben. Hierin sind sie den Besuchern der Gottesdienste “draußen” völlig gleich.

²¹³ Regarding human rights (*die Menschenrechte*) in the German context, it goes without saying that a minimum of human rights standards must be respected for prisoners and other people who are deprived of their liberty by state decision. This is not just about protecting against torture or ill-treatment, but generally about ensuring decent human conduct towards inmates in various institutional settings. Prison scandals, media reports on violence among prisoners and empirical research show, however, that human rights are not always maintained in everyday prison life. Cf. Axel Dessecker and Rainer Dopp (eds.), *Menschenrechte hinter Gittern* (Kriminologie und Praxis; 70) (Wiesbaden: Kriminologische Zentralstelle, 2016). Jochen Bung, “Strafvollzug unter Bedingungen der Menschenrechte.” *Kriminalpädagogische Praxis* 40, Heft 48 (2012): 28-30. Kirstin Drenkhahn, “Langstrafenvollzug und Menschenrechte. Erste Ergebnisse eines internationalen Forschungsprojektes,” *Neue Kriminalpolitik* 21, Number 1 (2009): 8-13. Christine M. Graebisch and Sven-Uwe Burkhardt, *Vergleichsweise menschlich? Ambulante Sanktionen als Alternative zur Freiheitsentziehung aus europäischer Perspektive* (Schriftenreihe des Strafvollzugsarchivs) (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2015).

starving and those hungry for education (*Bildungshungrige*).²¹⁴ In the 2020 study *Degrees of Freedom: Prison Education at the Open University* this need for education that Hubka detected in prisons is being confirmed by the following testimony of “a life sentence prisoner”: “The meaning and hope I derived from my study enabled the imagination of a new me, a *good* me... [it] played a significant role in the emotional transformation towards this new me... and I was required, by this environment to unpack and come to terms with the psychology of my crimes.”²¹⁵

Hubka goes beyond Rahner's “The Prison Pastorate” by focusing on pure encounter, and by her efforts to support the incarcerated with creativity, spirituality and education. In guiding prisoners in their rehabilitation by empowering their “imagination of a new me, a *good* me” through human connection, Hubka is convinced that prison ministry should bring about a radical change of perspective (*radikaler Perspektivwechsel*). With a knowledge of that for which all human beings are searching: true meeting (*Begegnung*).²¹⁶ Prison ministers can help to relocate the inmates' life focus, from say ‘money and more money,’ to other spiritual and more “human values” (*menschliche Werte*).²¹⁷ Prison chaplains are the ones who can appeal to men and women caught in unfreedom to watch their health, to keep a diet (*Ernährung*).²¹⁸ They witness the amount of medicines the prisoners are taking.²¹⁹ In their meetings, ministers learn to ‘read’ the prisoners, to understand their body language (*die Körpersprache*) and lively expressions. Unlike many others, the prison minister can confront the incarcerated humanly and compassionately with the vital question: “Why?” “Why did you?”²²⁰ Prisoners in turn may ask themselves, as Bonhoeffer did in Tegel prison: “Who am I?”

Katharina Ceming, *Ernstfall Menschenrechte: Die Würde des Menschen und die Weltreligionen* (München: Kösel-Verlag, 2010).

²¹⁴ HBG: 105. For “education” behind bars see the publication of James Mehigan and Rod Earle (eds.), *Degrees of Freedom: Prison Education at the Open University* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2020). This volume analyses the experience of the incarcerated whose lives have been transformed by the efforts to deliver higher education in prisons.

²¹⁵ Mehigan and Earle (eds.), *Degrees of Freedom*, 191-194 [“Vignette 8: My Journey, my new life”].

²¹⁶ HBG: 96-97.

²¹⁷ HBG: 102.

²¹⁸ Karlheinz Keppler and Heino Stöver, among others, strongly plead in their work for better health care in custody. Karlheinz Keppler and Heino Stöver (eds.), *Gefängnismedizin: Medizinische Versorgung unter Haftbedingungen* (Stuttgart: Thieme, 2009). Cf. Irene Marti, Ueli Hostettler, and Marina Richter, “Fragen und Herausforderungen aus der Sicht der Anstalt sowie der Gefangenen: Lebensende im Schweizer Justizvollzug,” *BAG-S Informationsdienst Straffälligenhilfe* 25, Heft 1 (2017): 22-25. Irina Meyer and Frank Wild, “Tagungsbericht: Altern im Strafvollzug.” *BAG-S Informationsdienst Straffälligenhilfe* 25, Heft 1 (2017): 27-29. Martin Oberfeld, “Behinderung und Alter.” Karlheinz Keppler and Heino Stöver (eds.), *Gefängnismedizin: Medizinische Versorgung unter Haftbedingungen* (Stuttgart: Thieme, 2009), 234-238. Nadine Ochmann, *Gesundheit hinter Gittern: Gesundheitsförderung und –versorgung aus Sicht von inhaftierten Frauen* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018).

²¹⁹ HBG: 65.

²²⁰ HBG: 23-24.

They mock me, these lonely questions of mine...²²¹ Together, in and through their encounter, the prisoner as well as the minister, may then quietly raise to heaven a unanimous plea for pardon and mercy, to implore from the heart: “Whoever I am, thou knowest me; O God, I am thine!”²²²

3.3. Two Further Questions

As we come to the end of this chapter, we will attempt to put our observations on the ministry of Brandner, Dabrowski, and Hubka in perspective. We have explored the scope and limitations of Rahner's views on prison ministry, which are valuable in themselves but not adequate to deal with the more complex situations in prison ministry today. To support our main argument, therefore, we will now turn to the two questions posed at the beginning of this chapter:

- (i) Can Rahner's claims built upon Matthew 25 be developed to remain sufficiently significant when we realise how grave the situation is in today's institutions of incarceration, within their cultural, political and social-economical contexts?
- (ii) Can Rahner's thought be expanded to really make sense in actual pastoral meetings with male and female prisoners with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds?

To answer these questions we recite Rahner's statement in “The Prison Pastorate”: “We visit the Lord, when we visit a prisoner.”²²³ Brandner, Dabrowski, and Hubka have shown us that chaplains can indeed find the person of Christ among the prisoners. So Rahner is accurate, one could argue, and his anthropology is a good starting point. However, *in* and *between* (*zwischen*)²²⁴ men and women who committed crimes the actual undertaking is not as obvious as Rahner presents it. His

²²¹ See “Gedicht ‘Wer bin Ich?’” in: *LPP*, 347-348. *DBWE* 8:459-460. *DBW* 8:513-514: [...] Wer bin ich? Einsames Fragen treibt mit mir Spott.

²²² *LPP*, 347-348. *DBWE* 8:459-460. *DBW* 8:513-514: Wer ich auch bin, Du kennst mich, Dein bin ich, o Gott!

²²³ *MG*, 3: 76, 78-79. *SG*, 450: Sie sollen den Herrn in den Gefangenen finden; er soll Ihnen selbst zu Ihrem eigenen Heil in diesen Gefangenen begegnen.

²²⁴ For the Jewish Biblical thinker Martin Buber, “between” (German: *zwischen*) refers to “the immediate presence of unreserved, spontaneous mutuality common to each person, yet beyond the sphere of either. Impossible to objectify, ‘the between’ is the most real reality of human existence, of being wholly and uniquely ‘human’ with humans.” See Kenneth Kramer & Mechthild Gawlick, *Martin Buber's I and Thou: Practicing Living Dialogue* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2003), 202. Cf. Martin Buber, *Zwischen Gesellschaft und Staat* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider Verlag, 1952); *Ibidem*, *Das Dialogische Prinzip: Ich und Du; Zwiesprache; Die Frage an den Einzelnen; Elemente des Zwischenmenschlichen* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1973); *Ibidem*, *Between Man and Man*, tr. Ronald Gregor Smith (London & New York, NY: Routledge, 2002).

claims based upon Matthew 25 fit the prison context but are not adequate to deal with the ever growing pastoral challenges of today. Ministers continually stand before basic existential questions to which there are no easy answers.²²⁵ The situation asks for a hands-on approach that is creative, meaning-centred and more prisoners' oriented in the pastoral encounter. The German author of *Bibliographie Gefängnisseelsorge* ("Bibliography of the Prison Pastorate") presents the sort of questions that could expand Rahner's thought in "The Prison Pastorate":

Can/should we participate in the program of the penal system?

How compatible is cooperation with our apostolic mission, concretely:
with our pastoral seal of confession?

Does our pastoral assignment leave us in a ghetto-existence
within the penal system, a religious enclave for church loyalty?

Or do we have to suspend our religious duties through active participation as an
officer of the state to improve the custodial system?

Or should we, when we think that cooperation with the penal system is simply
impossible, take a role of opposition?²²⁶

Chaplains encounter in prisons "a widely opposed reality."²²⁷ Ministers have expectations for themselves and for others which can be easily overwhelming. They are confronted with the "practical difficulties and narrow boundaries"²²⁸ that are set by the prison system. To face the present-day challenges, people have to be trained in different ways (intellectually, psychologically and relationally) and not only theologically.²²⁹ Those who work among the incarcerated have to be equipped as Brandner, Dabrowski, and Hubka have pointed out. Matthew 25 alone and the

²²⁵ BG: 13.

²²⁶ BG: 13 [my translation]: Kann/soll er am Programm des Strafvollzugs mitwirken? Wie verträgt sich eine Kooperation mit seinem kirchlichen Auftrag, konkret: mit seiner seelsorgerlichen Verschwiegenheit? Läßt ihn sein kirchlicher Auftrag ein Getto-Dasein innerhalb des Strafvollzugs führen, eine fromme Enklave für Kirchentreue? Oder muß er unter Zurückstellung seiner kirchlichen Aufgaben durch aktive Mitarbeit als Bediensteter an einer Verbesserung des Strafvollzugs mitarbeiten? Oder soll er, wo ihm Kooperation bei dem faktischen Zustand des Strafvollzugs unmöglich erscheint, eine Oppositionsrolle ergreifen?

²²⁷ BG: 13 [my translation].

²²⁸ BG: 13 [my translation]. For "prison boundaries" see Jennifer Turner, *The Prison Boundary: Between Society and Carceral Space*, Palgrave Studies in Prisons and Penology (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). Turner's study explores "the idea of the prison boundary, identifying where it is located, which processes and performances help construct and animate it, and who takes part in them." Her research reveals "how prisoners actively engage with life outside of prison and how members of the public may cross the boundary to the inside. In doing so, it shows the prison boundary to be a complex patchwork of processes, people and parts."

²²⁹ Cf. Udo Rauchfleisch, *Begleitung und Therapie straffälliger Täter* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2013, 2008).

willingness to visit prisoners is not enough. Ministers have to be carefully prepared to meet and dialogue with individuals of all ages. They have to learn to deal with people who have deceived, injured, offended, raped and killed other human beings. They are asked to guide individuals who desire to take their own lives in prison.²³⁰ Chaplains are confronted with men and women who broke the Ten Commandments and may well even be proud of having done so; and with persons who are hostile to the societies in which they live. So to shape Rahner's claims of "The Prison Pastorate" and to make his thought accessible in prisons today, i.e., "to meet Christ in prisoners," ministers have to be prepared and educated, and not only religiously as Dabrowski has pointed out.

Chaplains have to cope with challenging situations in prisons that go beyond religion. They must speak different languages and try to handle the hatred and aggression of prisoners. They have to accept too that convicts in their pain can be unreceptive to the religion and culture with which they may have grown up; and ill-disposed to those who represent them.²³¹ Brandner, Dabrowski, and Hubka have argued each in their own way that we have to be educated to face these challenges. We must also learn from the prisoners themselves, to see the truth of prison life 'in the warehouse.'²³² This includes the truth of the "many possibilities" ministers have which "generally cannot be exhausted."²³³ As Rassow puts it, the prison minister "can significantly contribute to normalisation in creating a space where human beings can be truly human," encountering one another, "laughing and

²³⁰ Katharina Bennefeld-Kersten, for instance, observed the phenomenon of taking one's life in prison as well as the wording "eliminated by suicide" (*Ausgeschieden durch Suizid*) in the custodial context. This wording puts a prisoner's personal file aside once s/he has committed suicide during detention. What can be the reason for such an act? Would this person have killed himself in freedom or are there special conditions that suggest suicide in prison as a way out of life? Bennefeld-Kersten investigates the very special interaction of stress and coping in this environment as part of a total survey of suicide cases in prisons from 2000 to 2006 that is unique in its kind. The study focuses on an area that is otherwise hidden from outsiders and in which it is difficult to obtain reliable data at all. The results of her study could make prison chaplains (re-)think, and give possible suggestions for how to handle prisoners' suicides in penitentiaries. Katharina Bennefeld-Kersten, *Ausgeschieden durch Suizid – Selbsttötungen im Gefängnis: Zahlen, Fakten, Interpretationen* (Lengerich: Pabst Science Publishers, 2009). Katharina Bennefeld-Kersten, Johannes Lohner, and Willi Pecher (eds.), *Frei Tod? Selbst Mord? Wenn Gefangene sich das Leben nehmen: Einschätzung und Prävention* (Lengerich: Pabst Science Publishers, 2015).

²³¹ Nonetheless, no matter what prisoners think about religion, they have a right to practice it. Sarah J. Jahn asks in her work, how the right to freedom of religion is implemented in German prisons. Civil rights generally apply to inmates of detention centres – but for some time now the cultural affiliation of the detainees has expanded, and with it the religious spectrum to which the freedom of religion guaranteed by the Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*) is to be applied by the administration. Sarah J. Jahn, *Götter hinter Gittern: Religionsfreiheit im Strafvollzug der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main/New York, NY: Campus Verlag, 2017).

²³² Pierce, Chapter 2, "Prisons: Warehousing the Oppressed," in: *Prison Ministry: Hope behind the Wall*, 57-67.

²³³ BG: 14 [my translation]: Unterschiedliche Grundvoraussetzungen und alle Vorbehalte gegenüber dem praktizierten Strafvollzug sollten dem Gefängnisseelsorger nicht den Blick dafür verstellen, welche vielfältigen Möglichkeiten er hat und in der Regel gar nicht ausschöpfen kann.

crying, cursing and praying, thinking, talking, dreaming, (re) acting.”²³⁴ “The prison chaplain,” he argues, “can be like no other in jail the person who is able to (re-) build community”: “[B]etween prisoners, but also between prisoners and the guards and with people and groups outside the prison.”²³⁵

The shared search for meaning, as witnessed in the German prison context, can help build community, as we will argue in Chapters Four and Five, to promote “mutual understanding, reducing tensions and opposites, to make peace.”²³⁶ Consequently, Rahner’s thought can be developed in this profession, when prison chaplains and theologians become aware that ministry inside the justice system is primarily *existential* and *highly complicated*. Today’s ministers need to be equipped spiritually and psychologically to face (a) the anger and aggression, the despair and alienation in prisons; (b) the frustration that is stirred up by the human desire to be free from all the misery, pain and affliction, to be liberated from the meaninglessness of that cold system that imposes suffering; and (b) the daily burdens of heartless procedures and uncompromising conducts.²³⁷ For Rahner, there is one great danger in all this, the “one deadly enemy” (*einen Todfeind*) of our eternal dignity, namely “habit and routine” (*die Gewohnheit und die Routine*).²³⁸ This *Todfeind*, as we will see in the next chapter, is strongly present in the day-to-day of imprisoned existence. This is why, we want to build on Rahner’s call to meet Christ: to develop a meaning-centred and empowering theology of prison ministry that can deal with the existential crises and challenges inside prisons. As we proceed in the following chapters, we will try to respond theologically (with the expertise and background knowledge of Brandner, Dabrowski, and Hubka) to the condition of institutions of incarceration in the twenty-first century.

²³⁴ BG: 14 [*my translation*]: [K]ann er zur Normalisierung beitragen, indem er einen Raum schafft, wo der Mensch Mensch sein kann: lachen und weinen, fluchen und beten, denken, reden, träumen, (re)agieren [...]

²³⁵ BG: 14 [*my translation*]: Der Gefängnisserger kann wie kaum ein anderer im Gefängnis Gemeinschaft herstellen: zwischen Gefangenen, aber auch zwischen Gefangenen und Bediensteten und mit Menschen und Gruppen außerhalb des Gefängnisses. Seine Tätigkeit kann so dazu beitragen, gegenseitiges Verständnis zu fördern, Spannungen und Gegensätze abzubauen, Frieden zu stiften.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ See Albert Nolan, *Hope in an Age of Despair: And Other Talks and Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009). Cf. Nelson Mandela, *The Prison Letters of Nelson Mandela*, edited by Sahm Venter (New York, NY: Norton & Company, 2018). Nelson Mandela was arrested in 1962 as South Africa’s apartheid regime intensified its brutal campaign against political opponents. He spent the next twenty-seven years in jail. During his 10,052 days of incarceration, the future leader of South Africa wrote a multitude of letters as a human response to the unyielding prison system of his day.

²³⁸ See Chapter Two, Section 2.3.1. *The One Deadly Enemy: Habit and Routine* in this thesis.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined six possible limitations in “The Prison Pastorate as it stands,” without losing sight of the theological significance and depth of Rahner’s “Complete Works” (*Sämtliche Werke*). The present study is thus careful, in critiquing Rahner’s treatise, to keep in mind his world, his audience, and the nature of his intervention and lecture since it was not his aim or goal to present a coherent theology of prison ministry. On the other hand, giving a balanced and insightful critique helps the thesis to achieve its objective of finding a contemporary theology of prison ministry. The aim is to give a clear analysis of the concerns and limitations identified in “The Prison Pastorate” and to examine how this work thus fails to address the challenges of prison ministry today or to support chaplains working with those challenges. In presenting the experiences of some chaplains working in the field, the study looks at their written accounts to see how they can respond to the proposed limitations of Rahner’s concepts in “The Prison Pastorate.”

In the light of the chaplaincy expertise of Tobias Brandner, Rainer Dabrowski, and Christine Hubka, it has become clear that prison ministry is an *empowering* ministry to people who are vulnerable and subject to the pain and suffering of oppression in various forms. It is a ministry that takes into account not only the role of ordained ministers but also the role that lay people, as well as the incarcerated, can play as ‘dialogue-partners’ in true encounter (*Begegnung pur*) in a movement towards a more human community behind bars.

In addition, this study of Rahner has finally provoked two further questions. In answering these, it has become clear that a theology of prison ministry can integrate Rahner’s thoughts. Nonetheless, at the same time, we must expand his theological horizon pastorally, so as to respond meaningfully to male and female prisoners with diverse backgrounds in institutions of incarceration today. To understand the perspectives of these prisoners and their suffering during confinement, a perspective which, in our view, is irreplaceable, the next chapter will examine the inmate’s search for meaning in light of the works of Viktor E. Frankl, Etty Hillesum and Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn.

CHAPTER FOUR

RAHNER'S EDGES – INCARCERATION FROM A PRISONER'S PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

Chapters One and Two focused on Karl Rahner's theological anthropology and his reflections on prison ministry. Chapter Three outlined six possible limitations in "The Prison Pastorate," and identified the central problem of his treatise: Rahner considers how "such a pastor with such a charge is himself to find God" but does *not* "think out how the charge laid upon prison chaplains is to be made fruitful and beneficial for those entrusted to their care – the prisoners."¹ His focus on the religious perspective of the prison pastor, the priest's search for God, leaves out the perspective of the prisoners. Yet, as Brandner, Dabrowski, and Hubka have pointed out, prisoners too are human beings on a journey through life and they too are searching, if not for God, then for something, someone or some purpose that can give meaning to a life where the natural human desire for freedom is confounded. "The Prison Pastorate" does not address the possibility of such a search for meaning on the part of prisoners and thus disregards the appropriate spiritual and psychological response chaplains could make: that is, to convey perspective, hope and purpose in a human situation where freedom has been removed.

The argument of the present chapter is that, in order to develop a contemporary approach to the practice and theology of prison ministry that meets the needs of the people it claims to serve, it is vital that an effort is made to understand the perspective of those people, i.e., prisoners. Failure to consider this perspective could be seen as arrogant, elitist and lacking in the compassion of Jesus who asks: do you see this woman, this man (Luke 7:44)? Furthermore, certain key questions can only be considered from the viewpoint of an imprisoned person: such as the appropriate psychological and spiritual support which is needed by people in prison; how one can create perspective in the prison situation and see life more positively; and how one can cultivate an attitude of *faith* that will help one

¹ *MG*, 3: 74. *SW*, 16: 214. *SG*, 447: Wenn Sie als Seelsorger in Strafanstalten zu einer priesterlichen Besinnungsstunde zusammenkommen, dann kann der Sinn dieser Stunde gerade nicht darin bestehen, daß in ihr bedacht wird, wie dieses Amt für die fruchtbar und segensreich wird, die Ihrer Sorge anvertraut sind, sondern es muß diese Besinnung daraufhin gehen, wie dieser Seelsorger in diesem seinem Amt selbst seinen Gott findet.

to survive the days of confinement.² Taking the perspective of prisoners into account is what will enable a theology of prison ministry to be an effective and practical pastoral support.³

So this chapter seeks another way of looking at prison chaplaincy, examining the works of the Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist Viktor E. Frankl (1905-1997), who survived being incarcerated in Auschwitz and subsequently articulated his experiences, giving us valuable insights into how prisoners could find meaning in the most difficult of circumstances. His theories and psychological claims about imprisonment are echoed in the prison experiences and insights of (i) the Dutch Jewish writer and Holocaust victim Etty Hillesum (1914-1943), who took on a 'soul-caring' role in the Nazi concentration camp Westerbork; and (ii) the Russian writer and thinker Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008), who suffered as a prisoner in 'the Gulag-system,' the forced labour camps in the former Soviet Union. The well-articulated testimonies offered by these three great thinkers will help to illustrate the inner perspective of prisoners for us.

As discussed in Chapter One,⁴ Rahner focuses on the "historical Word of God" (*geschichtliches Wort Gottes – Logos Gottes*) that addresses humans directly. He uses anthropology to point beyond itself, beyond the scope of the human to God, to the Transcendent, to *the Other*. Each of our three thinkers is trying to do something similar in their writings – the difference being they are doing it from within the concrete, lived experience of being imprisoned. As prisoners, that they are, in Rahner's words, being addressed in the horrific circumstances of their captivity by the "historical Word of God." Their response, through their writing and their personal search for meaning tells us much about what can inspire and bring new hope and life to prisoners today. Frankl, Hillesum and Solzhenitsyn are three great thinkers who were able to reflect on their experiences of imprisonment

² 'Faith' here is not necessarily a specific religious belief. Rather, we use the term to mean, as Fowler says, "a person's way of leaning into and making sense of life." See James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and The Quest for Meaning* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1995 [1981]).

³ For prisoners' perspectives and religion see: T.R. Clear and M.T. Sumter, "Prisoners, prison, and religion: Religion and adjustment to prison," in *J. Offender Rehabil* 35 (2002): 127-159. T.R. Clear, et al., *Prisoners, prisons, and religion: Final report*, School of Criminal Justice (New Brunswick, NJ; Rutgers University, 1992), pp. 1-108; H.R. Dammer, "Piety in Prison: An Ethnography of Religion in the Correctional Environment," Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers The State University of New Jersey, Newark, NJ, USA, 1992; H.R. Dammer, "The reasons for religious involvement in the correctional environment," in: *J. Offender Rehabil* 35 (2002): 35-58; M.T. Sumter, "Religiousness and Post-release Community Adjustment," Ph.D. Dissertation, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL, USA, 1999. T.R. Clear, et al., "The value of religion in prison: An inmate perspective," in: *J. Contemp. Crim. Justice* 16 (2000): 53-74. F.T. Cullen, "The virtuous prison: Toward a restorative rehabilitation," in: H. Pontell & D. Shichor (eds.), *Contemporary Issues in Crime and Justice: Essays in Honor of Gilbert Geis* (Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000).

⁴ See Chapter One, Section 1.1.1. *Historical Word of God (geschichtliches Wort Gottes)* in this thesis.

and ultimately found a way “to say ‘yes’ to life” while held in the most inhumane of circumstances.⁵ Their works illuminate the enduring significance of this attitude as well as highlight where Rahner’s thinking on prison chaplaincy falls short – that is, in finding a pastoral theology of prison ministry that embraces the accounts of the sufferings and perspectives of the ones imprisoned.

In this Chapter, we will first look at the anthropology outlined by Frankl based upon his prison experiences and its relevance for prison ministry today. We will then look at Frankl’s Three Mental Stages of being a prisoner and, finally, we will turn to the writings of Hillesum and Solzhenitsyn, as well as Frankl, to draw out insights and resources that could help people in prison to find meaning. Ultimately, this will enable us to present a set of core principles that will help prison ministers to provide pastoral support and assist prisoners in their own search for meaning today. This Chapter is divided accordingly into three parts:

- (i) The Will to Meaning
- (ii) Three Mental Stages
- (iii) Prison Perspectives.

4.1. The Will to Meaning

In his 1946 magnum opus *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl outlines a will to meaning as the basic and primary motivation of human life.⁶ His understanding of what he calls ‘the will to meaning’ began with, and was fundamentally shaped by, his own experiences as a prisoner in Auschwitz. While there, he witnessed suffering and brutality on a scale he had never experienced before, and he came to know intimately both the good and evil of which human beings are capable. To understand Frankl’s concept of the will to meaning, therefore, it is necessary to begin by considering his experiences as a prisoner in the concentration camps of the Second World War.

⁵ A ‘yes’ in the hope that “the day will come that they are free!” Cf. Joachim Hawel, *Lebendige Religionspädagogik: Existenzanalyse und Radikale Lebensphänomenologie im Religionsunterricht*, München: Karl Alber, 2016, 34: Wir wollen trotzdem „ja“ zum Leben sagen, denn einmal kommt der Tag – dann sind wir frei! (Fritz Löhner-Beda, *Das Buchenwaldlied*)

⁶ The quotations from Viktor E. Frankl’s writings are taken from: *Man’s Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* (New York, NY: Beacon Press, [1959] 1985). This English version is indicated with the abbreviation “MSM.” The book, originally titled *Ein Psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager* (“A Psychologist Experiences the Concentration Camp”) was released in 1946. For the German text and the Dutch translation see respectively: *Trotzdem Ja zum Leben sagen: Ein Psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager* (München: Kösel-Verlag, [1977] 2016); *De zin van het bestaan: Een psycholoog beleeft het concentratiekamp & een inleiding tot de logotherapie* (Rotterdam: A.D. Donker, [1978] 2016). Henceforth abbreviated: “TJL” and “ZB.”

4.1.1. *Frankl's Experiences of Imprisonment*

Our main resources for understanding Frankl's ideas about the psychological perspective of prisoners and their will to meaning are Frankl's life and writings.⁷ The story of this Holocaust survivor reveals his radical suffering as a prisoner and his search for the meaning of life which enabled him not only to survive but to thrive upon liberation. The book became an international bestseller to which Frankl reacted by stating that "the question of a meaning to life" must thus be "a question that burns under [the] fingernails" of those who purchased it.⁸ As we will see, it is a question that has meaning not only for prisoners today but for all.

Spending three years in four different concentration camps – Theresienstadt, Auschwitz, Kaufering, and Türkheim –, Frankl experienced for himself the extreme suffering of being imprisoned in the face of death. He was constantly aware of, as he puts it, the "unrelenting struggle for daily bread and for life itself."⁹ Gordon W. Allport writes of his experience:

As a long-time prisoner in bestial concentration camps he found himself stripped to naked existence. His father, mother, brother, and his wife died in camps or were sent to the gas ovens, so that, excepting for his sister, his entire family perished in these camps. How could he – every possession lost, every value destroyed, suffering from hunger, cold and brutality, hourly expecting extermination – how could he find life worth preserving?¹⁰

This was the question Frankl had to face and find a way to live with. Being a trained psychiatrist, he was able to reflect carefully on his experience of life and suffering. From his writing, we learn, as Allport puts it, "what a human being does when he suddenly realizes he has 'nothing to lose except

⁷ For Viktor E. Frankl see also: *Der unbewusste Gott: Psychotherapie und Religion* (München: DTV, [1974] 2017); *The Unconscious God* (New York, NY: Washington Square Press, 1975); *Der Mensch vor der Frage nach dem Sinn: Eine Auswahl aus dem Gesamtwerk* (München/Berlin: Piper, [1979] 2015); *Ärztliche Seelsorge: Grundlagen der Logotherapie und Existenzanalyse. Mit den 'Zehn Thesen über die Person'* (München: DTV, [2005] 2014); *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy*, Revised and Expanded ed. (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1986); *Psychotherapy and Existentialism: Selected Papers on Logotherapy* (New York, NY: Washington Square Press, 1967); *The Unheard Cry for Meaning: Psychotherapy and Humanism* (New York, NY: Washington Square Press, 1984); *The Will to Meaning: Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy* (New York, NY: Meridian, 1988); *Viktor Frankl's Recollections: An Autobiography* (New York, NY: Plenum Press, 1997).

⁸ MSM: 15. [Preface to the 1984 Edition]

⁹ MSM: 22. ZB: 18. TJJ: 18.

¹⁰ MSM: 9-10. ZB: 9-10.

his so ridiculously naked life.”¹¹ Allport describes the “mixed flow of emotion and apathy” which follows. The first reaction is “a cold detached curiosity concerning one’s fate.”¹² This is followed by “strategies to preserve the remnants of one’s life.”¹³ Next, the grinding experiences of “[h]unger, humiliation, fear and deep anger at injustice are rendered tolerable *by closely guarded images of beloved persons, by religion, by a grim sense of humor, and even by glimpses of the healing beauties of nature – a tree or a sunset.*”¹⁴ However, even the fleeting comfort of such moments does not help the prisoner establish a will to live unless the prisoner is able to “make larger sense out of his apparently senseless suffering.”¹⁵

What could help Frankl make meaning out of this “apparently senseless suffering” where “all the familiar goals in life are snatched away” and “every circumstance conspires to make the prisoner lose his hold?”¹⁶ Two things. Firstly, one of Frankl’s key insights is that, even in the midst of suffering, life expects something of us. “It did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us.”¹⁷ Whatever our circumstances, Frankl believes that discovering what life expects of us enables us to find purpose and meaning in existence. He argues that a prisoner who becomes “conscious of the responsibility he bears toward a human being who affectionately waits for him, or to an unfinished work, will never be able to throw away his life.”¹⁸ For Frankl, this meaning was found in the image of his beloved wife.¹⁹ This is what gave him strength to endure the horrors of the camps, to survive and even “to grow in spite of all indignities.”²⁰ As Frankl, quoting Nietzsche, declared: “He who has a *why* to live can bear with almost any *how*.”²¹ Realising that life expected something from him led Frankl too to feel a responsibility to write about his prison experiences, his psychological observations and ultimately led him to develop his theory of a will to meaning.

¹¹ MSM: 11. ZB: 11.

¹² MSM: 11. ZB: 11.

¹³ MSM: 11. ZB: 11.

¹⁴ MSM: 11 [*italics my emphasis*]. ZB: 11.

¹⁵ MSM: 11. ZB: 11.

¹⁶ MSM: 12. ZB: 12.

¹⁷ MSM: 98. ZB: 99. TJJ: 117.

¹⁸ MSM: 101. ZB: 102. TJJ: 121: Ein Mensch, der sich dieser Verantwortung bewußt geworden ist, die er gegenüber dem auf ihn wartenden Werk oder einem auf ihn wartenden liebenden Menschen hat, ein solcher Mensch wird nie imstande sein, sein Leben hinzuwerfen.

¹⁹ MSM: 56-58. ZB: 55-57. TJJ: 63-65. See below, Section 4.3.1. “Love” – *The Prisoner’s Ultimate Aspiration*.

²⁰ MSM: 11-12. ZB: 11-12.

²¹ Ibid.

Frankl's insight that life may expect something of us even in captivity is echoed in the writings of Solzhenitsyn and Hillesum. As we see in his three-volume magnum opus *The Gulag Archipelago: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*,²² Solzhenitsyn also felt an "obligation" and a responsibility that "has long weighed upon us"²³ to write down his experiences and to communicate the truth of the Soviet forced labour camp system to the world. Speaking of this sense of 'obligation,' he says, quoting the words of Vladimir Solov'ev: "Even in chains we ourselves must complete [...] that circle which the gods have mapped out for us."²⁴

Similarly, the Dutch Jewish thinker Etty Hillesum felt a responsibility and obligation to write of her experiences in Camp Westerbork in The Netherlands.²⁵ Her understanding of "what life expected from us" can be seen in themes in her writings such as the imperative to be "the thinking heart of the barracks,"²⁶ and to "be willing to act as a balm for all wounds."²⁷ Writing in 1941 at a time when confinement measures were having an ever-increasing impact on daily life, Hillesum ponders:

²² This is a detailed account of Solzhenitsyn's life and experiences as a prisoner in the Soviet Gulag camp system that includes reports, interviews, statements, diaries and legal documents. The original Russian manuscript was written between 1958 and 1968 and first published in 1973, followed by an English translation the following year by Harper & Row, Publishers. The quotations in this study are taken from the 2007 reissued and American printed version of the three volumes of *The Gulag Archipelago: An Experiment in Literary Investigation* which are indicated with the abbreviation "GA, 1"; "GA, 2"; and "GA, 3." Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago Volume 1: An Experiment in Literary Investigation* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2007 [1973, 1985]); *The Gulag Archipelago Volume 2: An Experiment in Literary Investigation* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2007 [1973, 1985]); *The Gulag Archipelago Volume 3: An Experiment in Literary Investigation* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2007 [1973, 1985]).

²³ GA, 1, "P.S. – Insights, Interviews & More": 8. Concerning the "P.S." transcript we mainly refer here to Solzhenitsyn's "Nobel Lecture."

²⁴ GA, 1, "P.S. – Insights, Interviews & More": 8.

²⁵ The quotations from Etty Hillesum's writings in this study are taken from *Etty: The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum 1941–1943* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002). The English translation by Arnold J. Pomerans is indicated with the abbreviation "E.T." The original Dutch (or German) text is quoted from the sixth revised edition *Het Werk* (Amsterdam: Balans, [1986] 2012). Cf. Meins G.S. Coetsier & Klaas A.D. Smelik (eds.), *Etty Hillesum: The Complete Works 1941-1943, Bilingual, Annotated and Unabridged*, Vol. 1 & 2 (Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 2014). See also Meins G.S. Coetsier, *Etty Hillesum and the Flow of Presence: A Voegelinian Analysis* (Eric Voegelin Institute Series in Political Philosophy, Studies in Religion and Politics) (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2008); *The Existential Philosophy of Etty Hillesum: An Analysis of her Diaries and Letters* (Supplements to the Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy, 22) (Leiden/Boston, MA: Brill, 2014).

²⁶ E.T., 515. *Het Werk*, 545: Het denkende hart van de barak. This phrase is used as title for a collection of Hillesum's letters published in 1982: *Het denkende hart van de barak: Brieven van Etty Hillesum*, ed. Jan G. Gaarlandt (Haarlem: De Haan, 1982).

²⁷ E.T., 550. *Het Werk*, 583: Men zou een pleister op vele wonden willen zijn. This sentence is used as title for a study on Etty Hillesum: *Men zou een pleister op vele wonden willen zijn: Reacties op de dagboeken en brieven van Etty Hillesum*, ed. Jan G. Gaarlandt (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Balans, 1989). Cf. "Een pleister op de wonde: Etty Hillesum" in Arjan Broers, *Dwarssluggers in naam van God: Mystici van Hadewijch tot Hillesum* (Baarn/ Tiel: Ten Have/Lannoo, 2002), 125-131.

More arrests, more terror, concentration camps, the arbitrary dragging off of fathers, sisters, brothers. *We seek the meaning of life, wondering whether any meaning can be left. But that is something each one of us must settle with himself and with God. And perhaps life has its own meaning, even if it takes a lifetime to find it.*²⁸

Each in their own way, Frankl, Hillesum and Solzhenitsyn believe “life holds a potential meaning under any conditions, even the most miserable ones” as Frankl puts it.²⁹ As Hillesum said, “life is good, come what may”³⁰ and “I firmly believed that I would go on finding life beautiful, always, despite everything.”³¹

Frankl's second key insight was his awareness that when all else is taken away, what alone remains is to “choose one's attitude.”³² Even in the concentration camps where one was condemned to be the passive victim of ‘man's inhumanity to man,’ a person has “the last of human freedoms” – the ability to “choose one's attitude in a given set of circumstances.”³³ This last freedom was one that could not be taken away. Even facing suffering and dying, one could choose how one met one's fate. Observing his fellow prisoners, Frankl noted that, while some succumbed to the hopelessness of their situation, there were “some, at least, [who] *by choosing to be ‘worthy of their suffering’* proved man's capacity to rise above his outward fate.”³⁴ Because of this “last of human freedoms,” a person could transcend their particular circumstances, however oppressive, and find meaning “despite everything.”³⁵

Frankl thus observed that there was a dimension of Spirit that was innately and uniquely human which enabled human beings to exercise this last freedom and, in so doing, to find a meaning in life that transcended the circumstances of their captivity.³⁶ This notion of ‘Spirit’ plays a decisive role in

²⁸ E.T., 62 [*italics my emphasis*]. *Het Werk*, 65: Weer arrestaties, terreur, concentratiekampen, willekeurig weghalen van vaders, zussen, broers. Men zoekt naar de zin des levens en vraagt of het überhaupt nog zin heeft. Maar dit is een zaak, die men alleen met zichzelf en God moet uitmaken. En misschien heeft ieder leven z'n eigen zin en duurt het een heel leven die zin te vinden.

²⁹ *MSM*: 16. [Preface to the 1984 Edition]

³⁰ E.T., 78. *Het Werk*, 82: het leven is goed, hoe dan ook.

³¹ E.T., 307. *Het Werk*, 320: En [ik] geloofde vast, dat ik het leven tòch schoon zou blijven vinden, altijd, ondanks alles.

³² *MSM*: 12. *ZB*: 12.

³³ *MSM*: 12. *ZB*: 12.

³⁴ *MSM*: 12 [*italics my emphasis*]. *ZB*: 12.

³⁵ *MSM*: 10. *ZB*: 10. Cf. E.T., 497. *Het Werk*, 526.

³⁶ Frankl sees ‘spirit’ as a life-giving force, present in all human beings, an approach that is similar to Rahner's in many ways. I come back to this towards the end of Section 4.1.2. *Frankl's Will to Meaning* in this chapter.

Frankl's thinking. It goes far beyond any religious understanding and, in fact, echoes Rahner's dictum (examined in Chapter One): "to be human is to be spirit" (*der Mensch ist Geist*).³⁷ It is 'Spirit' which generates the vitality (*Überlebenskraft*), the strength of resistance (*Widerstandskraft*),³⁸ the "inner freedom" and "resilience" which are critical to enabling people to cope with experiences of captivity which are otherwise perceived as hopeless and deadly.³⁹ In the circumstances of imprisonment, it is thus entirely possible to reach "for the absolute," in "openness" to "the spirit" and toward "meaning."⁴⁰ As Frankl says, "The spirit can never be sick."⁴¹

In this way, Frankl managed to find hope and the possibility of meaning in his horrific circumstances. As Allport concludes, "He takes a surprisingly hopeful view," of the human capacity to transcend our "predicament and discover an adequate guiding truth."⁴² It was this hopeful outlook which was to provide the basis of the will to meaning as outlined in *Man's Search for Meaning*.

4.1.2. Frankl's Will to Meaning

In this next section, we will examine the fundamentals of Frankl's concept of the will to meaning drawing upon both *Man's Search for Meaning* and Maria Marshall's book, *Logotherapy Revisited: Review of the Tenets of Viktor E. Frankl's Logotherapy*,⁴³ with a particular emphasis on those elements most relevant for prison ministry.

As we have seen, Frankl's prison experiences led him to reflect upon the importance of meaning in human life. Ultimately, these reflections led him to propose in *Man's Search for Meaning* that the

³⁷ See Brian J. Shanley, *The Thomist Tradition* (Band 2 von Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy of Religion) (Springer Science & Business Media, 2002), 174. Shanley cites Rahner's statement: "To be human is to be spirit, to live life while reaching ceaselessly for the absolute, in openness toward God...that we are always already on the way to God, whether or not we know it expressly, whether or not we will it. We are forever the infinite openness of the finite for God." Karl Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, tr. Joseph Donceel (New York, NY: Continuum, 1994), 53.

³⁸ Cf. Gotthard Fuchs (ed.), *Glaube als Widerstandskraft: Edith Stein, Alfred Delp, Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Frankfurt am Main: Josef Knecht, 1986).

³⁹ For "coping" with the problems of the prison experience see Edward Zamble and Frank J. Porporino, *Coping, Behavior, and Adaptation in Prison Inmates*, Research in Criminology (New York, NY: Springer, 1988).

⁴⁰ Stephen J. Costello, "Towards a Tri-Dimensional Model of Happiness: A Logo-Philosophical Perspective," in: Alexander Batthyány (ed.), *Logotherapy and Existential Analysis: Proceedings of the Viktor Frankl Institute Vienna*, Volume 1 (Heidelberg/Berlin: Springer, 2016), 343-365, esp. 347-349.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² *MSM*: 12-13. *ZB*: 13.

⁴³ Maria Marshall and Edward Marshall, *Logotherapy Revisited: Review of the Tenets of Viktor E. Frankl's Logotherapy* (Ottawa, ON: Ottawa Institute of Logotherapy, 2012). Henceforth, the abbreviation used will be: "LR."

striving to find a meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in all human beings. Thus he speaks of "a *will to meaning*" which is in contrast to both Freud's pleasure principle (or the *will to pleasure*) and Adler's "striving for superiority" (or the *will to power*).⁴⁴ For Frankl, the human being is concerned with more than "psycho-dynamic mechanisms, the satisfaction of physiological drives, etc.,"⁴⁵ and should not "be reduced to physical and psychological entities."⁴⁶ This 'more' with which the human being is concerned is, Frankl argues, to be found in the realm of meaning.

Frankl sets out three basic orientations or anthropological principles concerning human beings: these are, first, "Freedom of Will"; second, the "Will to Meaning"; and third, the "Meaning of Life."⁴⁷ The starting point for Frankl is the reality that "freedom of will" exists in human beings. He responds to "deterministic views of the human being" writing: "Freedom of will means freedom of human will, and human will is the will of a finite human being."⁴⁸ For him, this means that "human freedom is not freedom from conditions, but freedom to take a stand and to face whatever conditions might confront him."⁴⁹ Prisoners, therefore, being human, can "take a stand" and find "freedom" in their imprisonment if they want to. Thus, 'the last of human freedoms,' the ability to choose one's attitude, no matter what one faces, becomes the foundation of the search for meaning.

Frankl goes on to argue that "existential frustration" arises where a person's will to meaning, i.e., "the striving to find a concrete meaning in [their] personal existence" is frustrated.⁵⁰ Such existential frustration may be caused either by external conditions such as imprisonment or by inner turmoil and suffering caused by past and/or present trauma, both of which can affect modern prisoners. Frankl denies that the distress caused by existential frustration, which can be acute, is caused by mental disease or any other pathological condition.⁵¹ He states,

A prisoner's concern, even his/her despair, over the worthwhileness of life is an existential distress but by no means a mental disease. It may well be that interpreting the first in terms of the latter motivates a doctor to bury his patient's existential despair under a heap of

⁴⁴ MSM: 121. ZB: 123.

⁴⁵ LR: 8.

⁴⁶ LR: 8.

⁴⁷ LR: 7.

⁴⁸ LR: 8. Viktor E. Frankl, *The Will to Meaning: Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy* (New York, NY: Meridian, 1988), 16.

⁴⁹ LR: 8. Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 16.

⁵⁰ MSM: 123. ZB: 126.

⁵¹ MSM: 125. ZB: 129.

tranquilizing drugs. It is his task, rather, to pilot the patient through his existential crises of growth and development.⁵²

The task, therefore, for the psychiatrist or, indeed, for the prison minister, is to assist people in navigating these “existential crises” and to become aware of “the hidden *logos*” of their existence.⁵³ This is the search for meaning, a process which attempts “to make something conscious again,”⁵⁴ a ‘something’ that has to do with “*existential* realities, such as the potential meaning of the prisoner’s existence to be fulfilled as well as his/her will to meaning.”⁵⁵ Any assistance offered, therefore, “tries to make the prisoners aware of what they actually long for in the depth of their being,”⁵⁶ a process which is, in fact, remarkably similar to the Ignatian process of discernment with which Rahner would have been thoroughly familiar.⁵⁷ Thus, Frankl’s search for meaning might be considered as being also, deep down, a search for God. Certainly, it is true to say that, for Frankl, a human person is “a being whose main concern consists in fulfilling a meaning, rather than in the mere gratification and satisfaction of drives and instincts, [...], or in the mere adaptation and adjustment to society and environment.”⁵⁸

It is also true to say that Frankl is very much aware that human beings react differently to the complexities of life and, in particular, to the condition of being imprisoned. In his book *The Doctor and the Soul*, he describes the human ability of “self-sacrifice” in an essay entitled “The Psychology of the Concentration Camp,”⁵⁹ Human beings in confinement have a freedom of will, according to Frankl. They can choose, he argues, even in the horrific circumstances of the concentration camps. Thus, prisoners can manage, if they choose, to suppress their apathy and their irritability. Some may choose to do what good they still can, moving about among the others, sharing a good word and a last piece of something to eat, here and there. It is the human possibility to self-sacrifice in such ways that makes it possible for people to rise above their circumstances and transcend them.⁶⁰

⁵² *MSM*: 125 [Text slightly altered for gender-inclusive translation]. *ZB*: 129.

⁵³ *MSM*: 125. *ZB*: 129.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *MSM*: 125 [Text slightly altered for gender-inclusive translation]. *ZB*: 129-130.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Cf. “Rules for Discernment,” in: Michael Ivens, *Understanding The Spiritual Exercises* (Herefordshire, England: Gracewing, 1998), 205-237.

⁵⁸ *MSM*: 125-126. *ZB*: 130.

⁵⁹ *LR*: 11. Viktor E. Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1986), 93-105.

⁶⁰ *LR*: 11.

Frankl shares a story about a young medical doctor, who, “[w]hen the prisoners were in their bunks, held small speeches about the topics which concerned them, which enabled them to carry on the next day.”⁶¹ Even in the case of “Dr. J.,” a Nazi mass murderer, Frankl acknowledges that this truly “Mephistophelean being,” managed to reform himself after the war, and “proved to be an exemplary comrade during his own prison sentence.”⁶²

The possibility of choosing, even within the confines of imprisonment is at the very heart of Frankl’s thought. Marshall “illustrates our possibilities to choose” in the following way.⁶³ Using a “very simplistic, mechanistic model of the human being,”⁶⁴ one can see that people are constantly confronted in life by a negative input, or a positive input. In response to these two kinds of inputs, they have four “output possibilities”:

- (1) in response to *negative input*, we may respond with a *positive output*;
- (2) in response to a *negative input*, we may respond with a *negative output*;
- (3) in response to *positive input*, we may respond with a *negative output*; and
- (4) in response to *positive input*, we may respond with a *positive output*.

“Two of these response possibilities are automatic,” Marshall argues, “and do not change the world”⁶⁵:

the negative response to negative output; and the positive response to positive input do not alter what was initially “given.” The response of a negative output, in response to a positive input, even inflicts further suffering on others. *Only one of these possibilities creates something in the world that was not there before: A positive output in response to a negative input.*⁶⁶

This choice to sacrifice oneself or to respond positively to a negative situation is only possible if a person is inspired by some greater meaning and the corresponding values s/he has found to act upon. As Frankl says, in making choices, people “have not only their genes, and their learned behaviours to

⁶¹ LR: 11. Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, 103.

⁶² MSM: 121. ZB: 123.

⁶³ LR: 12.

⁶⁴ LR: 12.

⁶⁵ LR: 12.

⁶⁶ LR: 12 [*italics my emphasis*].

count on;” they can also decide in favour of the “values that they want to act on,”⁶⁷ in other words, they can choose. Frankl further believes, as Marshall puts it, that in the moment that human beings “choose a value [...] they become this value through their actions. They actualize this possibility in reality.”⁶⁸ The person’s search for meaning is, Frankl states,

the primary motivation in his/her life and not a “secondary rationalization” of instinctual drives. This meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by humans alone; only then does it achieve a significance which will satisfy a person’s own *will* to meaning. There are some authors who contend that meanings and values are “nothing but defense mechanisms, reaction formations and sublimations.” But as for myself, I would not be willing to live merely for the sake of my “defense mechanisms,” nor would I be ready to die merely for the sake of my “reaction formations.” Humans, however, are able to live and even to die for the sake of their ideals and values!⁶⁹

The search for meaning and the choices it inspires thus have the power to bring about a transformation of the person, even in the context of prison. Because human beings “can reach beyond themselves in the search for purposeful goals and values,”⁷⁰ redemption becomes a real possibility in the lives of individuals, including prisoners. Both the challenge and the possibility exist, in Frankl’s words, “to rise above a two dimensional plane, from what is given, to ‘what can be.’”⁷¹ The power of the uniquely human “freedom of will to explore, and to decide, the direction of their actions” derives directly from their ability to act “in the belief of something that is greater than them.”⁷²

This is very clear in Christianity where the most powerful example of self-sacrifice or responding positively in the face of a negative input is surely the response of Jesus when, in the face of persecution and violence, he accepted his crucifixion and turned it into an act of love and forgiveness.⁷³ This action is what leads to the resurrection which, in the belief of Christians, has utterly transformed the world. It is also an approach that Jesus explicitly espouses in life. For

⁶⁷ LR: 13.

⁶⁸ LR: 13.

⁶⁹ MSM: 121 [Text slightly altered for gender-inclusive translation]. ZB: 123.

⁷⁰ LR: 13.

⁷¹ LR: 13.

⁷² LR: 13.

⁷³ See John 13:1 (“he loved them to the end”) and Luke 23:34 (“forgive them for they know not what they do”).

example, in the Sermon on the Mount, he instructs his disciples to “love your enemies,” “turn the other cheek” and “go the extra mile” and also commands his followers to do to others not as they do to you but as you *would have* them do to you.⁷⁴ In the light of a greater reality or higher power, such as Jesus finds in his relationship with his Father, it makes sense to do such things, which on an ordinary, practical level make no sense. It is this type of meaning, not a specifically religious one but a higher, spiritual plane of being, which animates Frankl's vision of the will to meaning and its power.

What thus becomes clear is that the key to Frankl's articulation of the search for meaning is the presence of a noetic dimension in human consciousness, the dimension of “spirit” or “mind” – that which in Greek philosophy is called *Nous*. Frankl uses the term “nous” in order to distinguish it from the religious connotations of the word “Spirit” (*Geist* in German). In an approach similar to Rahner's concept of “anonymous Christian,” what he sought was a “specifically human dimension,” present in all persons, regardless of religious belief, socioeconomic and/or cultural background.”⁷⁵

This notion of the “*Dimension of Spirit*,” is, Marshall argues, “a unique coordinate in [his] *Anthropological View* of human beings.”⁷⁶ For Frankl, “Spirit” is that dimension through which prisoners can rise above “their psychological and physical dimensions.” One can take a stand towards it, he believes, as to exist means “...to come back to oneself by rising above, and beyond oneself, and ones' circumstances.”⁷⁷ Despite the confines of imprisonment and the human limitations of “being vulnerable, fallible, and finite,” people are “essentially free” “to rise above, and beyond” their “instincts, genetic inheritance, and environment”⁷⁸ and act in light of the meaning and values towards which they choose to take their stand. In this way, our human spirit is the source of our ultimate freedom.

The “*Dimension of the Spirit*” opens up a promising perspective for prison ministry. Frankl's writings show that behind the afflicted body and psyche of a prisoner, one could discover “the spark

⁷⁴ Mt 5:44, 5:39, 5:41 and 7:12 respectively.

⁷⁵ LR: 13-14. “[Frankl] also wanted to differentiate spirit from a general understanding of the ‘mind’ as a psychological function related to the processes of the brain, and the term ‘soul,’ used to refer to one's psychology and spirituality. Originally, he used the word ‘spirit’ to refer to a ‘specifically human dimension’ [...], present in all persons, regardless of their religious, or spiritual orientation, or, even atheistic bent.”

⁷⁶ LR: 14.

⁷⁷ LR: 16. Cf. Viktor E. Frankl, *Logotherapie und Existenzanalyse* (Berlin/München: Quintessenz Verlag, 1994).

⁷⁸ LR: 16-17.

of the human spirit yearning for meaning.”⁷⁹ The power of the human spirit essentially searches for personal freedom and truth beyond the limitations of incarceration, and beyond one's own individual or collective fate – that is, all those events and moments which one can not change. His ideas then are of tremendous value for prison ministry, offering, as they do, the prospect of change, transformation and fulfilment for individual prisoners. Before we turn to a consideration of how these ideas apply in a prison context, however, there is a further aspect of Frankl's thought which requires examination: his analysis of the psychological reactions of prisoners to the reality of being imprisoned which he divides into three distinct stages. It is to these Three Mental Stages that we now turn.

4.2. Three Mental Stages

In this section, we will look at the three phases, as analysed by Viktor Frankl, of a prisoner's mental reactions to imprisonment: namely, the experiences of shock, apathy and liberation.⁸⁰ According to Frankl, the suffering caused by imprisonment is more about the mental and emotional processes that prisoners go through than it is about the physical fact of being locked away. Shock, apathy and liberation are descriptions of the experiences a prisoner goes through in response to three specific “phases” or “periods” of imprisonment. These phases may be described as follows:

- (i) the period following the detainee's admission to prison;
- (ii) the period when the inmate is well entrenched in prison routine;
- (iii) and the period following the prisoner's release and liberation.⁸¹

These three phases are particularly noteworthy for prison ministry today, specifically among long-term prisoners and their mental reactions to prison life.⁸²

⁷⁹ *LR*: 17.

⁸⁰ *MSM*: 26. *ZB*: 23. *TJL*: 25: Die erste Phase ist gekennzeichnet durch das, was man als Aufnahmeschock bezeichnen könnte; wobei wir uns allerdings vergegenwärtigen müssen, daß die psychologische Schockwirkung unter Umständen der formalen Aufnahme vorausgehen kann.

⁸¹ *MSM*: 26. *ZB*: 23. *TJL*: 25: [D]ann könnten wir an den seelischen Reaktionen des Häftlings auf das Lagerleben drei Phasen unterscheiden: die Phase der Aufnahme ins Lager, die Phase des eigentlichen Lagerlebens und die Phase nach der Entlassung bzw. Befreiung aus dem Lager.

⁸² In their 2013 study *Ethical Issues in Prison Psychiatry* Norbert Konrad *et al.* emphasise that “recent surveys demonstrate a high and possibly increasing prevalence of mental disorders in prisoners. They have an increased risk of suffering from a mental disorder that transcends countries and diagnoses.” Norbert Konrad, Birgit A. Völlm, David N. Weisstub (eds.), *Ethical Issues in Prison Psychiatry*, International Library of Ethics, Law, and the New Medicine, 46 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013).

4.2.1. *Phase One – Admission to Prison*

The symptom Frankl uses to characterize the first phase of imprisonment is “shock” (*Aufnahmeschock*). “Under certain conditions,” he argues, “shock may even precede the prisoner’s formal admission to the camp.”⁸³ This claim is borne out by Solzhenitsyn who dedicates a whole chapter to ‘The shock of the “Arrest.”’⁸⁴ Calling it a “breaking point in your life” and a “somersault from one state into another,”⁸⁵ Solzhenitsyn makes clear that it is an experience that can not be compared to anything else in one’s life. It is a moment that shatters one’s universe so that one can only gasp out in such a moment: “Me? What for?”⁸⁶ The level of “displacement” caused by this moment is such that it cannot be embraced by the mind.⁸⁷ The “gate” to one’s past life “is slammed shut once and for all” and the present shifts “instantly into the past” while the impossible becomes an “omnipotent actuality.”⁸⁸ The scale, the suddenness and the impact of the change to one’s life means it simply cannot be grasped immediately.

In *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Frankl’s account of his own experience reinforces Solzhenitsyn’s impressions of the shock of one’s arrest. Describing his disorienting arrival in Nazi Germany’s largest extermination camp – Auschwitz – surrounded by an immense and intimidating camp, not knowing his destination, not understanding the “shouts and whistles of command,” Frankl states that “[m]y imagination led me to see gallows with people dangling on them. I was horrified, but this was just as well, because step by step we had to become accustomed to a terrible and immense horror.”⁸⁹

When confronted by such horror, one natural human response is what is known in psychiatry as the “delusion of reprieve” (*Begnadigungswahn*).⁹⁰ As Frankl explains, this is when “the condemned man, immediately before his execution, gets the illusion that he might be reprieved at the very last minute.”⁹¹ Thus, Frankl and his Jewish contemporaries “clung to shreds of hope and believed to the

⁸³ *MSM*: 26. *ZB*: 23. *TJL*: 25: Die erste Phase: Die Aufnahme ins Lager.

⁸⁴ *GA*, 1: 3-23.

⁸⁵ *GA*, 1: 3-4.

⁸⁶ *GA*, 1: 3-4.

⁸⁷ *GA*, 1: 3.

⁸⁸ *GA*, 1: 4.

⁸⁹ *MSM*: 27-28. *ZB*: 24. *TJL*: 26-27: Schon hat der eine oder andere von uns Schreckgesichte. Ich z.B. glaubte, ein paar Galgen und an ihnen Aufgehängte zu sehen. Mir graute, und das war gut so: wir alle mußten Sekunde für Sekunde, Schritt für Schritt in das große Grauen eingeführt werden.

⁹⁰ *MSM*: 28. *ZB*: 25. *TJL*: 27: Die Psychiatrie kennt das Krankheitsbild des sogenannten Begnadigungswahns [...]

⁹¹ *MSM*: 28. *ZB*: 25. *TJL*: 27: [D]er zum Tode Verurteilte beginnt just im letzten Augenblick, unmittelbar vor seiner Hinrichtung zu wännen, er würde eben erst im letzten Augenblick begnadigt werden.

last moment that it would not be so bad.”⁹² Solzhenitsyn too describes being tricked by deluded thoughts: “It’s a mistake! They’ll set things right!”⁹³ Such irrational thoughts can be dangerous as, when reality sinks in, prisoners’ thoughts can turn to suicide. Thus, Frankl testifies that the hopelessness of the situation meant that “[t]he thought of suicide was entertained by nearly everyone, if only for a brief time.”⁹⁴ For his own part, he promised himself on his first evening that he would not “run into the wire.”⁹⁵

For both Frankl and Solzhenitsyn, the necessary response to this first phase of imprisonment was to “put your cozy past firmly behind you.”⁹⁶ Frankl describes an instance where, clinging to his unfinished work as a psychiatrist, he showed an old prisoner a manuscript he was trying to preserve. The mocking response of the prisoner led to a moment of awakening for Frankl: “At that moment I saw the plain truth and did what marked the culminating point of the first phase of my psychological reaction: I struck out my whole former life.”⁹⁷

Instead of clinging to the past, what is necessary is to adjust to the new and painful present. Thus, Frankl explains the newly arrived prisoner must go through the “torture” of painful emotions such as one’s “boundless longing for ... home and ... family” and “disgust with all the ugliness” surrounding one.⁹⁸ As Solzhenitsyn points out, what can help with this difficult transition is the companionship of one’s fellow prisoners. Prison is where one encounters “others like [oneself], doomed to the same fate.”⁹⁹ For him, this moment of realising that there were “others who were alive, who were traveling your road” led to the joyous revelation that “you are not alone in the world!”¹⁰⁰ The solace of fellowship with others as well as the inestimably precious resources of “spirit” and “conscience”

⁹² *MSM*: 28. *ZB*: 25. *TJL*: 27: So klammerten auch wir uns an Hoffnungen und glaubten auch wir bis zum letzten Moment, es werde, es könne einfach nicht so arg sein.

⁹³ *GA*, 1: 4.

⁹⁴ *MSM*: 39. *ZB*: 33-34. *TJL*: 37-38: Die Ausweglosigkeit der Situation, die täglich, stündlich, minütlich lauende Todesgefahr, die Nähe des Todes anderer – der Majorität – machte es eigentlich selbstverständlich, daß nahezu jedem eine wenn auch noch so kurze Zeit lang der Gedanke an einen Selbstmord kam.

⁹⁵ *MSM*: 39. *ZB*: 33-34. *TJL*: 37-38: Aus einer weltanschaulichen Grundeinstellung heraus, die an andern Stellen noch klar werden wird, habe ich selber unmittelbar vor dem Einschlafen am ersten Abend in Auschwitz sozusagen von einer Hand in die andere mir das Versprechen abgenommen, nicht “in den Draht zu laufen.”

⁹⁶ *GA*, 1: 130.

⁹⁷ *MSM*: 32. *ZB*: 29. *TJL*: 32: Da weiß ich, wie die Dinge stehen. Ich mache das, was den Höhepunkt dieser ganzen ersten Phase psychologischer Reaktionen darstellt: ich mache einen Strich unter mein ganzes bisheriges Leben.

⁹⁸ *MSM*: 39. *ZB*: 36. *TJL*: 41: Da ist vor allem eine grenzenlose Sehnsucht nach seinen Leuten daheim. Eine Sehnsucht, die so brennend erlebt werden kann, daß man nur mehr ein Gefühl hat: zu vergehen. Dann ist da der Ekel. Der Ekel vor all der Häßlichkeit, schon rein äußerlich, von der sich der Häftling umgeben findet.

⁹⁹ *GA*, 1: 179.

¹⁰⁰ *GA*, 1: 183-184.

were what helped lead Solzhenitsyn to the conviction that prison can heal one's soul,¹⁰¹ a rare and surprising statement. A more common reaction among prisoners, then as well as now, is the reaction Frankl describes in the second mental stage, "the phase of relative apathy" where "the prisoner passed from the first to the second phase" of imprisonment "in which he achieved a kind of emotional death."¹⁰²

4.2.2. Phase Two – Well Entrenched in Prison Routine

"Apathy" is the "main symptom" of the second phase that Frankl analyses.¹⁰³ According to him, it is a reaction to routine. The apathy experienced by prisoners consists of a "blunting of the emotions and the feeling that one could not care any more."¹⁰⁴ Frankl observes that this lack of sensibility is a psychological reaction that makes sense in the context of the torture, beatings and constant fear of death faced by prisoners in the concentration camps. It was a "necessary mechanism of self-defense"¹⁰⁵ which provided vulnerable prisoners "with a very necessary protective shell" (*höchst notwendige Panzerschicht*).¹⁰⁶ In such a situation, "all efforts and all emotions" must be centered on one task: "preserving one's own life and that of the other fellow."¹⁰⁷

This "state of strain" endured by prisoners "coupled with the constant necessity of concentrating on the task of staying alive, forced the prisoner's inner life down to a primitive level."¹⁰⁸ Thus, it could be observed that a "regression" or retreat "to a more primitive form of mental life" (*eine primitivere Form seelischen Lebens*) took place in some camp inmates.¹⁰⁹ This manifested itself mainly in the desire for food. As Frankl points out, this was entirely natural given "the high degree of undernourishment which [...] prisoners suffered."¹¹⁰ In a form of "wish-fulfillment," prisoners were

¹⁰¹ GA, 1: 183.

¹⁰² MSM: 39. ZB: 36. TJJ: 41: Die Reaktionsweise, wie wir sie gekennzeichnet haben, beginnt nach wenigen Tagen sich zu wandeln. Nach dem ersten Stadium des Schocks schlittert der Häftling in das zweite Stadium hinein, in das Stadium der relativen Apathie. Es kommt allmählich zu einem inneren Absterben.

¹⁰³ MSM: 39. ZB: 36. TJJ: 41: Die zweite Phase: Das Lagerleben.

¹⁰⁴ MSM: 42. ZB: 39. TJJ: 44: [D]ie Abstumpfung des Gemüts, die innere Wurstigkeit und das Gleichgültigwerden [...]

¹⁰⁵ MSM: 47. ZB: 45. TJJ: 51: [E]in notwendiger Selbst-schutzmechanismus der Psyche.

¹⁰⁶ MSM: 42. ZB: 39. TJJ: 44-45.

¹⁰⁷ MSM: 47. ZB: 45. TJJ: 51: Alles Trachten und damit auch das gesamte Gefühlsleben konzentriert sich auf eine einzige Aufgabe: die pure Lebenserhaltung – die eigene und die gegenseitige!

¹⁰⁸ MSM: 47-48. ZB: 45. TJJ: 51. Es ist nur allzu begreiflich, wenn in dieser seelischen Zwangslage und unter dem Druck der Notwendigkeit, sich auf die unmittelbare.

¹⁰⁹ MSM: 47-48. ZB: 45. TJJ: 51.

¹¹⁰ MSM: 48-49. ZB: 46. TJJ: 52-53: Die denkbar höchstgradige Unterernährung, unter der die Häftlinge zu leiden hatten [...]

seeking to compensate for the lack of such a simple need being met by talking about and dreaming of the food they would one day have “in a distant future when they would be liberated and returned home.”¹¹¹

Nevertheless, “in spite of all the enforced physical and mental primitiveness of the life in a concentration camp,” Frankl says, “it was possible for spiritual life to deepen.”¹¹² He notices that “sensitive people” (*empfindsame Menschen*) managed well in the routine of the second phase, especially when they were used “to a rich intellectual life” (*in einem geistig regen Dasein zu stehen*).¹¹³

[Such people] were able to retreat from their terrible surroundings to a life of inner riches and spiritual freedom. Only in this way can one explain the apparent paradox that some prisoners of a less hardy makeup often seemed to survive camp life better than did those of a robust nature.¹¹⁴

Solzhenitsyn confirms this observation from his own experience, stating that “the general loss of external freedom for a person with a rich inner world,”¹¹⁵ tends to be “less hard to bear than for a person who is immature, “who lives more in terms of the flesh” and who “requires more in terms of external impressions.”¹¹⁶ For a sensitive or introspective person, Solzhenitsyn is clear, “broad horizons are opened to the mind and the soul!”¹¹⁷

For those whose spiritual life is deepened by the experience of prison, opportunities may arise to “exert a far-reaching moral influence” (*eine tiefe und weitgehende Wirkung*) on others.¹¹⁸ In this

¹¹¹ *MSM*: 48-49. *ZB*: 46. *TJL*: 52-53: [F]ür den Tag, an dem sie einander zu einer kleinen Wiedersehensfeier einladen wollen, dereinst, wenn sie befreit und heimgekehrt sind.

¹¹² *MSM*: 55. *ZB*: 53. *TJL*: 61: Trotz aller Primitivität, in die der Mensch im Konzentrationslager nicht nur äußerlich, sondern auch in seinem Innenleben zurückgeworfen ist, machen sich, wenn auch sporadisch, doch Ansätze bemerkbar im Sinne einer ausgesprochenen Tendenz zur Verinnerlichung.

¹¹³ *MSM*: 55. *ZB*: 54. *TJL*: 61.

¹¹⁴ *MSM*: 55-56. *ZB*: 54. *TJL*: 61-62: Denn gerade ihnen steht der Rückzug aus der schrecklichen Umwelt und die Einkehr in ein Reich geistiger Freiheit und inneren Reichtums offen. So und nur so ist die Paradoxie zu verstehen, daß manchmal die zarter Konstituierten das Lagerleben besser überstehen konnten als die robusteren Naturen.

¹¹⁵ *GA*, 2: 630-631.

¹¹⁶ *GA*, 2: 631.

¹¹⁷ *GA*, 2: 631.

¹¹⁸ *MSM*: 101. *ZB*: 102-103. *TJL*: 122.

endeavour, Frankl believes, “the right example” is “more effective than words could ever be.”¹¹⁹ Just as St. Francis of Assisi is said to have exhorted his followers to “[p]reach the Gospel, using words [only] when necessary,” so Frankl considered the effect of one’s own “just and encouraging behaviour” to be of more importance than words.¹²⁰ At times, however, an encouraging word can be effective too, he believes, “when mental receptiveness had been intensified by some outer circumstances.”¹²¹

As an example, he remembers an incident where the inmates of a whole hut listened to him at a time when prisoners were dying in the camp, “either of sickness or of suicide” but “the real reason for their deaths was the fact that they had “given up hope” (*Sich-selbst-Aufgeben*).¹²² In this instance, Frankl himself offered an ‘encouraging word’ to his fellow prisoners. Although “cold and hungry, irritable and tired,” he “had to make the effort and use this unique opportunity. Encouragement was now more necessary than ever.”¹²³ Drawing on his experience both as a prisoner and a psychiatrist, he spoke movingly and eloquently of many reasons not to lose hope in this apparently hopeless situation, declaring that “[w]hoever was still alive had reason for hope.”¹²⁴ He stated his conviction that “human life, under any circumstances, never ceases to have a meaning.”¹²⁵ There were “many opportunities of giving life a meaning” and ... “this infinite meaning of life” could include the sacrifice of “suffering and dying, privation and death.”¹²⁶ He concluded by saying that, although they must “face up to the seriousness of [their] position, they must not lose hope but should keep their courage in the certainty that the hopelessness of our struggle did not detract from its dignity and its meaning.”¹²⁷

¹¹⁹ *MSM*: 101. *ZB*: 103. *TJL*: 122: Die unmittelbare Wirkung des Seins, des Vorbildseins, ist immer eine größere als die der Sprache.

¹²⁰ *MSM*: 101. *ZB*: 102-103. *TJL*: 122.

¹²¹ *MSM*: 101. *ZB*: 103. *TJL*: 122: Hin und wieder war aber auch das Wort wirksam, namentlich dann, wenn aus irgendeinem äußeren Grunde das innere Echo erhöht war.

¹²² *MSM*: 102. *ZB*: 103-104. *TJL*: 123.

¹²³ *MSM*: 102-103. *ZB*: 104. *TJL*: 123: Mich fror und hungerte, und auch ich war schlapp und gereizt. Aber ich mußte mich aufraffen und diese einzigartige Möglichkeit nutzen, denn Zuspruch war jetzt nötiger als je.

¹²⁴ *MSM*: 103. *ZB*: 104. *TJL*: (124). This part of the English text is not in the German original.

¹²⁵ *MSM*: 104. *ZB*: 105-106. *TJL*: 125: Und dann sprach ich schließlich noch von der Vielfalt der Möglichkeiten, das Leben mit Sinn zu erfüllen.

¹²⁶ *MSM*: 104. *ZB*: 105-106. *TJL*: 125: Und dann sprach ich schließlich noch von der Vielfalt der Möglichkeiten, das Leben mit Sinn zu erfüllen. Ich erzählte meinen Kameraden (die ganz still dalagen und sich kaum rührten, höchstens ab und zu ein ergriffenes Seufzen hören ließen) davon, daß menschliches Leben immer und unter allen Umständen Sinn habe, und daß dieser unendliche Sinn des Daseins auch noch Leiden und Sterben, Not und Tod in sich mit einbegreife.

¹²⁷ *MSM*: 104. *ZB*: 106. *TJL*: 125: Und ich bat diese armen Teufel, die mir hier in der stockfinstern Baracke aufmerksam zuhörten, den Dingen und dem Ernst unserer Lage ins Gesicht zu sehen und trotzdem nicht zu verzagen, sondern im Bewußtsein, daß auch die Aussichtslosigkeit unseres Kampfes seinem Sinn und seiner Würde nichts anhaben könne, den

Frankl's words contain the empowering message that "the hopelessness" of the human "struggle" for freedom, "does not detract from its dignity and its meaning"¹²⁸ which, of course, is of great relevance to prison ministry. What is perhaps of more importance, however, is the example Frankl gives by 'rising above' the circumstances of his tiredness, irritability, etc., to offer encouragement and hope to his fellow prisoners. He thus embodied the human ability to self-sacrifice in the service of a greater meaning and it can truly be said that he practised what he preached. It is this type of example which prison ministers would do well to emulate either seeking directly to encourage those who are depressed or in despair or assisting prisoners who are coping better to provide that encouragement to others. In this way, the apathy of the second stage may be countered.

The second phase too is characterised by an encounter with the good and evil of which all human beings are capable. Frankl and Solzhenitsyn both speak about this. According to Frankl, "[l]ife in a concentration camp tore open the human soul and exposed its depths."¹²⁹ In prison, there is a tension between "survival" or "conscience" which is the basic pattern of the incarceration experience. This exposes "the rift dividing good from evil, which goes through all human beings, reach[ing] into the lowest depths."¹³⁰ As Solzhenitsyn states, arising out of the person's longing to survive, "an awesome vow takes shape: to survive at *any price*."¹³¹ For him, this is the great junction in prison life, "from this point the roads go to the right and to the left. One of them will rise and the other will descend. If you go to the right – you lose your life, and if you go to the left – you lose your conscience."¹³² To simply "survive," Solzhenitsyn believes, must not mean "at any price," for the consequence is clear, it would be "at the price of someone else."¹³³ As Frankl puts it, "there are two races of persons in this world,"¹³⁴

but only these two – the "race" of the decent person and the "race" of the indecent person. Both are found everywhere; they penetrate into all groups of society. No group consists

Mut zu bewahren.

¹²⁸ *MSM*: 104. *ZB*: 105-106. *TJL*: 125.

¹²⁹ *MSM*: 108. *ZB*: 110. *TJL*: 130: Das Leben im Konzentrationslager ließ zweifelsohne einen Abgrund in die äußersten Tiefen des Menschen aufbrechen.

¹³⁰ *MSM*: 108. *ZB*: 110. *TJL*: 130: Der Riß, der durch alles Menschsein hindurchgeht und zwischen gut und böse scheidet, reicht auch noch bis in die tiefsten Tiefen [...]

¹³¹ *GA*, 2: 602.

¹³² *GA*, 2: 603.

¹³³ *GA*, 2: 602-603.

¹³⁴ *MSM*: 108 [Text slightly altered for gender-inclusive translation]. *ZB*: 109. *TJL*: 130.

entirely of decent or indecent people. In this sense, no group is of “pure race” – and therefore one occasionally found a decent fellow among the camp guards.¹³⁵

In the camps, Frankl argues, we get to know the human person as “the being that always decides” (*das Wesen, das immer entscheidet*) what he or she “is”¹³⁶: Humans are those beings “who invented the gas chambers; but at the same time, they are also the beings who went into the gas chambers, upright and with a prayer on their lips.”¹³⁷ Through our freedom to choose, we decide whether we fall within the “race” of the decent person or the indecent, whether we will lose our life or lose our conscience in order to survive “at any price.”

Solzhenitsyn also speaks of a process of “soul-searching” which can take place during this second phase.¹³⁸ As soon as a prisoner renounces the “aim of ‘surviving at any price,’” imprisonment begins to transform his/her character.¹³⁹ This transformation Solzhenitsyn heads brings an unexpected calm and patience where once one would have been intolerant and filled with feelings of malice, hate, irritability and nervousness.¹⁴⁰ The transformation of a prisoner’s soul may dive deeper and bring understanding and empathy in place of judgment.¹⁴¹ The soul “ripens from suffering”¹⁴² and embarks on a journey of repentance and “at least learning to love those close to you.”¹⁴³ Solzhenitsyn “pleads guilty to his own conscience” and admits to finding “evil” and “good” in himself.¹⁴⁴ He recognises

¹³⁵ *MSM*: 108 [Text slightly altered for gender-inclusive translation]. *ZB*: 109. *TJL*: 130: Aus all dem können wir lernen: es gibt auf Erden zwei Menschenrassen, aber auch nur diese beiden: die “Rasse” der anständigen Menschen und die der unanständigen Menschen. Und beide “Rassen” sind allgemein verbreitet: in alle Gruppen dringen sie ein und sickern sie durch; keine Gruppe besteht ausschließlich aus anständigen und ausschließlich aus unanständigen Menschen, in diesem Sinne ist also keine Gruppe “rassenrein” – nun, und so gab es den einen oder andern anständigen Kerl eben auch unter der Wachmannschaft!

¹³⁶ *MSM*: (108) [my English translation]. *ZB*: (110). *TJL*: 130 [This part here is only in the German original]: Wir haben den Menschen kennengelernt wie vielleicht bisher noch keine Generation. Was also ist der Mensch? Er ist das Wesen, das immer entscheidet, was es ist.

¹³⁷ *MSM*: (108) [my English translation]. *ZB*: (110). *TJL*: 130-131 [*Ibidem*]: Er ist das Wesen, das die Gaskammern erfunden hat; aber zugleich ist er auch das Wesen, das in die Gaskammern gegangen ist aufrecht und ein Gebet auf den Lippen. [Towards the end of *MSM* (p. 157) we find in the English version: “Our generation is realistic, for we have come to know man as he really is. After all, man is that being who invented the gas chambers of Auschwitz; however, he is also that being who entered those gas chambers upright, with the Lord’s Prayer or the Shema Yisrael on his lips.”]

¹³⁸ *GA*, 2: 628.

¹³⁹ *GA*, 2: 610.

¹⁴⁰ *GA*, 2: 610-611.

¹⁴¹ *GA*, 2: 611.

¹⁴² *GA*, 2: 611.

¹⁴³ *GA*, 2: 611-612.

¹⁴⁴ *GA*, 2: 615.

that, in his previous life, he was “a murderer, and an oppressor” in his exercise of power.¹⁴⁵ “In my most evil moments I was convinced that I was doing good, ... it was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good.”¹⁴⁶ The medicine we all need to become healthy and good, Solzhenitsyn believes, is a frank “Know thyself” attitude.¹⁴⁷ Whenever tempted to judge others, one should be prepared to look at one’s own history and ask: “So were we any better?”¹⁴⁸

What interests Solzhenitsyn is the journey of *inner* liberation that he calls “ascending.”¹⁴⁹ For those caught in their own shadow, prison can be a blessing in disguise that liberates us where it really matters – in our hearts. Like Peter the Apostle (*Cephas*), it is only when we are led where we do not want to go (John 21:18)¹⁵⁰ that we can come to our true destiny. This offers hope and the possibility of redemption to prisoners today, who may also be able to experience that life can be different. They may, for instance, find freedom from drugs and crime in jail.¹⁵¹ Some may even find a renewed sense of faith or self-worth. It is this type of inner transformation that can turn the apathy of the second stage of prison life into a journey of liberation that empowers one to become the person one truly wants to be. It is because of this journey that occurs only “when we are led where we do not want to go” that Solzhenitsyn can say without hesitation: “*Bless you, prison, for having been in my life!*”¹⁵²

4.2.3. Phase Three – Release and Liberation

The third stage of “a prisoner’s mental reactions” (*der seelischen Reaktion des Häftlings*) that Frankl describes, is “the psychology of the prisoner” just before and after his “liberation.”¹⁵³ He observes that the days before one’s final liberation from captivity are filled with an “acute mental tension.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁵ *GA*, 2: 615.

¹⁴⁶ *GA*, 2: 615.

¹⁴⁷ *GA*, 2: 616.

¹⁴⁸ *GA*, 2: 616.

¹⁴⁹ *GA*, 2: 611.

¹⁵⁰ “Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.”

¹⁵¹ To be free from drugs and crime in prison, however, remains a difficult challenge for most prisoners. For a comprehensive, evidence-focused analysis of drug use among the incarcerated see Stuart A. Kinner and Josiah D. Jody Rich (eds.), *Drug Use in Prisoners: Epidemiology, Implications, and Policy Responses* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018).

¹⁵² *GA*, 2: 616-617.

¹⁵³ *MSM*: 105. *ZB*: 107. *TJL*: 126-127.

¹⁵⁴ *MSM*: 111. *ZB*: 113. *TJL*: 135: Der Weg von der seelischen Hochspannung der letzten Tage des Lagerlebens, der Weg von diesem Nervenkrieg zurück zum Seelenfrieden, ist nun keineswegs ein Weg ohne alle Hindernisse.

Solzhenitsyn also observes how much prisoners yearn to survive and dream of their future release: “If I only manage to survive – oh, how differently, how wisely, I am going to live! The day of our future *release*? It shines like a rising sun!”¹⁵⁵ Yet the day of one’s liberation is in the future so it does not yet exist.¹⁵⁶ Solzhenitsyn is sceptical about this promised liberation. He asks, “What can it give us after so many years?”¹⁵⁷ He thinks that over a period of time, prisoners “will change unrecognizably” and so will their “near and dear ones – and places which once were dear” to them will “seem stranger than strange.”¹⁵⁸ “The thought of freedom,” he states, “after a time even becomes a forced thought. Farfetched. Strange.”¹⁵⁹

In “The Psychology of a Concentration Camp,” Frankl describes “the psychology of the prisoner who has been released.”¹⁶⁰ In a disturbing account of his personal “experiences of liberation” (*Schilderung des Befreiungserlebnisses*), he speaks of the following moods and human emotions: “days of high tension,” “state of inner suspense,” followed by “total relaxation.”¹⁶¹ It is “quite wrong to think,” he states, that released prisoners are “mad with joy.”¹⁶² What happens, he explains, is that one is tired. One is also timid and questioning.¹⁶³ Most of all, one is in a state of disbelief about being free.

“Freedom” – we repeated to ourselves, and yet we could not grasp it. We had said this word so often during all the years we dreamed about it, that it had lost its meaning. Its reality did not penetrate into our consciousness; we could not grasp the fact that freedom was ours.¹⁶⁴

In addition, Frankl reports that what prisoners experience once they are out is that they see the world but have “no feelings” about what they see. He found that he himself had “lost the ability to feel

¹⁵⁵ *GA*, 2: 602

¹⁵⁶ *GA*, 2: 607.

¹⁵⁷ *GA*, 2: 607.

¹⁵⁸ *GA*, 2: 607.

¹⁵⁹ *GA*, 2: 607.

¹⁶⁰ *MSM*: 108-109. *ZB*: 110. *TJL*: 132: Und jetzt wollen wir uns dem letzten Abschnitt innerhalb einer Psychologie des Konzentrationslagers zuwenden: der Psychologie des aus dem Lager befreiten Häftlings.

¹⁶¹ *MSM*: 109. *ZB*: 110. *TJL*: 132: [...] Tagen höchster Spannung [...] seelischen Hochspannung [...] eine totale innere Entspannung [...]

¹⁶² *MSM*: 109. *ZB*: 110. *TJL*: 132: [W]er aber denkt, daß nun unter uns große Freude geherrscht habe, der täuscht sich.

¹⁶³ *MSM*: 109. *ZB*: 110. *TJL*: 132.

¹⁶⁴ *MSM*: 109. *ZB*: 110-111. *TJL*: 132-133: “In die Freiheit,” sagt man sich vor und wiederholt man in Gedanken immer wieder; aber man kann es einfach nicht fassen. Das Wort Freiheit war in den jahrelangen Sehnsuchtsträumen schon zu sehr abgegriffen und der Begriff zu sehr verblaßt; mit der Wirklichkeit konfrontiert, zerfließt er. Die Wirklichkeit dringt noch nicht recht ins Bewußtsein ein: man kann es eben einfach noch nicht fassen.

pleased.”¹⁶⁵ The feeling that one does “not yet belong to this world,”¹⁶⁶ is strongly present. This loss of feeling is usually the result of severe trauma, for example, from the torture of the concentration camps and never knowing when or if one was going to be killed. For Frankl, on that day of their liberation, everything also “appeared unreal, unlikely, as in a dream.”¹⁶⁷ Psychologically, he recognised that what was happening was a process called “depersonalization.”¹⁶⁸

It would be difficult to argue that modern prisoners would be faced with the same level of trauma as those leaving an extermination camp such as Auschwitz. Of course, some of today's prisoners may well have experienced trauma of different kinds but it is not necessarily the case that it would be triggered by their release. Nonetheless, prisoners today are likely to experience a range of difficult feelings upon their release from prison, particularly if they are long-term prisoners who have become institutionalised. Such feelings may include fear and disorientation as well as alienation and helplessness. Like Frankl's released detainees, they are unlikely, for the most part, to experience the emotions that one might expect such as pleasure or joy. It is also necessary to remember that people will react differently to the experience of being released.

The struggle to believe again, and not knowing in the first place what to believe, is a normal psychological reality after years of confinement. “Step by step,” Frankl explains, the ex-prisoners must learn to “progress,” until they feel that they are “human” again. In this process the “body has fewer inhibitions than the mind”¹⁶⁹ so the ex-prisoners found that they began to “eat ravenously” “from the first moment on.”¹⁷⁰ Many prisoners also have a need to talk, especially when “the pressure” (*der jahrelange Druck*) which has been on their minds for years is “released” (*entlädt*) at last. It is as if they *have* to talk, that this “desire to speak” is somehow “irresistible.”¹⁷¹ Some, however, will experience the opposite and find it almost impossible to express themselves. Frankl realised that it takes time until “not only the tongue” is “loosened, but something within oneself as

¹⁶⁵ MSM: 110. ZB: 111. TJJ: 133.

¹⁶⁶ MSM: 109. ZB: 111. TJJ: 133.

¹⁶⁷ MSM: 110. ZB: 111. TJJ: 133.

¹⁶⁸ MSM: 110. ZB: 111. TJJ: 133: Was da die befreiten Kameraden erlebten, läßt sich vom psychologischen Standpunkt als ausgesprochene Depersonalisation bezeichnen. Alles erscheint unwirklich, unwahrscheinlich, alles erscheint wie ein bloßer Traum. Noch kann man es nicht glauben.

¹⁶⁹ MSM: 110. ZB: 112. TJJ: 134: Und doch ist es so, eines Tages. Der Körper aber hat weniger Hemmungen als die Seele.

¹⁷⁰ MSM: 110. ZB: 112. TJJ: 134: Von der ersten Stunde an, in der es nun möglich wird, nützt er die Wirklichkeit, greift er zu, buchstäblich: man beginnt nämlich zu fressen.

¹⁷¹ MSM: 110-111. ZB: 112. TJJ: 134: [A]ls ob der Betreffende unter einer Art seelischem Zwang stünde, so dranghaft ist dieses Erzählen, dieses Redenmüssen.

well.”¹⁷² It is necessary to be gentle and patient with the inmates, as the prisoner’s emotional life and feelings may unexpectedly break through those “strange fetters which had restrained it.”¹⁷³

The way that leads prisoners from the “acute mental tension” (*von der seelischen Hochspannung*) of the last days in prison – “from that war of nerves to mental peace” – is definitely “not free from obstacles.”¹⁷⁴ Thus Frankl says, it would be “an error to think that a liberated prisoner” is not “in need of spiritual care any more.”¹⁷⁵ We have to consider “that a man who has been under such enormous mental pressure for such a long time is naturally in some danger after his liberation.”¹⁷⁶ This is especially the case if the pressure is released quite suddenly. It is, according to Frankl, “the psychological counterpart of the bends.”¹⁷⁷

One of the dangers to which an ex-prisoner can fall prey is what Frankl calls a “moral deformity” (*der Deformierung*) where “people with natures of a more primitive kind” were unable to “escape the influences of the brutality which had surrounded them in camp life.”¹⁷⁸ “Now, being free ... [t]he only thing that had changed for them was that they were now the oppressors instead of the oppressed. They became instigators... of willful force and injustice and justified their behavior by their own terrible experiences.”¹⁷⁹ It was necessary (albeit a slow process) to guide formerly aggressive inmates back to “the commonplace truth that no one has the right to do wrong, not even if wrong has

¹⁷² MSM: 111. ZB: 112. TJJ: 134: Tage vergehen, viele Tage, bis sich nicht bloß die Zunge löst, sondern irgend etwas im Innern gelöst wird [...]

¹⁷³ MSM: 111. ZB: 112. TJJ: 134: [U]nd bis dann plötzlich das Gefühl eine Bresche schlägt in jene merkwürdige hemmende Barriere, von der es bis dahin noch eingedämmt war.

¹⁷⁴ MSM: 111. ZB: 113. TJJ: 135: Der Weg von der seelischen Hochspannung der letzten Tage des Lagerlebens, der Weg von diesem Nervenkrieg zurück zum Seelenfrieden, ist nun keineswegs ein Weg ohne alle Hindernisse.

¹⁷⁵ MSM: 111. ZB: 113. TJJ: 135: Und man ist im Irrtum, wenn man glaubt, der aus dem Konzentrationslager entlassene bzw. befreite Häftling bedürfe keiner seelischen Betreuung mehr.

¹⁷⁶ MSM: 111-112. ZB: 113. TJJ: 135-136: [E]inem Menschen, der durch längere Zeit unter dem ungeheuren seelischen Druck gestanden ist, den das Konzentrationslager bedeutet, einem solchen Menschen drohen naturgemäß auch nach der Befreiung [...]

¹⁷⁷ MSM: 111-112. ZB: 113. TJJ: 135-136.

¹⁷⁸ MSM: 112. ZB: 113. TJJ: 136: Vor allem konnte man bei primitiveren Naturen in dieser psychologischen Phase oft bemerken, daß sie nach wie vor in ihrer seelischen Einstellung unter der Kategorie der Macht und der Gewalt verharren [...]

¹⁷⁹ MSM: 112. ZB: 113-114. TJJ: 136: [N]ur, daß sie nunmehr, als Befreite, selber diejenigen zu sein vermeinen, die ihre Macht, ihre Freiheit willkürlich, hemmungslos und bedenkenlos nützen dürfen. Für solche primitiven Menschen hat sich eigentlich nichts als das Vorzeichen der alten Kategorie geändert, es ist aus einem negativen ein positives geworden: aus den Objekten von Macht, Gewalt, Willkür und Unrecht sind die entsprechenden Subjekte geworden; aber sie haften eben noch an dem, was sie erlebt haben.

been done to them.”¹⁸⁰ This is what makes the convict’s reintegration into society after a long prison sentence such a tedious enterprise.

In addition to “moral deformity,” Frankl differentiates two other major experiences which threaten to harm “the character of the liberated prisoner: bitterness and disillusionment,” particularly when one returns to one’s “former life.”¹⁸¹ Bitterness is experienced by ex-prisoners when they are met with a disappointing reaction from others on their return. This can cause them to ask themselves why they had “gone through all” that they have.¹⁸² Frankl himself, on returning to his home town “was met only with a shrug of the shoulders and with hackneyed phrases.”¹⁸³ Disillusionment, according to Frankl, is different. Here it is not “one’s fellow man (whose superficiality and lack of feeling was so disgusting that one finally felt like creeping into a hole and neither hearing nor seeing human beings any more) but fate itself” which seems so cruel.¹⁸⁴ For instance, men who drew hope from the thought that someone was waiting for their return found, on leaving prison, “that no one awaited them.”¹⁸⁵ Such disillusionment “which awaited not a small number of prisoners” was not easy to overcome.¹⁸⁶

Nonetheless, Frankl is aware that, here too, one needs to seek a greater perspective. For the liberated prisoners, just as when the day of liberation came, “everything seemed to him like a beautiful dream, so also the day comes when all his camp experiences seem to him nothing but a nightmare.”¹⁸⁷ The need for hope and meaning is still present after the experience of prison.

¹⁸⁰ *MSM*: 112-113. *ZB*: 114. *TJL*: 137: Nur langsam kann man diese Menschen zurückfinden lassen zu der sonst doch so trivialen Wahrheit, daß niemand das Recht hat, Unrecht zu tun, auch der nicht, der Unrecht erlitten hat.

¹⁸¹ *MSM*: 113. *ZB*: 115. *TJL*: 137.

¹⁸² *MSM*: 113. *ZB*: 115. *TJL*: 137.

¹⁸³ *MSM*: 113. *ZB*: 115. *TJL*: 137: Wenn so ein Mensch heimkehrt und feststellen muß, daß man ihm hier oder da mit nichts besserem als Achselzucken oder billigen Phrasen gegenübertritt [...]

¹⁸⁴ *MSM*: 113. *ZB*: 115. *TJL*: 138: Anders liegen die Dinge beim Grunderlebnis der Enttäuschung. Hier ist es nicht der Mitmensch, über dessen Oberflächlichkeit oder Herzensträgheit man schließlich einfach so entsetzt ist, daß man sich am liebsten nur verkriechen möchte, um von der Mitwelt nichts mehr sehen und hören zu müssen... hier, im Erlebnis der Enttäuschung, ist es das Schicksal, dem gegenüber der Mensch sich ausgeliefert fühlt [...]

¹⁸⁵ *MSM*: 113-114. *ZB*: 115. *TJL*: 138: Dann gibt es eben den einen oder andern, der nun feststellen muß, daß niemand mehr auf ihn gewartet hat...

¹⁸⁶ *MSM*: 114. *ZB*: 116. *TJL*: 139: Diese Enttäuschung, die nicht wenigen von den Befreiten in der neuen Freiheit vom Schicksal beschieden war [...]

¹⁸⁷ *MSM*: 115. *ZB*: 116. *TJL*: 139: Und wenn es in seinem Leben einen Tag gab – den Tag der Freiheit –, an dem ihm alles wie ein schöner Traum erschien, dann kommt einmal der Tag, an dem ihm alles, was er im Lager erlebt, nur mehr wie ein böser Traum vorkommt.

4.2.4. *Frankl and Prison Ministry*

The question which now arises is, how does Frankl's meaning-centred approach apply to the world of contemporary European prisons? Is it relevant? Does it truly reflect the perspective of prisoners today? What resources does it offer for prisoners themselves and/or for those who minister in prisons? In what ways does his approach differ from Rahner's as already examined in Chapter Two? Ultimately, from a pastoral point of view, the questions resolve themselves into one: does it help?

As we have seen in Chapter Two, it is Rahner's intention in "The Prison Pastorate" neither to take on the perspective of prisoners nor to compare possible alternative pastoral actions. His focus is on the pastor and his efforts to find Christ in the prisoners he meets and treat them accordingly. In contrast, Frankl is himself an ex-prisoner. His writings draw directly on his own personal experience and his focus and starting point is the prisoners themselves. Frankl's is a prisoner's voice and a prisoner's perspective on the experience of being imprisoned. Out of the depths of his experience of the hopelessness and "apparently senseless suffering"¹⁸⁸ of the concentration camps, he gives voice to the profound human longing for meaning felt in this situation, a need and longing which is so often unspoken and unheard because it belongs to those who are powerless and have no voice.

Does this voice truly reflect the perspective of prisoners today? Clearly, there are unmistakable differences between the experiences of people like Frankl, Hillesum and Solzhenitsyn who were imprisoned unjustly under a tyrannical and authoritarian regime, and the experience of prisoners in Germany today who, at least for the most part, have received a fair trial as part of a fair system of justice and in fact guilty of crimes for which they have been convicted and imprisoned. Despite this, however, there are clear parallels which make the experiences of Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn uniquely relevant to prisoners today. These parallels are: the loss of freedom accompanied by a sense of injustice; the fact of having been brutalised in some way by life; and the sense of being trapped with feelings of deep loneliness and ongoing powerlessness in the face of an overarching, oppressive system.

A German prison chaplain, Heinrich Schöning, who worked with long-term prisoners for over twenty years, listening attentively to their personal experiences, noticed that, for those with extended periods of detention (twenty years or more), the meaning and purpose of life is easily lost. He argues

¹⁸⁸ *MSM*: 11. *ZB*: 11.

that the psychological state of some prisoners, due to a complete loss of perspective (*Verlust an Lebensperspektive*), a perspective where life's sense of meaning and purpose is eradicated, may be compared to that of people who were imprisoned in the Gulag or in the concentration camps. One cannot underestimate the damaging psychological effect of the uncertainty caused by matters such as the lack of clarity regarding *when* one may be paroled, the "social reception room" (*sozialen Empfangsraum*) into which one is to be released, if there is any, along with uncertainty as to personal matters such as whether one can still cope with a greatly changed environment and a severely damaged social life: all of this makes life for today's prisoners extremely burdensome.¹⁸⁹

What this leads one to see is that, although the context of how they came to be imprisoned differs greatly, from a psychological and existential viewpoint, prisoners detained in prison, in the Gulag or in concentration camps (whether because of their crimes, political oppression or racism, etc.) show comparable patterns in terms of human suffering, survival instinct and ability to cope. In a sense, what we are seeing in each case is a manifestation of the 'sin' in which we human beings, (prisoners, jailors, pastors and justice systems alike) are trapped,¹⁹⁰ a situation in which we are all in need of redemption. While Rahner, arguing from a Christian perspective, sees redemption as something that can only be provided by Christ, the Son of God, Frankl, of course, does not use such theological language. For him, 'redemption' or, rather, the fulfilment of the human person's search for meaning is something that emerges from the depths of the human "Spirit." Nonetheless, for both, prison can be seen as a situation in which the central 'problem' of life is exposed in a greatly intensified way: that is to say, our need as human beings for something 'more,' something beyond ourselves. It is thus true to say that, in articulating the longing and need to search for meaning, Frankl was expressing a universal human need, one that embraces all, including prisoners held within European justice systems today.

Using this experience of a longing for meaning as his starting point, Frankl develops an approach to life (including life in prison) based on the person's search for meaning. This approach is at once both universal and deeply personal and individual. While all human beings can search for meaning in their lives and, in fact, the underlying will to meaning drives us all to such a search, yet the particular meaning of each person's life will be different according to the different circumstances, characters,

¹⁸⁹ I want to thank Sr. Michele O'Kelly and my predecessor, prison pastor Schöning, for our correspondence about this Chapter, and their insightful theological suggestions concerning Frankl's psychology and long-term prisoners in the prison context.

¹⁹⁰ See Romans ch.7.

etc., of each individual. As Frankl said in his speech to his fellow prisoners, there are many “opportunities of giving life a meaning.”¹⁹¹ The search for meaning is therefore something that can be undertaken by all prisoners no matter what their circumstances. Again, as Frankl told his comrades, at one of the lowest points of their suffering, “human life, under any circumstances, never ceases to have a meaning.”¹⁹² Seeking that which gives meaning to one’s life, then, brings hope to people who are struggling, even in the darkest of situations.

The search for meaning also confers dignity on the person who is seeking. This is of great importance in a prison context where prisoners can be the target of judgment and prejudice. Prison life deals with complex realities not least of which are the many challenging human behaviours of the people who are imprisoned. Nonetheless, it does not help to take an approach that reduces prisoners to a lower level of being. Human beings, even if they have committed a crime, Frankl believes, are more than categorical expressions of processes in the human mind, or physiological, instinctual realities.¹⁹³ Problems in the German context often arise when generalisations about convicts and their crimes are made, or when the divine-human dimensions of existence which go beyond the scope of the regulations of the justice system are denied. Prisoners are then seen *solely* in terms of their behaviour and this behaviour is interpreted and categorised *solely* on the basis of misconduct, delinquencies, fraud and corruption. Such a simplistic view, as inmates’ personal life stories show, does not fully capture the complexity of the reasons for and spiritual depth of human behaviour.¹⁹⁴

In light of Frankl’s writings, therefore, prison chaplaincy needs to be aware of possible prejudices and distortions in people’s minds – that is to say, in the chaplains themselves, in prison authorities, in people outside prison, and in society in general. Prison chaplains have the opportunity *par excellence* to observe and anticipate the consequences of distorted views of humanity in the custodial setting.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ MSM: 104. ZB: 105-106. TJJ: 125.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ LR: 8.

¹⁹⁴ LR: 9. As an example, I refer here to the story of German prisoner M. whom I guided over the years. Mister M. was definitely a complex person: a tough man in a wheelchair yet also a cheerful character; a criminal who was proud of his record of having robbed from the rich yet also a man who was very aware of his own sins, of his personal faults and failures; an inmate hated and despised by fellow inmates and staff yet a man of faith devoted to Church services or anything that had to do with the message of Christ. His faith was steeped in the Gospel of Mark and he contributed greatly to the life of the Church in prison and was missed greatly when he left and died sadly with no one to take care of him. His is an example of how a convict’s life story can be superficially interpreted as a grave misconduct while in fact being something much deeper than most people like to consider.

¹⁹⁵ Note that we speak here of the custodial setting in the German-speaking world.

They work *in* the system but are not *of* the system. They know that some destructive punitive ways of dealing with prisoners, can lead to offences against their dignity and disrespect for their rights including the fundamental human right to freedom.¹⁹⁶ While the European justice system of today can never be compared with the incarceration methods used during the atrocities of World War II, nonetheless, societies should always be self-critical once they insist on taking away people's freedom and rights by locking them up behind bars.

Frankl's orientation towards meaning makes his approach different from Rahner's treatment of the subject of prison and prisoners in two essential respects. Firstly, it starts not with the pastor's desire to find Christ but with the person's quest to attain "the essence of life," a goal which may be common to both pastor and prisoner.¹⁹⁷ The search for meaning is not exclusively the preserve of one class of people as against another. On the contrary, in Frankl's view, it arises from the innately human will to meaning and thus belongs to all. Pastorally, this means that prisoners and pastors share a common goal and a common journey. Adopting Frankl's meaning-centred approach means that the prison minister is 'journeying with' people in prison rather than 'ministering to' them. It thus facilitates a relationship of mutuality and solidarity between prisoner and minister where it is recognised that each may be enriched and encouraged by the other. As such, it is more in tune with contemporary theological values.

Secondly, Frankl's meaning-centred approach is founded upon the presence of a noetic dimension in human consciousness which he refers to as *Nous* or "Spirit." In basing his thinking upon a concept from Greek philosophy, Marshall argues that Frankl is searching for a "specifically human dimension," present in all persons, regardless of religious belief, socioeconomic and/or cultural background.¹⁹⁸ Equivalent in some ways to Rahner's concept of the "anonymous Christian," Frankl goes further in setting out a path that is spiritual yet not linked to any specific religion¹⁹⁹ and therefore open to those of all faiths and none. His concern is with the Spirit of the human person and

¹⁹⁶ For an in-depth comparative study on "prisoner's rights" see Liora Lazarus, *Contrasting Prisoners' Rights: A Comparative Examination of England and Germany*, Oxford Monographs on Criminal Law and Justice (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁹⁷ LR: 7.

¹⁹⁸ LR: 13-14. "Dr. Frankl used the Greek word 'Noos' – Mind – to avoid confusion with the religious connotations of the English translation of the German word 'Geist' as 'spirit.'... Originally, he used the word 'spirit' to refer to a 'specifically human dimension' [...], present in all persons, regardless of their religious, or spiritual orientation, or, even atheistic bent."

¹⁹⁹ LR: 7.

with “the whole and purpose of life.”²⁰⁰ As such, Frankl’s approach is more suited to contemporary prison life where prisoners have many different faiths and attitudes to religion.²⁰¹ It thus allows for a more pastoral and ecumenical/interreligious approach. At the same time, it is worth pointing out here that Frankl’s search for meaning, with its emphasis on searching for what a person really “desires,” what he or she “actually longs for in the depth” is very similar to the Ignatian “Discernment of Meaning.”²⁰² It could therefore be considered, from a Christian point of view, as a search for God.

Most of all, however, Frankl’s approach is one of empowerment. He makes the claim that prisoners (and indeed all of us), despite the degrading and demeaning circumstances in which we may find ourselves, can be empowered to live meaningful lives. We are more than our circumstances, more than our personal histories and we can find peace, dignity and fulfilment even when we are deprived of freedom. This ‘empowerment’ rests on two things: what Frankl calls the “last [human] freedom” to choose one’s attitude to whatever one is faced by and the innate human “Spirit” (which is itself the Source of this “last freedom”) which helps us to understand that “life may expect something from us,”²⁰³ that there is something greater, that there are higher ideals one may be called to serve. It is these two uniquely human attributes, “freedom” and “Spirit,” that enable human beings to respond positively to a negative situation or to sacrifice themselves in the service of something or someone else.

Humans are those beings who, in Frankl’s view, can be inspired or empowered to become ‘more,’ to transcend the limits of their own circumstances or, as Marshall puts it, “to rise above a two dimensional plane, from what is given, to ‘what can be.’”²⁰⁴ This is the process that Solzhenitsyn calls “soul-searching,”²⁰⁵ the journey of inner liberation that can transform one’s character. Looking through a theological lens, we can put it this way: while Rahner encourages the prison pastor to find Christ in the prisoner and to treat him/her accordingly, Frankl calls on both prisoner and pastor to

²⁰⁰ LR: 7.

²⁰¹ See Frank Arloth, “Seelsorge und Religion im Justizvollzug,” *Forum Strafvollzug* 63, Number 1 (2014): 1-68. Thomas Deutschländer, “Gefängnisseelsorge im Deutschen Strafvollzug,” *Forum Strafvollzug* 63 (2007): 9-13. Helmut Weiß, Karl H. Federschmidt and Klaus Temme (eds.), *Ethik und Praxis des Helfens in den verschiedenen Religionen: Anregungen zum interreligiösen Gespräch in Seelsorge und Beratung* (Neulirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Aussaat, 2005). Wolfram Reiss, “Anwalt für die religiösen Bedürfnisse: Interreligiöse Seelsorge im Gefängnis,” in: Helmut Weiß et al. (eds.), *Handbuch interreligiöse Seelsorge* (Neukirchen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2010), 299-308. Friedrich Johannsen, *Die Menschenrechte im interreligiösen Dialog: Konflikt- oder Integrationspotential?* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2013).

²⁰² See Ivens, *Understanding The Spiritual Exercises*, 205-237.

²⁰³ MSM: 98. ZB: 99. TJJ: 117.

²⁰⁴ LR: 13.

²⁰⁵ GA, 2: 628.

find Christ in themselves, in the deepest longings of the “Spirit” within and the ideals it fosters and, by acting on such ideals and actualising them, to *become* Christ, making Christ truly present in themselves and in their encounters with each other. The power of the human “Spirit,” of which Frankl speaks, can thus be seen as empowering people in prison to become one with Christ.

Frankl thus holds out the possibility (and the hope) of change and transformation for both prisoners and those who minister to them.²⁰⁶ Rahner saw this possibility for the pastor; Frankl articulates it for the prisoner as well. Being in prison does not mean that one ceases to be human; and human beings “can reach beyond themselves in the search for purposeful goals and values.”²⁰⁷ Prisoners regularly may train their bodies; some may even train their minds as well. However, beyond their bodies and minds, “they are equipped with freedom of will to explore, and to decide, the direction of their actions, even if this means acting in the belief of something that is greater than them.”²⁰⁸

Both chaplains and prisoners, according to Frankl, have the possibility to choose their response to the environment of prison and all the challenges it poses. However, to enable these responses to be “a positive output” in reply to “a negative input,”²⁰⁹ especially in a custodial setting, is most difficult to achieve. Nonetheless, as Marshall shows, the point of Frankl’s message is that ultimately, the decision rests with each individual. Even if we consider predispositions in institutions of incarceration, human beings “are not automatically pre-programmed.”²¹⁰ The “last freedom” still remains. The personal spiritual attitudes of prisoners can be healthy and even heroic. Some inmates’ attitudes, however, may be unhealthy, and inflict more suffering on them, in addition to the suffering from their imprisonment. In light of Frankl’s insights, therefore, prison ministry should support prisoners “to take a stand” and help them to face whatever conditions might confront them, both the external conditions of their confinement and the inner turmoil and suffering caused by past and/or present trauma.²¹¹

The difficulty of this task is particularly acute if the prisoner’s suffering “grows out of existential frustration,”²¹² i.e., where her/his will to meaning is frustrated. Here the role of the prison chaplain is

²⁰⁶ LR: 13.

²⁰⁷ LR: 13.

²⁰⁸ LR: 13.

²⁰⁹ LR: 12.

²¹⁰ LR: 12.

²¹¹ MSM: 125. ZB: 129.

²¹² MSM: 125. ZB: 129.

of great importance in helping prisoners to learn to deal with “existential frustration.”²¹³ Prison chaplains may not be trained psychiatrists or medical doctors but they can be of great value in the process of “piloting” prisoners through their “existential crises of growth and development.”²¹⁴ The task here is not to do something *for* the prisoner. As Allport says, “no man can tell another what this purpose is. Each must find out for himself, and must accept the responsibility that his answer prescribes. If he succeeds he will continue to grow in spite of all indignities.”²¹⁵ The task of the chaplain then, according to Frankl, is not to tell prisoners what the purpose of their suffering is but to support them in finding out and thus empowering them to find meaning in their lives despite the existential frustration, in Nietzsche’s words, to find a “*why* to live” that will help them cope with the “*how*” of prison life.²¹⁶

It should be noted that we are dealing here primarily with the second of Frankl’s three stages of prison life where the prisoner begins to adapt and the tendency can be to fall into an apathy that blunts the emotions and deadens the inner spiritual life. It is here that the prison chaplain needs to intervene and be the catalyst to create something new in the world of incarceration, something that may spark the inner spirit of an individual prisoner into new life. *How* this may be done is a most important question that will be explored more fully in the next section. For now, we will remind ourselves that the answer is one which will be different for each person and will therefore require dialogue and exploration with individual prisoners to discern what gives meaning to their “one wild and precious life.”²¹⁷ It is also worth remembering that the importance of encouragement can never be overestimated as disclosed by Frankl’s speech to his fellow inmates at a particularly low moment in Auschwitz. Seizing the opportunity to deliver an encouraging word, whether through a speech or homily or song at a Church service or simply an informal exchange, can make all the difference in helping inmates to “carry on the next day.”²¹⁸ Chaplains must thus be aware that each “positive output” they can come up with “in response to a negative input,”²¹⁹ will change something in the lives of those who are prisoners behind bars, often in a way that may not be apparent at the time.

²¹³ *MSM*: 125. *ZB*: 129.

²¹⁴ *MSM*: 125. *ZB*: 129.

²¹⁵ *MSM*: 11-12. *ZB*: 11-12.

²¹⁶ *MSM*: 11-12. *ZB*: 11-12.

²¹⁷ See the poems “The Summer Day” and “Wild Geese” of Mary Oliver in *Devotions: The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2017), 316, 347.

²¹⁸ *LR*: 11. Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, 103.

²¹⁹ *LR*: 12.

The chaplain's role is not limited to the second stage though it may well be the one which occupies most of his/her time and energy. However, the first and third stages of prison life also present challenges for the chaplain. As previously noted, the first stage of admission to prison is often experienced as a profound shock by the prisoner. Indeed, as shock and denial give way to the reality of the situation, the prisoner can be at risk of self-harm or suicide. It is important then for chaplains to pay particular attention to those who are newly admitted to prison and to assist them in the task of adjusting to prison life. Likewise, when it comes to the third stage of being released from prison, chaplains will need to support prisoners in preparing for what can be a painful and disempowering transition. This is particularly the case with long-term prisoners who may have become institutionalised in prison and may not be well equipped to cope with the trauma of adjusting to, and 'fitting in with' a changed world and social environment. Such people can be at risk on leaving prison especially if they are alone and without supports. The chaplain's role should thus be allowed to extend into providing pastoral support for a period of time after leaving prison. It will also be important to link with other services outside prison to ensure that, by working collaboratively with others, ex-prisoners will get the necessary support.²²⁰

One stage can, however, lead into the work of another. As Frankl's writings disclose, how prisoners respond to their sentence and to their confinement already tells the chaplain something about the stand they take with regard to their worldviews, their spiritual orientation and attitudes, and about their own person.²²¹ Chaplains can support prisoners in all three phases to choose their response: to their crimes and guilt, to their "genes, upbringing, to events of fate," and even to their own selves and the need for forgiveness.²²² The possibility of change and transformation is ever-present as is the possibility of finding meaning and purpose and the chaplain needs to be attentive to the many opportunities that present themselves for their encouragement and support to make a difference.

What we can see, in light of Frankl, is that prison ministry is all about helping prisoners to find an answer to their questions of purpose and meaning, gaining a personal "why to live."²²³ For a theology of prison ministry, this study, of course, wants to know how prisoners can be helped to find these answers and to act upon their individual will to meaning. *How* can prison pastors awaken in the prisoner a feeling that s/he is responsible to life for something, however grim the circumstances may

²²⁰ *KGH*: 10-18.

²²¹ *LR*: 17.

²²² *LR*: 17.

²²³ *MSM*: 11-12. *ZB*: 11-12.

be? *How* can the standpoint that a chaplain takes towards the pastoral care of the mental, physical and spiritual problems of the inmates influence their personal choices? *How* can prisoners discover a tangible perspective which will enable them to find meaning in life? We propose that the perspectives and experiences of prison inmates, as reflected in the accounts of Hillesum and Solzhenitsyn, as well as Frankl, can help us to understand what gives meaning to a person's life in prison and thus help us discover what concrete pastoral initiatives might empower people to live a meaningful life in prison and engage with the possibilities of change and transformation that this situation might hold for them. It is to these perspectives that we now turn.

4.3. Prison Perspectives

Etty Hillesum's *Letters and Diaries*, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* and Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* all have great resonance for prison ministry today. Precisely because their insights come from the perspective of being prisoners themselves, they speak powerfully and with authority to contemporary prisoners especially on the subject of what can give meaning and purpose to one's experience of imprisonment. Not only can their work provide prison chaplains with 'tools' to support people in prisons particularly those who "are prone to despair,"²²⁴ each in their own way, our three thinkers, Frankl, Hillesum and Solzhenitsyn convey "by way of a concrete example that life holds a potential meaning under any conditions, even the most miserable ones" as Frankl puts it.²²⁵ Their lives are an eloquent testimony to the power of the human "Spirit" under the most adverse conditions. This testimony is itself a spiritual insight which may be of value to those who struggle with the experience of being imprisoned. It is a tangible proof that it is possible to live a meaningful life even in captivity. For this reason, prison chaplains will find much in their life stories to offer to prisoners as reason to hope. More concretely, there are a number of specific 'tools' or perspectives on life offered by all three thinkers which can be of great pastoral value to prison chaplains in their task of 'piloting' prisoners through the despair and struggle of prison life. The first of these, to which we now turn, is love.

²²⁴ *MSM*: 16. [Preface to the 1984 Edition]

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

4.3.1. "Love" – *The Prisoner's Ultimate Aspiration*

For Frankl, "love is the ultimate and the highest goal" to which human beings "can aspire."²²⁶ Love (or relationship) is therefore the most powerful 'tool' a prisoner can use in facing the suffering and meaninglessness of imprisonment. As we see from our three thinkers, it can arise and be expressed in different ways.

Hillesum, for example, speaks of a love for humanity that grows and deepens through her experience of suffering. She is conscious that "there will always be suffering, and whether one suffers from this or from that really doesn't make much difference [...] It is not the object but the suffering, the love, the emotions, and the quality of these emotions that count."²²⁷ The love of which Hillesum speaks is really an *agape* experience, a disinterested but passionate love for all she met or encountered as she sought to bear witness to their mutual suffering. It expresses itself through her attentiveness to people, to their "faces," their "thousand gestures," their "small changes of expression," their "life stories."²²⁸ With her artistic sensibility, she sought to "read the last expressions on the faces of the dying with compassion, and preserve them."²²⁹ This love provided Hillesum with an unambiguous answer to the question of the meaning of life. For her, love was reason enough to carry on "despite everything."²³⁰ She writes,

Oh God, times are too hard for frail people like myself. I know that a new and kinder day will come. I would so much like to live on, if only to express all the love I carry within me; carry into that new age all the humanity that survives in me, despite everything I go through every day.²³¹

²²⁶ MSM: 57. ZB: 55. TJJ: 63. Coetsier, "Vrijheidsberoving als menselijke grenssituatie," 30.

²²⁷ E.T., 358-359. *Het Werk*, 375-376: [H]et lijden zal er altijd zijn en of men nu om het ene of om het andere lijdt, dat doet er toch eigenlijk niet toe [...] Het gaat niet om het object. Het gaat om het lijden, om de liefde, om de grote gevoelens en om de kwaliteit van die gevoelens.

²²⁸ E.T., 526. *Het Werk*, 557: En daar beleefde ik plotseling dit: uit de gezichten van de mensen, uit duizenden van gebaren, kleine uitingen, levensgeschiedenissen, begon ik deze tijd en veel meer dan deze tijd alleen bijeen te lezen. See also Coetsier, *The Existential Philosophy of Etty Hillesum*, 374.

²²⁹ E.T., 478. *Het Werk*, 505: Bij al het ondergáán van de dingen, bij al mijn vermoeidheid, lijden en wat je maar wilt, blijft toch altijd nog dit: mijn vreugde, de vreugde van de kunstenaar, om de dingen waar te nemen en in zijn geest om te vormen tot een eigen beeld. Van stervenden zal ik nog de laatste uitdrukking van hun gezichten lezen, met belangstelling en ze bewaren.

²³⁰ E.T., 497. *Het Werk*, 526. Coetsier, "Vrijheidsberoving als menselijke grenssituatie," 30.

²³¹ E.T., 497. *Het Werk*, 526: Mijn God, dit tijdperk is te hard voor broze mensen als ik ben. Ik weet ook, dat er hierna weer een ander tijdperk komen zal, dat humanistisch zijn zal. Ik wil zo graag blijven leven om al de menselijkheid, die ik in me bewaar, ondanks alles, wat ik dagelijks meemaak, over te dragen in dat nieuwe tijdperk.

In contrast to Hillesum, Frankl speaks of love in a much more personal way. Love, for him, meant the love of one particular person who meant more to him than any other: his wife. He speaks eloquently of how much it meant to him to think of her and dwell on her image.

[M]y mind clung to my wife's image, imagining it with an uncanny acuteness. I heard her answering me, saw her smile, her frank and encouraging look [...] A thought crossed my mind: I didn't even know if she were still alive. I knew only one thing – which I have learned well by now: Love goes very far beyond the physical person of the beloved [...] Whether or not s/he is actually present, whether or not s/he is still alive at all, ceases somehow to be of importance [...] There was no need for me to know; nothing could touch the strength of my love, my thoughts, and the image of my beloved. Had I known then that my wife was dead, I think that I would still have given myself, undisturbed by that knowledge, to the contemplation of her image, and that my mental conversation with her would have been just as vivid and just as satisfying. "Set me like a seal upon thy heart, love is as strong as death."²³²

The power of this testimony is striking. For Frankl, the love of his wife was as strong as death and nothing could touch it. In thinking of his wife and imagining times they had shared in the past,²³³ he was able to "find a refuge from the emptiness, desolation and spiritual poverty of his existence."²³⁴ Turning to the image of someone we love is something to which many prisoners can relate. As a prison chaplain in Germany, I find that prisoners love to draw and copy images to symbolize their love for others. They also cherish deeply photos of loved ones, of girlfriends, partners or wives, of families and friends. For Frankl, this love of his wife and the thought of her waiting for him was what gave his life meaning and enabled him to survive the horrors of the camps. As he puts it,

In a position of utter desolation, when they cannot express themselves in positive action, when their only achievement may consist in enduring their sufferings in the right way – an

²³² *MSM*: 56-58. *ZB*: 55-57. *TJL*: 63-65.

²³³ *MSM*: 59. *ZB*: 57. *TJL*: 65.

²³⁴ *MSM*: 58-59. *ZB*: 57. *TJL*: 65: Die mögliche Verinnerlichung, die bei dem, der dazu bereit ist, das Leben im Konzentrationslager erfährt, führt auch dazu, daß er aus der Leere und Öde, aus der geistigen Inhaltsarmut des gegenwärtigen Daseins in die Vergangenheit flüchtet.

honorable way – in such a position humans can, *through loving contemplation of the image they carry of their beloved, achieve fulfillment.*”²³⁵

Solzhenitsyn also speaks of love but in a way different to both Hillesum and Frankl. He talks about the experience of sharing one's first cell with others after a prolonged and solitary experience of interrogation. For him, that first cell was the “place where you first encountered others like yourself, doomed to the same fate”²³⁶ and it turned his experiences of “disgust” with “the ugliness”²³⁷ around him into a kind of love. He writes,

All your life you will remember it with an emotion that you otherwise experience only in remembering your first love. And those people, who shared with you the floor and air of that stone cubicle during those days when you rethought your entire life, will from time to time be recollected by you as members of your own family. Yes, in those days they were your only family.²³⁸

The experience Solzhenitsyn is describing here is one of fellowship which is a type of love that can be experienced quite intensely in a prison environment (as can its opposite: enmity). After suffering the hostility and oppression of interrogation, Solzhenitsyn is greatly moved when he finds himself with fellow prisoners.

Now for the first time you were about to see people who were not your enemies. Now for the first time you were about to see others who were alive, who were traveling your road, and whom you could join to yourself with the joyous word “we.” ... [It] is now revealed to you as something sweet: you are not alone in the world! Wise, spiritual beings – *human beings* – still exist.²³⁹

²³⁵ *MSM*: 57 [*italics* my emphasis and the text slightly altered for gender-inclusive translation]. *ZB*: 55. *TJL*: 63-64: In der denkbar tristesten äußeren Situation, in eine Lage hineingestellt, in der er sich nicht verwirklichen kann durch ein Leisten, in einer Situation, in der seine einzige Leistung in einem rechten Leiden – in einem aufrechten Leiden bestehen kann, in solcher Situation vermag der Mensch, im liebenden Schauen, in der Kontemplation des geistigen Bildes, das er vom geliebten Menschen in sich trägt, sich zu erfüllen.

²³⁶ *GA*, 1: 179.

²³⁷ Cf. *MSM*: 39. *ZB*: 36. *TJL*: 41: Dann ist da der Ekel. Der Ekel vor all der Häßlichkeit, schon rein äußerlich, von der sich der Häftling umgeben findet.

²³⁸ *GA*, 1: 179.

²³⁹ *GA*, 1: 183-184.

Such was the strength of this love for Solzhenitsyn that he was convinced that, in his first cell, his “soul would heal.”²⁴⁰ Fellowship of this kind can offer prisoners an experience of solidarity and friendship that can make life meaningful. Prison chaplains can thus encourage prisoners to accept their cells and the people around them, helping them to find a community based on shared experience and a faith that utters, “my soul will heal.”²⁴¹

The pastoral value of love and relationships in the life of a prisoner is very clear and chaplains should be aware of the need to support and encourage prisoners in developing and drawing strength and meaning from such relationships. From a Christian viewpoint, of course, chaplains will also be aware that the ultimate Source of love is God and where possible will encourage prisoners to explore a loving relationship with God as they understand Him. The reality, however, is that such a relationship may not be meaningful for many prisoners: the personal experience of love described by Frankl is likely to be something to which many will find it easier to relate.

It can be argued that this personal love between two human beings, as in Frankl's love for his wife, is a reflection and image of God's love, just as the imagery of the lovers in the Song of Songs quoted by Frankl is also a reflection of God's love for us.²⁴² Ultimately, in clinging to their love for another person, prisoners are clinging to Love itself which is God.²⁴³ The truth is there are many ways to love and each way brings us to God. Whether it is Rahner in the “Prison Pastorate” speaking of God's love in Christ or Frankl speaking of his love for his wife or Hillesum and Solzhenitsyn speaking of their love for their fellow prisoners or a prisoner speaking of love for his parent or her child or a friend, it is all part of the same mystery of Love. Where there is love, there is God “because love is from God.”²⁴⁴

As discussed in Chapter One, Rahner argues that God is present in this human world and is present, in a real way, in each human being. When we reach out to a beloved other, then, we are in truth reaching for God. Love brings out the best in us even in incarceration, as Frankl experienced.²⁴⁵ It purifies and ennobles the human condition enabling us to touch (or, rather, be touched by) the Source of all love: God. One of the most significant titles for Jesus in the Gospels is “the Beloved.” The love

²⁴⁰ *GA*, 1: 183.

²⁴¹ *GA*, 1: 183.

²⁴² *MSM*: 58. *ZB*: 57. *TJL*: 65. Quoting the Song of Solomon 8:6, Frankl affirms that “[...] love is as strong as death.”

²⁴³ 1 John 4:16.

²⁴⁴ 1 John 4:7.

²⁴⁵ Cf. 1 Cor 13.

between Jesus and the Father that is expressed in the Spirit (so beautifully depicted in Rublev's icon of the Trinity) is the love for which we are all reaching though we may not always be aware of it. As Frankl truly proclaims, therefore, "the truth" and "the final wisdom" of so many poets and thinkers is "that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which humans can aspire.... The salvation of human beings is through love and in love."²⁴⁶

4.3.2. *Art, Music, Poetry, and Literature*

Another aspect of life that helped Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn find meaning in their lives despite the grim reality of their captivity was the world of art, music, poetry, and literature. For Hillesum and Solzhenitsyn, in particular, the pursuit of art and the beauty it brings was of tremendous importance in enabling them not only to cope with but to overcome their horrific circumstances. Solzhenitsyn speaks of the power of beauty, referring to Dostoevsky's remark, "Beauty will save the world," and asking himself "[h]ow could that be possible?," whom has beauty ever saved?²⁴⁷ He answers by saying that there is "a certain peculiarity" in beauty and in art: "namely, the convincingness of a true work of art is completely irrefutable and it forces even an opposing heart to surrender."²⁴⁸

Frankl, Hillesum and Solzhenitsyn each found a personal way of reporting their experience and expressing their search for meaning through writing or "art." Living a truly human life in incarceration, they realised that it is the artist, speaking in images and symbols, who seems to possess the most truthful language.²⁴⁹ As Solzhenitsyn says, "works of art" which are truthful "take hold of us, compel us, and nobody ever, not even in ages to come, will appear to refute them."²⁵⁰ They connect us to what he calls the "ancient trinity of Truth, Goodness and Beauty" and have the power to help people, in their troubled hours, to see themselves and this world as it really is.²⁵¹ Speaking of literature, he goes on to argue that it can "help mankind,"²⁵² in its struggle "against the ruthless onslaught of open violence" as violence is always "necessarily interwoven with

²⁴⁶ *MSM*: 57. *ZB*: 55. *TJL*: 63.

²⁴⁷ *GA*, 1, "P.S. – Insights, Interviews & More": 6.

²⁴⁸ *GA*, 1, "P.S. – Insights, Interviews & More": 7.

²⁴⁹ For the artist, "speaking in images and symbols" in prisons, see Michael Balfour et al. (eds.), *Performing Arts in Prisons: Creative Perspectives* (Portland, OR: Intellect, 2019). See also Victor H. Brombert, *The Romantic Prison: The French Tradition* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015 [1978]).

²⁵⁰ *GA*, 1, "P.S. – Insights, Interviews & More": 7.

²⁵¹ *GA*, 1, "P.S. – Insights, Interviews & More": 7, 20.

²⁵² *GA*, 1, "P.S. – Insights, Interviews & More": 19.

falsehood”²⁵³ and art “can *conquer falsehood!*”²⁵⁴ In Solzhenitsyn’s view, “[f]alsehood can hold out against much in this world, but not against art. And no sooner will falsehood be dispersed than the nakedness of violence will be revealed in all its ugliness – and violence, decrepit, will fall.”²⁵⁵ As he says, through art, “*one word of truth shall outweigh the whole world.*”²⁵⁶

If we translate what Solzhenitsyn is saying and apply it to prisoners, one could argue that literature (and, by extension, all kinds of “art”) is a form of empowerment that will help prisoners. Prisoners generally tend to be people who have experienced and/or participated in what Solzhenitsyn calls “the ruthless onslaught of open violence.”²⁵⁷ Being held against one’s will in an institution of incarceration is itself a type of violence no matter how just the system that puts one there. Many prisoners have grown up in situations where violence and falsehood are ways of life and that violence can run right through to their own hearts. True works of art created or received by prisoners can help their own “opposing hearts to surrender” and open them up to the values of “Truth, Goodness and Beauty” in their lives.²⁵⁸ Dostoevsky’s remark is not “a careless phrase but a prophecy,” Solzhenitsyn argues.²⁵⁹ It encourages prison chaplains to recognise “Beauty” as the empowerment which “saves the world” behind bars.²⁶⁰ Those who work in prison ministry need to take seriously the possibility that music, poetry, literature, and art might really be able to help prisoners to find meaning in their lives.

Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn are, each in their own manner, looking not simply for ways to express themselves but, more profoundly, for ways to empower themselves and others through the art of writing. This is the “small insight” into which they have succeeded in gaining insight and seek to communicate.²⁶¹ As the Dutch Hillesum scholar, Ria Van den Brandt, notes, “for Etty Hillesum herself *writing* functioned as *empowerment*.”²⁶² Her writings provided her with “a source of

²⁵³ GA, 1, “P.S. – Insights, Interviews & More”: 21.

²⁵⁴ GA, 1, “P.S. – Insights, Interviews & More”: 21-22.

²⁵⁵ GA, 1, “P.S. – Insights, Interviews & More”: 21-22.

²⁵⁶ GA, 1, “P.S. – Insights, Interviews & More”: 21-22.

²⁵⁷ GA, 1, “P.S. – Insights, Interviews & More”: 21.

²⁵⁸ GA, 1, “P.S. – Insights, Interviews & More”: 7.

²⁵⁹ Cf. Mark Patrick Hederman, “The God of Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Solzhenitsyn,” in: *The Crane Bag* Vol. 7, No. 1, *Socialism & Culture* (1983): 65-73.

²⁶⁰ GA, 1, “P.S. – Insights, Interviews & More”: 7.

²⁶¹ GA, 1, “P.S. – Insights, Interviews & More”: 7.

²⁶² Coetsier, *The Existential Philosophy of Etty Hillesum*, 82. Cf. Ria van den Brandt’s essay “Etty Hillesum and her ‘Catholic Worshippers’: A Plea For a More Critical Approach to Etty Hillesum’s Writings,” in: *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum: Proceedings of the Etty Hillesum Conference at Ghent University, November 2008*, Supplements to the

recognition, confirmation and liberation,” a sense of “identity.”²⁶³ Van den Brandt notes further that, for others too, the *reading* of her texts turns out to be an act of *empowerment* as they feel nourished and strengthened by her words and insights.²⁶⁴ The message for prison chaplaincy is a creative one: the writing and reading of texts, of poetry and literature, and the singing of a song, can turn out to be an *act of empowerment*. As Hillesum herself declared: “There is no hidden poet in me, just a little piece of God that might grow into poetry. And a camp needs a poet, one who experiences life there, even there, as a bard and is able to sing about it.”²⁶⁵ What is significant here for the prison pastorate, is that she did *not* write ‘this prison’ needs a “religious person,” a “Christian,” someone who finds “Christ.” Instead, she believed these terrible circumstances needed a “song” from an “artist,” a “poet” with a “thinking heart.”²⁶⁶ From this belief came her resolution to be “the thinking heart of a whole concentration camp.”²⁶⁷

For Hillesum herself, reading the poetry and literature of others was profoundly empowering. Through a meditative reading of such works, she became aware of “a timeless quality that enabled her to regain some order in her life.”²⁶⁸ Rilke in particular had a major influence during her incarceration and became one of Hillesum’s main prison-teachers. Like Frankl who also cited Rilke’s poetry, the words filled her with meaning. She even thought that she could have written his letters “On God” herself. She was convinced that if she had, then she would have wanted to write them “just like that and no other way.”²⁶⁹ For Hillesum, as for Solzhenitsyn, art has the power through “one word of truth” to change our inner world. She argues that it is possible for prisoners to radically shut out the outside world and to concentrate on what she calls the “inner universe or outer space

Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy, eds. Klaas A.D. Smelik, Ria van den Brandt, and Meins G.S. Coetsier (Boston, MA: Brill, 2010), 215-231, esp. 230. Van den Brandt’s essay is an enhanced revision of her Dutch article “Etty Hillesum en haar ‘katholiek vereerders’: Pleidooi voor een meer kritische benadering van een bijzonder document,” in: *Etty Hillesum in facetten*, Etty Hillesum Studies I, eds. Ria van den Brandt and Klaas A.D. Smelik (Budel: Damon, 2003), 57-75.

²⁶³ Ibid. For “identity” and its complexity in the prison context see Joel Thomas, *Conviction, Conversion and the Chaplain: An Investigative Study of the Possible Roles of Prison Chaplains in Shaping Prisoners’ Identities* (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012).

²⁶⁴ Coetsier, *The Existential Philosophy of Etty Hillesum*, 82.

²⁶⁵ E.T., 542. *Het Werk*, 575: Er is geen dichter in mij, er is wel een stukje van God in mij, dat tot dichter zou kunnen aangroeien. In zo een kamp moet toch een dichter zijn, die het leven daar, ook daar, beleeft als dichter en die er van zal kunnen zingen.

²⁶⁶ Coetsier, *The Existential Philosophy of Etty Hillesum*, 102.

²⁶⁷ E.T., 542-543. *Het Werk*, 575: Ik zou het denkende hart van een heel concentratiekamp willen zijn.

²⁶⁸ Coetsier, *The Existential Philosophy of Etty Hillesum*, 46.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 102.

within” (*Weltinnenraum*), a favourite term copied from one of Rilke’s poems.²⁷⁰ In the midst of the suffering she encountered, poetry and literature helped her to connect to her inner world. Not only that, she also learned through her reading of Rilke that writing could help her “to belong to one’s experience” and “to transform it.”²⁷¹ Thus, she discovered that writing could satisfy her yearning to transform her prison experience. In Frankl’s language, art became a way of trying to make sense of her “apparently senseless suffering.”²⁷²

In this regard nothing has really changed: prisoners today also search for meaning but often feel their own words are insufficient. Hillesum and Frankl show that reading, or simply quoting from poetry and literature (as Frankl often did) can help in expressing human thoughts and feelings behind bars.²⁷³ As Solzhenitsyn believes, art reflects human consciousness and has the power to articulate what prisoners want to say. In *The Gulag Archipelago*, he notes that books in prison were a significant part of the prisoners’ life and they were grateful when they could read.²⁷⁴ Music too can be empowering for prisoners. Solzhenitsyn gives a moving description of a man singing, “in a voice... weak yet full of feeling,” “an old revolutionary song” creating a moment of extraordinary emotional empathy among the inmates.²⁷⁵ Music has an ability to express feelings too deep for words and can be a very important form of expression for prisoners.

Contact with poetry, literature and music could thus be seen as a primary need in the prison pastorate along with other creative forms of expression for those prisoners who have this ability. As we have seen, writing was a way for Hillesum to transform her experience. For Solzhenitsyn too, it was transformative, enabling him “not to notice what was being done” with his “body”²⁷⁶ as he was obliged to carry out forced labour but instead find moments when he was “both free and happy.”²⁷⁷ Writing was also a way for prisoners to express the words that “would well up inside us... that we should like to cry out to the whole world, if the whole world could hear one of us.”²⁷⁸ What this suggests is that writing is a cathartic release for prisoners of their existential frustration and it can

²⁷⁰ Coetsier, *The Existential Philosophy of Etty Hillesum*, 47. Cf. Maria Gabriella Nocita, “Feeling Life: Etty Hillesum Becomes Word,” in: *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum*, 279-296.

²⁷¹ E.T., 336. *Het Werk*, 351: [M]it meinem Erleben allein zu sein, ihm zu gehören, es umzubilden [...]

²⁷² *MSM*: 11. *ZB*: 11.

²⁷³ Coetsier, *The Existential Philosophy of Etty Hillesum*, 46.

²⁷⁴ *GA*, 1: 215.

²⁷⁵ *GA*, 3: 50.

²⁷⁶ *GA*, 3: 98.

²⁷⁷ *GA*, 3: 98-99.

²⁷⁸ *GA*, 1, “P.S. – Insights, Interviews & More”: 8.

therefore be of therapeutic value for them. As Balfour *et al.* have noted, “there is a growing body of evidence that suggests music, theatre, poetry, and dance can contribute to prisoner wellbeing, management, rehabilitation, and reintegration.”²⁷⁹ While Solzhenitsyn makes the point that many prisoners who do express themselves artistically can fall into the “abyss,” being “never recognised, never once mentioned in public,”²⁸⁰ efforts are made by some chaplains today to communicate the art and poetry of nameless prisoners to the wider community.²⁸¹

If we are to take remarks seriously the reflections of our three thinkers on the transformative power of art in prison, I would suggest that prison ministry needs chaplains with “thinking hearts” who have an affinity with the creative arts and who will use that ability to empower prisoners to find meaning through creative and receptive engagement with the arts. Engagement of this kind in prison can be intense and uplifting. Reading, writing, etc., can evoke a “security” in prisoners, something no one can take away from them.²⁸² As Hillesum makes clear, the empowerment in such artistic activity can teach prisoners to become “indestructible” despite it all: “And yet there in the passage, amid all the gloom and the bustle, I was able to read a few Rilke letters, to continue living my own life.”²⁸³

The arts are vital to a contemporary theology of prison ministry, and it is clear from our study that engagement with the arts is of great pastoral value in prisons. However, one could go further, pointing, for instance, to how scripture makes use of the arts. Thus, for example, Jesus used the art of story-telling to make his points and also used natural images of beauty, e.g., in the “do not worry” passage in the Sermon on the Mount.²⁸⁴ Many sections of the Bible, such as the psalms and other examples of biblical poetry, use literary forms to convey “a greater Truth.” A good example is the “Song of the Suffering Servant” which may speak particularly strongly to the prisoner’s condition,

²⁷⁹ Michael Balfour et al. (eds.), *Performing Arts in Prisons: Creative Perspectives* (Portland, OR: Intellect, 2019).

²⁸⁰ *GA*, 1, “P.S. – Insights, Interviews & More”: 8.

²⁸¹ See the 2020 prison publication: Meins G.S. Coetsier & Andreas Leipold (eds.), *Born to be wild: Gott, Geld und Gefängnis – Bilderbogen & Lesebuch aus dem Gefängnis* (Bad Hersfeld/Hünfeld: Volkert Design, 2020).

²⁸² *Ibid.* An inmate of Hünfeld prison and contributing author of *Born to be wild: Gott, Geld und Gefängnis*, spoke in a radio interview about this sense of inner ‘security’ and ‘freedom’ that he discovered in art. See Petra Klostermann-Groß, “Kunst aus dem Knast - eingesperrte Maler und Autoren in der JVA,” Radio - hr4 Nord-Osthessen, Hessischer Rundfunk (29 December 2020, 15:00 o’clock).

²⁸³ E.T., 496. *Het Werk*, 525: En ik heb toch nog daar in de gang, in de benauwdheid en in het gedrang, een paar Rilke-brieven gelezen, ik ga toch maar door op mijn manier. En de doodsangst op die gezichten. Al die gezichten, mijn God, die gezichten.

²⁸⁴ Matt 6:25-34; Luke 12:22-31.

referring as it does to being “despised by all.”²⁸⁵ The Gospels themselves show us how the early Christian communities turned to such passages in order to make sense of the seismic experience of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Art has always been something that helps us make sense of our experience and this can be seen in scripture.

The same is true of works of art considered part of the Christian canon such as Michelangelo's *Pietà*, the music of Bach or Arvo Pärt, Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*²⁸⁶ or the poetry of the Spanish mystic John of the Cross (1542-1591).²⁸⁷ In the words of the Russian filmmaker Andrey Tarkovsky, such art “furthers man's search for what is eternal, transcendent, divine.”²⁸⁸ The point is not that prison chaplains should be promoting specifically theological art: rather, as the writings of Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn illustrate, the point is that using beauty to point to Ultimate Truth is something that is already there in scripture (and in Christian art and literature) and that is because Truth and Beauty, like Love, bring us to that which is beyond, the Transcendent, God. Ralf Frisch claims in his 2020 book *Er: Ein Zwiegespräch mit dem Mann der Jesus erfand* (“He: A dialogue with the man who invented Jesus”) that “redemptive power” to save the beauty of the lepers, the outcasts, the abused and those who are suffering from self-destructive behaviour (the real mission of Christianity, according to him) only comes through “the language of the Light and the language of Beauty.”²⁸⁹ It can therefore be argued that there is a theological basis for using art and beauty of all kinds to point to the salvation offered by God which is not limited to a specific Church or religion but is, as Rahner himself argues, to be freely offered to all, believers and non-believers alike including prisoners.

As Tarkovsky states: “Art affirms all that is best in man – hope, faith, love, beauty, prayer ... What he dreams of and what he hopes for...”²⁹⁰ To engage prisoners with various forms of art is to affirm “all that is best” in them – their “hope, faith, love, beauty, prayer” and to further their “search for

²⁸⁵ Is 52:13-53:12

²⁸⁶ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, tr. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2002).

²⁸⁷ John of The Cross, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, tr. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991).

²⁸⁸ Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: The Great Russian Filmmaker Discusses His Art*, translated from the Russian by Kitty Huntler-Blair (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986), 239.

²⁸⁹ Ralf Frisch, *Er: Ein Zwiegespräch mit dem Mann, der Jesus erfand* (Zürich: TVZ, 2020), 112-113: Erlösende Kraft hat nur das, was die Augen der Menschen zum Glänzen bringt und ihre Herzen höher schlagen lässt. Erlösende Kraft hat nur das, was die Sprache des Lichts und die Sprache der Schönheit spricht.

²⁹⁰ Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 239.

what is eternal, transcendent, divine.”²⁹¹ There can be nothing more empowering for a person in search of meaning and it is clear that it is the role and responsibility of prison ministers to foster such pursuits among those in their charge.

4.3.3. *The Prisoner's Weapon of the Soul (Waffe der Seele) – Humour (Lagerhumor)*²⁹²

Along with art and love, Frankl is concerned with another ‘tool’ of central importance for prison ministry today: humour. Frankl refers to humour (*Lagerhumor*) as “the soul’s weapon in the fight for self-preservation.”²⁹³ He acknowledged that it might be astonishing for outsiders to learn “one could find a sense of humor” in a concentration camp.²⁹⁴ However, humour was essential to survival as, “more than anything else in the human make-up, [it] can afford an aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds.”²⁹⁵ He writes of how most of the inmates “were overcome by a grim sense of humor” as all their illusions were destroyed and they realised they “had nothing to lose except our so ridiculously naked lives.”²⁹⁶ What was important then was to make fun of whatever they could.

Humour was a life-saver, according to Frankl, as a “show of good humour and a Devil-may-care attitude” could release a prisoner from inner tensions.²⁹⁷ Hillesum also writes about a sense of “humour” breaking through in the tensions of imprisonment in Camp Westerbork.²⁹⁸ Solzhenitsyn agrees with Frankl that humour is the “best evidence of all of the healthy psychological state” of the *zeks*, the Gulag inmates.²⁹⁹ He writes that *zeks* “value and love humor,... [it] is their *constant ally, without which, very likely, life in the Archipelago would be totally impossible...* Their every reply to

²⁹¹ Ibid. As the poet Rumi says, “Let the beauty we love be what we do. There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.” Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī, *The Essential Rumi*, tr. Coleman Barks (London: Penguin, 1995), 36.

²⁹² For humour in today’s prison ministry see Meins G.S. Coetsier & Andreas Leipold (eds.), *Humor hinter Gittern – Der hat gesessen* (Hünfeld/Darmstadt: JVA Darmstadt, 2018 [3. Auflage, 2019]).

²⁹³ *MSM*: 63. *ZB*: 61-62. *TJL*: 71: Auch der Humor ist eine Waffe der Seele im Kampf um ihre Selbsterhaltung.

²⁹⁴ *MSM*: 63. *ZB*: 61-62. *TJL*: 71: Ist es schon erstaunlich genug für den Außenstehenden, daß es im Konzentrationslager so etwas wie Natur- oder Kunsterleben gibt, so mag es noch erstaunlicher klingen, wenn ich sage, daß es dort auch Humor gibt.

²⁹⁵ *MSM*: 63. *ZB*: 61-62. *TJL*: 71: Auch der Humor ist eine Waffe der Seele im Kampf um ihre Selbsterhaltung. Ist es doch bekannt, daß der Humor wie kaum sonst etwas im menschlichen Dasein geeignet ist, Distanz zu schaffen und sich über die Situation zu stellen, wenn auch nur, wie gesagt, für Sekunden.

²⁹⁶ *MSM*: 34-35. *ZB*: 31. *TJL*: 35.

²⁹⁷ *MSM*: 37. *ZB*: 34. *TJL*: 39.

²⁹⁸ E.T., 656. *Het Werk*, 700.

²⁹⁹ *GA*, 2: 527.

a question, then: every judgment about their surroundings, is spiced with at least a mite of humor.”³⁰⁰ A sense of humour is what helped prisoners in all three situations to cope with the macabre reality of death and suffering all around them. As *zeks* said of those arriving in the Archipelago for sentences of twenty five years: “Whoever hasn’t been there yet ... will get there, and whoever has been there ... won’t forget it.”³⁰¹

“Apart from that strange kind of humor,” Viktor Frankl describes, “another sensation” that seized him simultaneously in his prison experiences: “curiosity.”³⁰²

I have experienced this kind of *curiosity* before, as *a fundamental reaction toward certain strange circumstances*. When my life was once endangered by a climbing accident, I felt only one sensation at the critical moment: curiosity, curiosity as to whether I should come out of it alive or with a fractured skull or some other injuries.³⁰³

These human qualities of “humour” and “curiosity,” enable people to detach from their situation and thus helps them to keep functioning and, ultimately, to survive. Those working in prison ministry today definitely need a sense of humour³⁰⁴ and these human qualities should arguably be given greater credit than is generally practised in Church professions.³⁰⁵ As a prisoner once said to me: “Religion without humour is the Holy Trinity without Jesus Christ.”

In the camps, Frankl trained a prison friend “to develop a sense of humor.”³⁰⁶ He suggested to his fellow inmate that they would “invent at least one amusing story daily, about some incident that could happen one day after their liberation.”³⁰⁷ Prison pastors should integrate such an approach in their work and develop a sense of humour in their ministry and conversations with prisoners. This is very important to build up trust and give the inmates a sense of being human. As Frankl says, the ability to “to see things in a humorous light” is part of “the art of living. Yet it is possible to practice

³⁰⁰ *GA*, 2: 527 [*italics my emphasis*].

³⁰¹ *GA*, 2: 527-528.

³⁰² *MSM*: 35. *ZB*: 31. *TJL*: 35.

³⁰³ *MSM*: 35 [*italics my emphasis*]. *ZB*: 31. *TJL*: 35.

³⁰⁴ See the introductions of Coetsier & Leipold (eds.), *Humor hinter Gittern*, 4-9.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid*.

³⁰⁶ *MSM*: 63. *ZB*: 62. *TJL*: 71.

³⁰⁷ *MSM*: 63. *ZB*: 62. *TJL*: 71.

the art of living even in a concentration camp, although suffering is omnipresent.”³⁰⁸ Just as a person's suffering, no matter how great or small, can completely fill one's mind and soul,³⁰⁹ so “a very trifling thing can cause the greatest of joys.”³¹⁰ He gives as an example a journey where the prisoners thought they were heading for a particularly strict camp and were overjoyed when they found they were “heading ‘only’ for Dachau.”³¹¹ So too it is important in prison to encourage prisoners to take satisfaction in small moments of joy.

Following Frankl, pastoral ministry in prisons “must make use of the specifically human capacity for self-detachment inherent in a sense of humor” and also curiosity and joy.³¹² For both prisoners and prison ministers, this “basic capacity to detach” themselves from other inmates, from the prison environment and especially from themselves is crucial if one is not only to survive but to thrive in jail.³¹³

4.3.4. *The Prisoner's Prayer/Relationship with God*

Solzhenitsyn writes, citing the poet Tanya Khodkevich: “You can pray *freely* [...] But just so God alone can hear.”³¹⁴ Prayer is one of the “last freedoms” that could not be taken away from prisoners even in the worst of circumstances. Throughout her prison life, Hillesum showed how it was possible to carry an inner world within oneself and participate in an “uninterrupted dialogue with You, God.”³¹⁵ For her, this was “the one necessary thing.”³¹⁶ It was because of God and her “prayer” that

³⁰⁸ MSM: 64. ZB: 62-63. TJJ: 72: Stellt der Wille zum Humor, der Versuch, die Dinge irgendwie in witziger Perspektive zu sehen, gleichsam einen Trick dar, dann handelt es sich jeweils um einen Trick so recht im Sinne einer Art Lebenskunst. Die Möglichkeit einer Einstellung im Sinne von Lebenskunst, auch mitten im Lagerleben, ist jedoch dadurch gegeben, daß dieses Lagerleben reich an Kontrasten ist, und die Kontrastwirkungen wiederum haben eine gewisse Relativität allen Leidens zur Voraussetzung.

³⁰⁹ MSM: 64. ZB: 63. TJJ: 72.

³¹⁰ MSM: 64. ZB: 63. TJJ: 73. [U]nd hieraus ergibt sich weiter, daß auch ein an sich Geringfügiges die größte Freude bereiten kann.

³¹¹ MSM: 64-65. ZB: 63. TJJ: 73.

³¹² MSM: 147. ZB: 152.

³¹³ See the introductions of Coetsier & Leipold (eds.), *Humor hinter Gittern*, 4-9. Cf. Jonathan G. Rudy, *OFF THE WALL: Prison Art & Humor* (Salem, OR: Atkins Enterprises, 2006).

³¹⁴ GA, 1: 37.

³¹⁵ Coetsier, *The Existential Philosophy of Etty Hillesum*, 67. E.T., 640. *Het Werk*, 682: Je hebt me zo rijk gemaakt, mijn God, laat me ook met volle handen uit mogen delen. Mijn leven is geworden tot één ononderbroken samenspraak met jou, mijn God, één grote samenspraak.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

she was able to give thanks for everything, even in captivity: “At night, too, when I lie in my bed and rest in You, oh God, tears of gratitude run down my face, and that is my prayer.”³¹⁷

Hillesum's dialogue with God deepened during her prison experiences. What had started as a “listening to her inner voice” (*hineinhorchen*) had developed into an ongoing dialogue with God during her incarceration in Camp Westerbork.³¹⁸ Although she claimed to have found the term “God” somewhat primitive, the number of times she used it increased as the war continued, appearing more than 400 times in her writings. For Hillesum, meaning seems to have been found in her relationship with God, leading to a powerfully resilient view of life itself: “life is good, come what may.”³¹⁹ Filled with a deeply authentic faith in God, she declared: “I am ready to bear witness in any situation and unto death that life is beautiful and meaningful and that it is not God's fault that things are as they are at present, but our own”³²⁰ and “I firmly believed that I would go on finding life beautiful, always, despite everything.”³²¹ As Pope Benedict XVI said of Hillesum, “she found God right in the midst of the great tragedy of the twentieth century, the Shoah.”³²² Thus, she was able to see God's beauty and the wonder of life despite the horrific prison conditions, saying “[t]he misery here is quite terrible; and yet,... time and again, it soars straight from my heart – *the feeling that life is glorious and magnificent...*”³²³

Etty Hillesum experienced God within herself: “When I pray,... *I hold a silly, naive, or deadly serious dialogue with what is deepest inside me*, which for the sake of convenience I call God.”³²⁴ By looking deep within herself, she discovered God, writing: “There is a really deep well inside me. And in it dwells God. Sometimes I am there, too. But more often stones and grit block the well, and God is buried beneath. Then He must be dug out again.”³²⁵ This was her deep desire, her “will to meaning”: to dig God out from under the prison rubble, not only for herself but for others also. She

³¹⁷ E.T., 640. *Het Werk*, 682: Ook 's avonds. wanneer ik in m'n bed lig en rust in jou, mijn God, lopen me soms de dankbaarheidstranen over het gezicht en dat is dan mijn gebed.

³¹⁸ Coetsier, *The Existential Philosophy of Etty Hillesum*, 53.

³¹⁹ E.T., 78. *Het Werk*, 82: het leven is goed, hoe dan ook.

³²⁰ E.T., 480-481. *Het Werk*, 507-508: [I]k ben bereid tot in iedere situatie en tot in de dood te getuigen, dat dit leven schoon en zinrijk is en dat het niet aan God ligt, dat het zo is als het nu is, maar aan ons [...]

³²¹ E.T., 307. *Het Werk*, 320: En [ik] geloofde vast, dat ik het leven tòch schoon zou blijven vinden, altijd, ondanks alles.

³²² Coetsier, *The Existential Philosophy of Etty Hillesum*, 77, esp. n. 32.

³²³ E.T., 616 [*italics my emphasis*]. *Het Werk*, 657: [D]an stijgt er altijd weer uit m'n hart naar boven ik kan er niets aan doen, het is nu eenmaal zo, het is van een elementaire kracht: dit leven is iets prachtigs en iets groots [...]

³²⁴ E.T., 494 [*italics my emphasis*]. *Het Werk*, 523: Als ik bid, bid ik nooit voor mezelf, altijd voor anderen of ik houd een dolzinnige of kinderlijke of dooernstige dialoog met dat allerdiepste in me, dat ik gemakshalve maar God noem.

³²⁵ E.T., 91. *Het Werk*, 97: Binnen in me zit een heel diepe put. En daarin zit God. Soms kan ik erbij. Maar vaker liggen er stenen en gruis voor die put, dan is God begraven. Dan moet hij weer opgegraven worden.

had a deep concern for others throughout her prison experiences, frequently being struck by the suffering she saw etched on their “faces” (*gezichten*).³²⁶ She saw others, like herself, as being made in the image and likeness of God. “I sank to my knees with the words that preside over human life: And God made man after His likeness.”³²⁷ The prison context confronted Hillesum with the helplessness around her and she was equally convinced of God’s helplessness. She wanted to make sure too that God did not lose more ground in the hearts of other prisoners. Being made in the image and likeness of God, she saw herself as a participant in God’s creating. Accordingly, she decided to help “You” in their imprisonment: “I shall try to help You, God [...] You cannot help us, but we must help You and defend Your dwelling place inside us to the last.”³²⁸

The meaning and hope Hillesum drew from her relationship with God empowered her to remain resilient in the face of suffering (“We may suffer but we must not succumb”³²⁹) and to conceive of a future without bitterness and hatred. As Pope Benedict noted, she became a woman full of love and inner peace, able to say: “I live in constant intimacy with God.”³³⁰ To put it in Rahner’s words, she involved herself in the horrific historical events of her time and, despite the suffering that surrounded her, managed to say something significant about our shared human experiences of the divine and of being partners with God.³³¹ All of this came from her “uninterrupted dialogue” with God, with what was deepest within her being – a dialogue which arguably each prisoner today can learn. Prisoners and prison ministers alike would greatly benefit from adopting such an inner dialogue.³³² Hillesum’s experiences show us just how empowering such a dialogue can be and that prisoners themselves can be motivated and empowered to “dig out” God, thereby transforming themselves and their prison experience.

Solzhenitsyn also was inspired by dialogue concerning God, in his case, with a fellow prisoner, the religious poet Anatoly Vasilyevich Silin. Silin and Solzhenitsyn talked to each other freely about

³²⁶ E.T., 459-460. *Het Werk*, 484-485

³²⁷ E.T., 644. *Het Werk*, 686: Ik ben in de knoei geraakt met het woord, dat het leidmotief van mijn leven is: En God schiep de mens naar Zijn Evenbeeld. Dat woord beleefde een moeilijke ochtend met mij.

³²⁸ E.T., 488-489. *Het Werk*, 516-517: Ik zal je helpen God [...] En haast met iedere hartslag wordt het me duidelijker: dat jij ons niet kunt helpen, maar dat wij jou moeten helpen en dat we de woning in ons, waar jij huist, tot het laatste toe moeten verdedigen.

³²⁹ E.T., 616. *Het Werk*, 657: We mogen wel lijden, maar we mogen er niet onder bezwijken.

³³⁰ Coetsier, *The Existential Philosophy of Etty Hillesum*, 78, esp. n. 33. Cf. Hillesum’s diary entry of August 26, 1941. *Het Werk*, 97; *Etty Hillesum: Pagine mistiche*, tr. Cristina Dobner (Milan: Ancora, 2007), 112.

³³¹ See Chapter One, Section 1.1.3.1. *Being Human as a Reference to the Mystery of God* in this thesis.

³³² Cf. Meins G.S. Coetsier, “‘You-Consciousness’ – Towards Political Theory: Etty Hillesum’s Experience and Symbolization of the Divine Presence.”

God, and Solzhenitsyn was startled “not for the first time or the last to realize what far from ordinary souls are concealed within deceptively ordinary exteriors.”³³³ Inmate Silin was not only a believer in God and a poet, but a philosopher and theologian as well. “His sensitive response to the riches of nature lent warmth and beauty to his view of the world,”³³⁴ Solzhenitsyn notes. Speaking of suffering, Silin held, quoting his own poem: “[t]he soul must suffer first, to know the perfect bliss of paradise...”³³⁵ The sufferings which Christ bore “in the flesh” prisoner Silin “daringly explained not only by the need to atone for human sins, but also by God’s desire to feel earthly suffering to the full.”³³⁶ Solzhenitsyn explains that “God always *knew* these sufferings,” but never before had Silin “*felt* them.”³³⁷

Solzhenitsyn’s writings show how prisoners may truly meet one another; how they start to pray, to think and to write about God during their confinement. Participating in severe human suffering bonds people together in faith. Prayer and dialogue with God are a profound resource for prison ministry and chaplains need to remember how empowering they can be and provide opportunities for prisoners to deepen and share this dialogue.

4.3.5. *Suffering*

It is counter-intuitive to think of suffering as a potential resource in prison ministry yet Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn make clear their belief that prisoners can “draw strength even from suffering.”³³⁸ In one way or another, suffering plays a large part in the experience of contemporary prisoners as well as those imprisoned by the Nazi and Soviet regimes. This suffering may not always be of the same type. Contemporary prisoners do not have to deal with the hardships and terror of the camps; those imprisoned for ideological reasons do not have to deal with guilt and the suffering that brings which can take many forms.³³⁹ The truth is that suffering of any kind takes one deep into the

³³³ *GA*, 3: 105-106.

³³⁴ *GA*, 3: 106.

³³⁵ *GA*, 3: 106-107.

³³⁶ *GA*, 3: 107.

³³⁷ *GA*, 3: 107.

³³⁸ E.T., 477. *Het Werk*, 504: En zelfs uit lijden kan men krachten putten.

³³⁹ For the guilt, punishment, atonement (*Schuld, Strafe, Sühne*) of offenders (*Straftäter/innen*) in the German context cf. Hubertus Becker (ed.), *Zappenduster: Wahres aus der Unterwelt* (Zell/Mosel: Rhein-Mosel-Verlag, 2017). Hermann Deisenberger, and Leo Karrer, *Schuld und Gewissen bei Dissozialen* (Praktische Theologie im Dialog; 13) (Freiburg: Academic Press Fribourg, 1996). Rudolf Egg, *Die unheimlichen Richter: Wie Gutachter die Straffjustiz beeinflussen* (München: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 2015). Thomas Galli, *Die Gefährlichkeit des Täters* (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2017); *Die Schwere der Schuld: Ein Gefängnisdirektor erzählt* (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2016). Veronika Hofinger, and Thomas

human heart and confronts us with our inability and powerlessness to change ourselves and/or our conditions. For Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn, “[s]uffering” (*lijden*) was not something beneath their “human dignity.”³⁴⁰ Their writings deal constantly with the theme of suffering and their insights strongly challenge those practising prison ministry to acknowledge the role suffering can play to make the lives of prisoners more meaningful. Solzhenitsyn tells us that suffering is the prisoner’s lone reality: “[a]nd there we suffered, and we thought, and there was nothing else in our lives.”³⁴¹ Hillesum is conscious that “there will always be suffering, and whether one suffers from this or from that really doesn’t make much difference [...]”³⁴² She writes,

I mean: it is possible to suffer with dignity and without. I mean: most of us in the West don’t understand the art of suffering and experience a thousand fears instead. We cease to be alive, being full of fear, bitterness, hatred, and despair. God knows, it’s only too easy to understand why.³⁴³

What matters is to undertake the journey of the heart that is asked of us by our suffering: in Frankl’s language, to respond to “what life expects of us” and to “choose our attitude” and “take our stand” in face of the suffering. In this way, we can find meaning in life “despite everything” and “accept [our] fate with dignity and calm.”³⁴⁴ This is what enables us to rise above our circumstances and become what the “Spirit” within is urging us to be. This is a journey of *transformation*.³⁴⁵

Schmidinger, *Endbericht zur Begleitforschung Deradikalisierung im Gefängnis* (Wien: IRKS, 2017). Ulrich Lüke, and Georg Souvignier (eds.), *Schuld - überholte Kategorie oder menschliches Existential? Interdisziplinäre Annäherungen* (Quaestiones disputatae; 272) (Freiburg: Herder, 2015). Norbert Nedopil, *Jeder Mensch hat einen Abgrund: Spurensuche in der Seele von Verbrechern* (München: Goldmann Verlag, 2016). Michael Roth, *Willensfreiheit? Ein theologischer Essay zu Schuld und Sünde, Selbstgerechtigkeit und Skeptischer Ethik* (Rheinbach: Cms, 2015). Bertram Scheufele et al. *Der kommunikative Kosmos von Gefangenen: Eine sozialkonstruktivistische Studie zum Strafvollzug in Baden-Württemberg* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2019). Steffen Schroeder, *Was alles in einem Menschen sein kann: Begegnung mit einem Mörder* (Berlin: Rowohlt Berlin, 2017). Peter Strasser, *Verbrechermenschen: Zur kriminalwissenschaftlichen Erzeugung des Bösen* (Frankfurt am Main/New York, NY: Campus, 2005).

³⁴⁰ E.T., 459-460. *Het Werk*, 484-485.

³⁴¹ *GA*, 1: 225.

³⁴² E.T., 358-359. *Het Werk*, 375-376: [H]et lijden zal er altijd zijn en of men nu om het ene of om het andere lijdt, dat doet er toch eigenlijk niet toe [. . .]

³⁴³ E.T., 459-460. *Het Werk*, 484-485: Ik bedoel: men kan menswaardig lijden en onmenswaardig. Ik bedoel: de meeste Westerlingen verstaan de kunst van het lijden niet en ze krijgen er duizend angsten voor in de plaats. Dit is geen leven meer, wat de meesten doen: angst, resignatie, verbittering, haat, wanhoop. Mijn God, het is zo goed te begrijpen allemaal.

³⁴⁴ E.T., 616. *Het Werk*, 657.

³⁴⁵ For “transformation” of a life cf. Patrick Woodhouse, *Etty Hillesum: A Life Transformed* (London & New York, NY: Continuum, 2009).

Suffering brings to light the 'Shadow' in the person so that much of what Frankl, Hillesum and Solzhenitsyn have to say relates to the need to work with one's own "thinking heart" and to be touched by "the Transcendent."³⁴⁶ Ultimately, as Hillesum says, "[i]t is not the object [of suffering] but the suffering, the love, the emotions, and the quality of these emotions that count."³⁴⁷

What was true for Hillesum, Solzhenitsyn and Frankl could also be true for all. Their insights may significantly change the way both prisoners and chaplains can understand their humanity as they face their own sufferings in prison today. Both their testimony and their thoughts on imprisonment challenge pastors to weave the "slender threads of a broken life" with the prisoners, "into a firm pattern of meaning and responsibility."³⁴⁸ Undertaking this journey of transformation is an immense challenge which brings to light the fundamental Christian truth that Rahner points out in his theological anthropology: all human beings are in need of mercy and redemption. Ultimately, this can, from a faith perspective, only be found in God. But, of course, God – Christ – works through people and through what the world has to offer.

Christ, to speak with Rahner, works *in* prisoners but also *through* the prison chaplain who is the person who walks with them. Each person's journey of healing, redemption or transformation is utterly unique so each person has to find their own way, based on their experience of sorrow, suffering, sinfulness and need of God.³⁴⁹ The prisoner's story is the human story, the story of each one of us. In them, Rahner believes, we see the path that each of us must find. A path that is marked through and through with the Paschal mystery, the Easter journey through the darkness of Good Friday to the dawning of the light of Easter Sunday, a journey from death to life. The long "Dark Night" of the soul so poetically described by John of the Cross³⁵⁰ is a necessary part of being led to

³⁴⁶ See Meins G.S. Coetsier, "Eric Voegelin's Philosophy of Luminous Participation in the Transcendent Ground of Being" (Ph.D. Dissertation Philosophy, Ghent University, 2008). Cf. Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, tr. Michael B. Smith (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999 [1995]). "Part II: Love and Transcendence" in: Sarah Allen, *The Philosophical Sense of Transcendence: Levinas and Plato on Loving Beyond Being* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2009); *Transcendence et intelligibilité: Suivi d'un entretien* (Geneve: Labor et Fides, 1984), 1-69. Renée Dirkje Neeltje van Riessen, *Erotiek en Dood met het oog op transcendentie in de filosofie van Levinas* (Kampen: Kok Agora, 1991).

³⁴⁷ E.T., 358-359. *Het Werk*, 375-376: [H]et lijden zal er altijd zijn en of men nu om het ene of om het andere lijdt, dat doet er toch eigenlijk niet toe [...] Het gaat niet om het object. Het gaat om het lijden, om de liefde, om de grote gevoelens en om de kwaliteit van die gevoelens.

³⁴⁸ *MSM*: 9. *ZB*: 9.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁰ John of the Cross, "The Dark Night" in: *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, 353-457.

the experience of “Love” (*Liebe*) which God always so wants to bestow on us.³⁵¹ The aim of prison ministry, as Rahner articulates in “The Prison Pastorate,” is to find Christ: to find a way into the prisoner’s mind and heart and there to “witness” to the “self-bestowing God.”³⁵²

The prison chaplain must journey *with* prisoners to support them in finding their path. This can only work to the extent that they have walked their own path in wrestling with the sinfulness, the ‘going astray’ and being ‘lost in the wilderness,’ that marks the human condition and have come to experience for themselves the wonders of God’s love and God’s mercy. Psalm 130 says it all: “out of the depths” we cry to *You*; like the watchman waiting for dawn, like Hillesum, we “wait for Thy Spirit”; we trust in *You* – for with *You* is found mercy and fullness of redemption. As we have seen in Frankl’s existential analysis and in Rahner’s understanding of *anonymous Christianity*, this is by no means an exclusive, religious perspective. The writings of Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn make clear that the fullness of “God’s redemption” is for all and can be found in the most unexpected places, even in prison.

Conclusion

This chapter shows that the viewpoint of prisoners is different from the perspective of the prison pastors and their search for God as articulated by Rahner in “The Prison Pastorate.” The prisoner’s search for meaning finds clarity in the works of Viktor E. Frankl, Etty Hillesum and Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, who suffered imprisonment in the most difficult of circumstances. The study of their writings shows (i) the conceivable responses to the experiences of confinement, and (ii) what chaplains could do to support inmates psychologically during their time of incarceration. These three writers convey perspective and hope, dignity and purpose in a human situation where freedom has been taken away.

The argument presented in this chapter is that the practice of prison ministry and its related theology displays a number of characteristics that only a prisoner’s search for meaning can answer. The inmates themselves can illuminate the appropriate psychological and spiritual support that they need in their incarceration. Frankl’s analysis of “the search for meaning” and of “the three phases” within prison life can help prison pastors to support people behind bars in creating a greater perspective in their lives. Frankl’s reflections in light of Hillesum and Solzhenitsyn reveal the kind of personal

³⁵¹ See Iain Matthew, *The Impact of God: Soundings from John of the Cross* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995).

³⁵² Cf. Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 1-4.

“attitude” that will help inmates to survive their days of confinement and can be seen as reflected in some of the attitudes proposed and actions taken by Jesus Christ.

Frankl's understanding of the search for meaning is essential for the prison pastorate to deal with the “existential frustration” commonly experienced by prisoners. With a “meaning-centred theology” which cannot but be a resurrection theology,³⁵³ prison pastors may find basic spiritual orientations for ministry in institutions of incarceration today. A theology of prison ministry, as can be drawn from the accounts of their prison experience of Frankl, Hillesum and Solzhenitsyn, must arguably empower the prisoners through music, art and poetry, through reading, writing and listening. Prison chaplains can, through creative empowerment and a sense of humour, support prisoners to “take” a hopeful “stand” and help them to find “freedom” and human dignity in jail.

To support the outcome of Frankl's arguments and the prison experiences of Hillesum and Solzhenitsyn, the next chapter will move beyond Rahner and articulate some of the central aspects of a “theology of empowerment” (*Theologie der Stärkung*) that emphasises the spiritual in music, poetry, and art in prison.

³⁵³ See also Leo Tolstoy's last completed novel, *Resurrection*, about a rediscovery and renewal of self in the prison context. This intimate, psychological tale is one of guilt, anger and forgiveness. Leo Tolstoy, *Resurrection*, tr. Anthony Briggs (London: Penguin Classics, 2009).

CHAPTER FIVE

BEYOND RAHNER – TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF PRISON MINISTRY

Introduction

The aim of this study is to determine the contemporary relevance of Karl Rahner's theology of prison ministry. As stated in the introduction to this thesis there are three main objectives: (i) to review and critique Rahner's theology of prison ministry; (ii) to identify areas where this theology fails to meet the pastoral challenges of today; and (iii) to develop an empowering theology of prison ministry. Thus far the study has traced Rahner's theological views, outlined his anthropology, and has shown his influence on *Gaudium et Spes*. We have given an analysis of "The Prison Pastorate" and placed it in the light of chaplains working professionally in prisons in the German-speaking world. We identified six possible limitations in Rahner's reflections and examined the prisoner's perspective in the works of Viktor E. Frankl, Etty Hillesum and Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn in order to identify, based on their real-life experience of imprisonment, the needs and challenges likely to be felt by prisoners and possible ways to respond. It is our thesis that Rahner's work is valuable and of significance on its own terms but limited when confronted with the complicated development of our rapidly changing secular European communities.

This final chapter aims to fulfil the last objective of this thesis which is to develop a theology of prison ministry that goes beyond Rahner with a more ecumenical, interreligious and less sacramental perspective.¹ Moreover, it will demonstrate that Rahner's theory continues to be of value and contemporary significance despite the limitations outlined above. We seek to develop and enhance his views with a lively pastoral theology that aims to strengthen and empower people in prisons through the adoption of a meaning-centred approach that acknowledges the role of prisoners as contributors in their own right to the process of rehabilitation. Using the pastoral principles found in our examination of Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn, of love, faith, and humour, as well as the

¹ See Vicente Chong, *A Theological Aesthetics of Liberation: God, Art, and the Social Outcasts* (Eugen, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2019), esp. 110. Henceforth, the abbreviation used will be: "ATAL." Chong writes: "[I]f Rahner's theology is to be relevant in the realm of socio-political change, *it is necessary to develop a theology that is based on Rahner's method, but at the same time goes beyond Rahner*" [*italics my emphasis*].

spiritual dimension of art in all its forms,² we seek to outline a theology that prioritises the cultivation of healing and hope in a way that respects and defends the dignity of each prisoner.³

Prison ministry is a mirror of Christian hope in the sense that providing pastoral care in a prison setting demands more than humans can do with their own abilities: only with the help of God whose “power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine”⁴ can we hope to work together with prisoners and others in the prison community to empower prisoners to find meaning and hope in life. Prison ministry is a collaborative process. It includes both lay and ordained ministers, professionals and volunteers, those within the prison and those in the wider community outside. It takes place across different Christian denominations and includes those operating out of other belief systems (e.g., Muslim, humanist). It involves both prisoners and those who guard them. An interdisciplinary and integrated pastoral approach is needed to help prisoners to find meaning and to meet the challenges today.⁵ It is a complex enterprise particularly as pastors in

² Cf. Glenn Hughes, *A More Beautiful Question: The Spiritual in Art and Poetry* (Columbia & London: University of Missouri Press 2011).

³ Foundational texts for the Catholic prison pastorate in the German context are: Heinz-Bernd Wolters et al. (eds.), *Seelsorge im Gefängnis*, Norddeutschen Konferenz der katholischen Seelsorger bei den Justizvollzugsanstalten in Bremen, Hamburg, Niedersachsen, Schleswig-Holstein und Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (Ankum: Medienpark Ankum, 2008) [The abbreviation that is used: “SGKS”]. Michael Kullinat (ed.), *Katholische Gefängnisseelsorge in Hessen: Grundlagen Arbeitsweisen Alltagspraxis*, Landeskonferenz katholischer Gefängnisseelsorgerinnen und Gefängnisseelsorger im Land Hessen (Darmstadt: Justizvollzugsanstalt Darmstadt, 2018) [The abbreviation that is used: “KGH”]. “Denkt an die Gefangenen, als wäret ihr mitgefangen” (Hebr. 13,3): *Der Auftrag der Kirche im Gefängnis*, Die deutschen Bischöfe Nr. 84, (2., aktualisierte und ergänzte Neuauflage 2015). Vereinbarung über die katholische Seelsorge an den hessischen Justizvollzugsanstalten: Bekanntmachung des MdJ v. 19.10.1977 (2412 – IV/1 – 1721/77 – JMBI. S. 709) mit Änderung der Art. 6 der Vereinbarungen über die evangelische und katholische Seelsorge an den hessischen Justizvollzugsanstalten. Bekanntmachung d. MdJ v. 2.9.1986 (4561 – IV/5-84/83) – JMBI. S. 905. Dienstordnung für die evangelischen und katholischen Anstaltspfarrer in den Justizvollzugsanstalten des Landes Hessen: Bekanntmachung des MdJ v. 10.11.1977 (2412 – IV/1 – 2018/77) – JMBI. S. 719. Richtlinien für die Bestellung von Seelsorgehelfern an hessischen Justizvollzugsanstalten: Bekanntmachung des MdJ v. 9.5.1984 (4561 – IV/5 – 451/80) – JMBI. 1984 S. 361. Geschäftsordnung der Landeskonferenz katholischer Gefängnisseelsorgerinnen und Gefängnisseelsorger im Land Hessen in der Fassung vom 01. März 2018. Erzbischöfliches Ordinariat Freiburg, Bischöfliches Ordinariat Diözese Rottenburg-Stuttgart, *Katholische Gefängnisseelsorge. Leitbild der Katholischen Gefängnisseelsorge in den Diözesen Freiburg und Rottenburg-Stuttgart* (Rottenburg 2008). Evangelische Konferenz für Gefängnisseelsorge in Deutschland, “Ich war im Gefängnis, und ihr seid zu mir gekommen.” *Leitlinien für die Evangelische Gefängnisseelsorge in Deutschland* (Hannover 2009).

⁴ Eph 3:20.

⁵ For the challenges (*Herausforderung*) today, cf. Gerd Koop, “Alte Züge und neue Weichen – Vollzugspraxis und Herausforderungen für die Zukunft,” in: Gerd Koop and Barbara Kappenberg (eds.), *Weichen gestellt für den Justizvollzug? Herausforderung und Strategien* (Wiesbaden: Gesellschaft für die Fortbildung der Strafvollzugsbediensteten e.V., 2016), 177-191. Gerd Koop and Barbara Kappenberg, *Wohin fährt der Justizvollzug? Strategien für den Justizvollzug von morgen* (Schriftenreihe Kriminalpädagogische Praxis; 16) (Lingen: Kriminalpädagogischer Verlag, 2009); *Hauptsache ist, dass nichts passiert? Selbstbild und Außendarstellung des Justizvollzuges in Deutschland* (Schriftenreihe Kriminalpädagogische Praxis; 15) (Lingen: Kriminalpädagogischer Verlag, 2006). Harald Preusker,

the field, as presented in Chapter Three, have shown that prison encounters are diverse in so many ways and prisoners have so many different needs. Our theology of empowerment throws light on how the divine-human encounter in prison can become a source of strength for both prisoners and ministers. It is through our working with God, seeking to cooperate with grace or, as Hillesum puts it, “to help You, God,”⁶ that prison ministry can be made “fruitful and beneficial” for those entrusted to our care.⁷

A theology of prison ministry that emphasises pastoral care that is firmly grounded in respect for the dignity of each individual prisoner and the spiritual value of engaging in art, music, poetry, and literature can become a sign of hope for people behind bars. This hope, as this chapter argues, is not mere wishful thinking as a way to cope with human suffering. This firming hope has its basis in the creative communication of the life and fate of Jesus – because God himself intervened in history to save and strengthen us, therefore the event of his life is the historical basis of our strength and hope behind bars. As Pope Francis says, the living hope based on a poor man called Jesus is the self-confidence of the Church and it reveals a meaningful perspective for life and work in prisons as well.⁸

To move towards a more contemporary theology of prison ministry, we will start by looking at the situation faced by prisoners today in the German prison system and the suffering likely to be experienced by them. We will look at the need for a theology of empowerment by briefly recalling what a traditional theology of prison ministry based on Rahner’s reflections has to offer in this situation and where it may fall short. We will then proceed to outline the elements of a theology of empowerment which we will argue supports a more contemporary and pastoral approach to prison ministry and is better able to meet the needs of prisoners today. Accordingly, this chapter will be divided into the following parts:

Bernd Maelicke, and Christoph Flügge (eds.), *Das Gefängnis als Risiko-Unternehmen* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2010).

⁶ E.T., 488-489. *Het Werk*, 516-517: Ik zal je helpen God [...]

⁷ *MG*, 3: 74. *SW*, 16: 214. *SG*, 447.

⁸ Pope Francis often uses language that echoes liberation theology. He speaks of creating “a poor church for the poor” and is seeking to position Catholic theology closer to the people. Considering the self-confidence of his ‘liberation spirituality’ – in terms of addressing action, and opting for the poor in befriending the poor, getting to know the prisoner – this chapter makes a step forwards towards a theology of prison ministry with respect for the spirituality of the oppressed in the everyday – being aware of the landmark challenges of Gustavo Gutiérrez, Jon Sobrino, Leonardo Boff, Juan Luis Segundo, Oscar Romero, Jürgen Moltmann, Johannes Baptist Metz, Dorothee Sölle, Hans Urs Von Balthasar, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Bernard Lonergan, and several others.

- (i) The Situation of Prisoners Today
- (ii) The Need for a Theology of Empowerment
- (iii) Elements of a Theology of Empowerment (*Theologie der Stärkung*)
 - a) Dignity
 - b) Meaning
 - c) Transformation
 - d) Liberation
 - e) Creativity
 - f) Hope
 - g) Community

5.1. The Situation of Prisoners Today

To formulate our theology of prison ministry, it is necessary to start from the reality of the custodial context in 21st century Europe. The situation today is no longer as it was in the time Rahner was writing. The phenomenon of imprisonment needs to be viewed today in light of the complicated development of our rapidly changing European communities. We live in a complex, diverse and multi-cultural society which is reflected in our institutions of incarceration. As we have seen in Chapter Three, ministers in the field have experienced the difficulties of working with prisoners of many different nationalities, languages, religious beliefs and social backgrounds. This contributes to a multiplicity of different (sometimes clashing) needs and serious problems with trust and communication.⁹ Secularisation is a growing issue across Europe and one can no longer take for granted that the message of Christian faith will be welcomed or understood among prisoners. Far more likely is the possibility of encountering indifference and hostility to matters of faith. At the same time, one may encounter devout believers of other religions including extreme forms of Islamisation and other radical tendencies. It is a cultural melting pot giving rise to many tensions and points of conflict which could not have been envisaged by Rahner.

In the German-speaking world, custodial institutions themselves are experiencing change and difficulty. In some places, the prison system is weakened and trust is broken. A lack of personnel,

⁹ Prison pastor Michael Drescher, who ministered in the JVA Karlsruhe for 16 years, encountered this phenomenon of “trust and mistrust” in the German penal system in a wide variety of ways and shades. In his Masters thesis, he seeks an ethical perspective regarding trust, mistrust and control in penitentiaries. See Michael Drescher, “Vertrauen und Misstrauen im Gefängnis. Geeignete Konstrukte für eine Ethik im Justizvollzug?” Master Thesis. [online verfügbar: <https://gefaengnis-seelsorge.net>]

political guidelines, and the security paradigm¹⁰ have intensified various debates and affected the prison pastorate significantly.¹¹ It has been observed that “countries throughout Europe are sending more and more of their citizens to prison, yet this has no correlation with crime figures... Alongside this, people are being sent to prison for longer.”¹² An increasingly punitive approach is being adopted and security has become of paramount importance in the running of prisons where there are chronic problems with overcrowding, drug use and the constant threat of violence. This sets up a complex custodial dynamic of power, rights, and privileges in the world behind bars. On the one hand, the prisoner is faced with a pervasive system that controls, invades, and sometimes takes away what little privacy and autonomy s/he has; on the other hand, s/he inhabits a “dangerous place” where institutional sub-cultures promote “violence as a means of resolving conflicts” and one can be subjected regularly to “assaults, threats, theft and verbal abuse.”¹³ Studies of violence in prisons reveal a “record of violence, domination [and] exploitation”¹⁴ where rivalry and resentment between prisoners lead to a continually escalating cycle of violence, retaliation and yet more violence.¹⁵ As

¹⁰ Cf. Jochen Goerdeler, Frank Arloth, and Susanne Gerlach, “Sicher ist sicher – ist das sicher? Eine Einführung in den Heftschwerpunkt,” *Forum Strafvollzug* 67, Number 2 (2018): 94-95. Johannes Goldenstein (ed.), *Sicherungsverwahrung: Auf schmalem Grat zwischen Prävention und Freiheit* (Loccum Protokolle 63/09) (Rehburg-Loccum: Evangelische Akad. Loccum, 2010).

¹¹ In the following German journals (*Zeitschriften*), the latest developments of prison ministry are being reported: (i) *AndersOrt*. Fachzeitschrift. Hg. v. Katholische Gefängnisseelsorge in Deutschland e.V., 2011. (Fortsetzung von Mitteilungen) (online verfügbar: <https://gefaengnisseelsorge.net/andersort>); (ii) *Aufschluss*. Mitteilungsblatt der evangelischen Konferenz für Gefängnisseelsorge in Deutschland. Hg. v. Vorstand der Evangelischen Konferenz für Gefängnisseelsorge in Deutschland, 2016 (online verfügbar: <https://www.gefaengnisseelsorge.de>); (iii) *BAG-S: Informationsdienst Straffälligenhilfe*. Hg. v.d. Bundesarbeits-gemeinschaft für Straffälligenhilfe, Bonn 1983. (online verfügbar: <https://bags.de>); *Forum Strafvollzug. Zeitschrift für Strafvollzug und Straffälligenhilfe*. Hg. v. d. Gesellschaft für Fortbildung der Strafvollzugsbediensteten, Wiesbaden 1952. (iv) *Mitteilungsblatt Gefängnisseelsorge*. Hg. v. Vorstand der Evangelischen Konferenz für Gefängnisseelsorge; (v) *Seelsorge und Strafvollzug*, Bern 2018. (online verfügbar: <http://www.seelsorgeundstrafvollzug.ch>)

¹² Eoin Carroll and Kevin Warner (eds.), *Re-Imagining Imprisonment in Europe: Effects, Failures and the Future* (Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2014).

¹³ See Kimmett Edgar, Ian O'Donnell, and Carol Martin (eds.), *Prison Violence: The Dynamics of Conflict, Fear and Power* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012 [2003]). See also the works of the German ex-prison director Thomas Galli, *Die Gefährlichkeit des Täters* (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2017); *Die Schwere der Schuld: Ein Gefängnisdirektor erzählt* (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2016).

¹⁴ Kristine Levan, *Prison Violence: Causes, Consequences and Solutions* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016 [2012]). Levan's international study focuses on the impact of violence on the individual prisoner both “while he or she is incarcerated and upon his or her release from prison, as well as on society as a whole.”

¹⁵ See “Mimetic Theory” in: Sarah Drews Lucas, “War on Terror: The Escalation to Extremes,” in: Scott Cowdell, Chris Fleming, and Joel Hodge (eds.), *Violence, Desire, and the Sacred*, Volume 2: *René Girard and Sacrifice in Life, Love and Literature* (New York, NY et al.: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 57-66, esp. 58-60. Sarah Drews Lucas writes: “Girard has long argued that the mimetic nature of desire historically sets members of a society in conflict with one another. As two members of society come into competition over the same object, each member's desire comes to mirror the others until the two desiring bodies become a rivalrous *double*. Conflictual mimetic desire between such doubles is contagious; desire always breeds more desire. Thus, mimesis leads to widespread rivalry, in which individual members of society

O'Connor and Duncan state:

Prisons, by nature, are dangerous places. Prisons concentrate large numbers of people in crowded conditions with little privacy and few positive social outlets. Prisons hold healthy people dealing with issues of loss, fear, shame, guilt and innocence, alongside people with mental illnesses, varying levels of maturity, sociopathic tendencies, and histories of impulsivity and violence.¹⁶

Pierce also tells us that prison is a “dangerous and vulnerable world,”¹⁷ where people’s living conditions are precarious and human dignity is threatened.¹⁸ Small wonder then that prison ministers practising in the field describe the situation faced by prisoners today as one which leads to crisis point and “human breakdown.”¹⁹ As we noted in Chapter Three, Brandner considers the prison experience to be “one of the most serious crisis experiences one can imagine, causing high levels of stress and disruption to life.”²⁰ In many cases, people who end up in prison tend to be already vulnerable. Poverty, and injustice are widespread among prisoners and many come from dysfunctional family backgrounds.²¹ The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study in the US found extremely high levels of correlation between experience of trauma in childhood and adverse adult outcomes such as addiction and behaviour resulting in prison.²² The people most likely to enter

become indistinguishable from one another: every member is identical in the acquisitive and rivalrous character of desire. Girard calls this widespread mimetic confusion, which he explores in depth in his first major work, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, the crisis of undifferentiation. He argues that once it reaches a certain point, mimetic rivalry can only escalate. Without violence, there is no way to quell escalating mimesis, which is itself thinly veiled violence.” Cf. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Baltimore, MD The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

¹⁶ Tom P. O'Connor & Jeff B. Duncan, “The Sociology of Humanist, Spiritual, and Religious Practice in Prison: Supporting Responsivity and Desistance from Crime,” *Religions* (2011): 590-610, esp. 591. Cf. Verena Boxberg, Daniel Wolter, and Frank Neubacher, “Gewalt und Suizid im Jugendstrafvollzug – Erste Ergebnisse einer Längsschnittstudie,” in: Axel Dessecker and Rudolf Egg (eds.), *Justizvollzug in Bewegung* (Kriminologie und Praxis; 64), 87-257 (Wiesbaden: Kriminologische Zentralstelle, 2013).

¹⁷ Pierce, *Prison Ministry: Hope behind the Wall*, 79.

¹⁸ In Germany there is a “National Torture Prevention Agency” that reports annually on the state of human dignity in correctional facilities: Nationale Stelle zur Verhütung von Folter, *Jahresbericht 2017. Berichtszeitraum 1. Januar 2017 - 31. Dezember 2017* (Wiesbaden: Justizvollzugsanstalt Heimsheim, 2018).

¹⁹ Pierce, Chapter 4, “Human Breakdown Created by Prison’s Emotional Ethos,” in: *Prison Ministry: Hope behind the Wall*, 79-85.

²⁰ *BWS*: ix, 69.

²¹ Pierce, Chapter 4, “Human Breakdown Created by Prison’s Emotional Ethos,” in: *Prison Ministry: Hope behind the Wall*, 79-85.

²² See Gordon J. G. Asmundson and Tracie O. Afifi (eds.), *Adverse Childhood Experiences: Using Evidence to Advance Research, Practice, Policy, and Prevention* (Cambridge, MA: Academic Press/Elsevier, 2020), eps. 19-23, 107-108. Cf. Roberta Waite and Ruth Ann Ryan, *Adverse Childhood Experiences: What Students and Health Professionals Need to*

this “dangerous place” may very well have been traumatised as children and may be singularly ill equipped to deal with the further trauma and stress of prison. As O’Connor and Duncan state, it is “a dehumanising situation... that is fraught with loss, deprivation, and survival challenges... a social context that can be inherently inhumane.”²³

In prison, these vulnerable people are subjected to loss after loss. Not only have they lost their liberty and their right to privacy, they are separated from their families, their support systems and all that is familiar to them. The impact of this loss is inestimable. Recent scientific research shows that the human “brain has evolved sophisticated mechanisms for securing our place in the social world... [with] a unique ability to read other people’s minds, to figure out their hopes, fears, and motivations, allowing us to effectively coordinate our lives with one another.”²⁴ This amounts to a “deep social wiring” of the brain which causes us “to experience threats to our social connections in much the same way” as we “experience physical pain.”²⁵ The same biological imperative towards survival that causes children to seek safety by staying close to their parents also causes us as adults to seek security through our social connections. As Lieberman says, “staying socially connected [is] a lifelong need, like food and warmth.”²⁶ What neurology tells us today, therefore, is that the pain of social loss, such as that experienced by prisoners and the sense of threat it engenders, needs to be taken very seriously – as seriously as the pain of physical injury or threat to life.²⁷ This pain can be greatly heightened by experiencing a crisis while in prison such as the illness or death of a family member or the ongoing anguish of not being with one’s children.²⁸ Such experiences can precipitate the ‘breakdown’²⁹ to which Pierce refers which is why prison ministry includes help for relatives of prisoners and seeks to support and consolidate family and other social bonds wherever possible.³⁰

Prison life turns the personal life of individuals upside down, leaving their self-confidence and self-

Know (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020).

²³ O’Connor & Duncan, “The Sociology of Humanist, Spiritual, and Religious Practice in Prison,” 592, cf. esp. n. 6-12.

²⁴ For “social pain” see Matthew D. Lieberman, *Social: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect* (New York, NY: Broadway Books, 2013), esp. 4-5, 39-70 [Chapter 3]. I want to thank Rev. Dr. Victoria Campbell for sharing her scientific and theological knowledge on this point with me as well as her clinical pastoral care experience.

²⁵ Lieberman, *Social: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect*, 4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁸ Pierce, Chapter 1, “Time to Meet the Incarcerated,” in: *Prison Ministry: Hope behind the Wall*, 13-55.

²⁹ Pierce, Chapter 4, “Human Breakdown Created by Prison’s Emotional Ethos,” in: *Prison Ministry: Hope behind the Wall*, 79-85.

³⁰ Lieberman, *Social: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect*, 5. See also Part Two “Connection,” 37-100.

worth shaken in the process.³¹ We can see here the shock described by Frankl as characterising the first mental stage of imprisonment.³² This turns to apathy in the second mental stage as prisoners become ‘hardened’ to their suffering.³³ This is a process that leads to a gradual shutting down of the prisoner’s emotions. In addition to the many losses endured by people in prison and the brutality of their environment, prison is a bruising emotional experience. Dabrowski points to the fear which, in its many forms, was the constant companion of prisoners including simply the fear of being in jail.³⁴ Tim Weiler, an ex-prisoner, describes the fear and loneliness he experienced in the isolation of his cell:

I will spend this weekend in my cell. Without radio, without television, without books – only with me alone. The thought scares me and I get panic attacks. I walk up and down in the cell and I’m completely done. I don’t want to deal with myself – I don’t want to be alone with my thoughts.³⁵

Shame is also widespread. Brandner refers to “the emotional walls of shame and self-imposed isolation”³⁶ which add so much to prisoners’ suffering. This is echoed by Oscar Wilde, who was a prisoner himself for two years and speaks of prison walls being “built with bricks of shame”³⁷ in his poem, ‘The Ballad of Reading Gaol.’³⁸ As he describes the pain felt by prisoners, Wilde goes on to speak of “the heart of stone”³⁹ which forms in prisoners as they shut down inwardly: “[T]hough I was a soul in pain, My pain I could not feel.”⁴⁰

The apathy which thus develops leads to what Pierce identifies as the most pressing problem of prisoners: “self-alienation and the capitulation to self-hate.”⁴¹ Despair becomes the only reality they can see. The loss of social connection and self-worth creates what Costello calls an “existential

³¹ For a detailed analysis, see Norbert Nedopil, *Jeder Mensch hat einen Abgrund: Spurensuche in der Seele von Verbrechern* (München: Goldmann Verlag, 2016).

³² *MSM*: 26. *ZB*: 23. *TJL*: 25.

³³ *MSM*: 39. *ZB*: 36. *TJL*: 41.

³⁴ *VVV*: 74.

³⁵ Tim Weiler, *Haftraumkontrolle* (Berlin: epubli, 2012).

³⁶ *BWS*: 188.

³⁷ Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis: The Ballad of Reading Gaol and Other Writings* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2020 [1999]), 135. The Irish poet and playwright Wilde was incarcerated from 1895 till 1897.

³⁸ Wilde, *De Profundis*, 117-138.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁴¹ Pierce, *Prison Ministry: Hope behind the Wall*, 81.

vacuum” where “[l]ack of meaning” leads to the experience of “*ennui* and apathy, of doubt, despair, hopelessness, and spiritual *acedia*” where one no longer cares about anything, least of all oneself.⁴² As Frankl says, “despair is suffering without meaning.”⁴³ This is the reality of many people held in German prisons today.

This, then, is the world in which prison ministry must operate. These are the people prison ministers must seek to reach in order to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ so that they can be empowered to find meaning and hope again in their lives. The prison experience is understood differently when viewed through the lens of the prisoner’s pain. In contrast to Rahner’s approach in “The Prison Pastorate,”⁴⁴ we must thus learn to see events in prison from the perspective of the prisoners: to hear the voice of the “outcasts, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed and reviled, in short from the perspective of the suffering”⁴⁵ in order to see them with the eyes of Jesus and to ask uncomfortable and healing questions.⁴⁶ Obviously, there is a historical, political, and cultural gap between Rahner’s theology of prison ministry and the reality of prison chaplaincy nowadays.

There is a growing need for an in-depth theological reflection on imprisonment which needs to take seriously the pain and suffering experienced by prisoners. As the Second Vatican Council points out in *Gaudium et Spes*: “The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well.”⁴⁷ For such a theological reflection, the background of working on the ground in prison ministry is desirable.⁴⁸ In such a reflection, we will need to keep in mind that the human tendency is to avoid pain. Yet, as theologians such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) and Dorothee Sölle (1929-2003) point out, it is precisely through our suffering, our powerlessness and our weakness that we encounter God.⁴⁹ As Wilde also says, “How else but through a broken heart... May

⁴² Stephen J. Costello, “Towards a Tri-Dimensional Model of Happiness: A Logo-Philosophical Perspective,” 348.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 346.

⁴⁴ *MG*, 3: 74. *SW*, 16: 214. *SG*, 447.

⁴⁵ See Jacqueline Bussie, chapter 4: “Dorothee Soelle: Lutheran Liberation Theologian of the Cross,” in: Jason A. Mahn (ed.), *Radical Lutherans / Lutheran radicals* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 109.

⁴⁶ See Jens Söring, *Richtet nicht, damit ihr nicht gerichtet werdet: Barmherzigkeit und Strafvollzug*, tr. Barbara Häußler (Würzburg: Echter, 2008).

⁴⁷ GS 1. *VCII*, 163. Par. 1, “De intima coniunctione Ecclesiae cum tota familia gentium.” See also Chapter One, Section 1.2.2. “Recognising Christ our Brother in the Persons of all Men and Women” in this thesis.

⁴⁸ Cf. Pierce, *Prison Ministry: Hope behind the Wall*, 13.

⁴⁹ Dorothee Sölle, “God’s Pain and Our Pain,” in: Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro (eds.), *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutiérrez* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 326. Henceforth abbreviated as: “GPOP.” Cf. *Ibidem*, *Suffering* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press Publishers, 1975); *Mystery of Death*

Lord Christ enter in?”⁵⁰ In the words of St. Paul, whenever we are weak, it is then that we are strong for God’s power is made perfect in weakness.⁵¹ As we seek to formulate a theology of empowerment, therefore, we ground ourselves firmly in the pain and perspective of prisoners but keep our eyes open and alert to ways in which the “Lord Christ” may enter in and transform our experience.

5.2. The Need for a Theology of Empowerment

As discussed in Chapter Three, Rahner’s theology of prison ministry is based upon profound theological and anthropological truths and contains much that continues to be of great value in ministry today. However, the limitations inherent in his work become very obvious when confronted with the reality of contemporary prison for those imprisoned. There are reasons why Rahner did not examine the suffering of prisoners from their own perspective. He was addressing an audience of prison chaplains and “The Prison Pastorate” is naturally focused on the perspective of the chaplain. It is also the case that Rahner is a theologian rather than someone with practical experience of prison ministry. Rahner’s anthropological and theological outlook provides a secure foundation for a theology of prison ministry, speaking as he does of human beings as “hearers of the Word” (*Hörer des Wortes*) who are open to receive “a meaning” (*eine Sinnzusage*)⁵² and who are met by grace and strengthened by the “divine foolishness” of God’s love (*göttliche Torheit der Liebe*).⁵³ Nonetheless, it is arguable that a theology of prison ministry today needs to begin – not from anthropological truths – but rather, from the perils and anonymity of daily struggles in solidarity with people in “the warehouse,”⁵⁴ in order to make sense of this experience in confrontation with our faith in “Christ.”

Rahner’s theology is particularly focused on the missionary proclamation of God’s Word. He is convinced that in difficult situations the poor and the oppressed are best served and mediated to in “word, sacraments, and grace.”⁵⁵ For Rahner, as discussed in Chapter Two, the first task of pastoral care in jail is to “find Christ” in prisoners which, in turn, enables chaplains to find and “meet ourselves” and “to discover the hidden truth of our own situation.”⁵⁶ This is a theology that supports

(Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press Publishers, 2007). See below, Section 5.3.4. *Liberation*. Also *LPP*, 298. *DBWE* 8: 388. *DBW* 8: 433.

⁵⁰ Wilde, *De Profundis*, 137.

⁵¹ 2 Cor 12:9-10.

⁵² See Chapter One, Section 1.1.1. “*Theological Anthropology: Hearer of the Word (Hörer des Wortes)*” in this thesis.

⁵³ *MG*, 3: 84. *SW*, 16: 219. *SG*, 454.

⁵⁴ Pierce, Chapter 2, “Prisons: Warehousing the Oppressed,” in: *Prison Ministry: Hope behind the Wall*, 57-67.

⁵⁵ *MG*, 3: 74. *SW*, 16: 214. *SG*, 447.

⁵⁶ *MG*, 3: 95. *SW*, 16: 223-224. *SG*, 461.

a traditional view of prison ministry which focuses primarily on liturgical services and individual visitation. Of course, these activities are important but they do not come close to meeting all the needs of prisoners held in the pressure cooker situation just described. It is not possible today to enter into the world of prison bearing the Word of God and expect to receive a hearing. There may be some who are open to such an approach but most prisoners will be, at best, indifferent. It is necessary to meet people where they are: to reach *in* to their world and offer a word of hope, meaning, or encouragement. Even with the assistance of the concept of the “anonymous Christian” (*anonymer Christ*),⁵⁷ Rahner’s thought needs to be taken further if it is to become “fruitful and beneficial for those entrusted to our care.”⁵⁸

It is the argument of this thesis that, if prison ministry is to be made “fruitful and beneficial” for prisoners, that is, for those who suffer and are in anguish, trying to survive, then we need to turn to the perspective of those who have themselves experienced the suffering of imprisonment and who can bear witness to the fact that life *can* have a meaning, “despite everything.”⁵⁹ As we saw in Chapter Four, the writings of Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn deal constantly with the theme of human suffering and the meaning that can be found in it. They acknowledge the ubiquity of a prisoner’s suffering. Solzhenitsyn tells us that suffering is the prisoner’s lone reality: “[a]nd there we suffered, and we thought, and there was nothing else in our lives.”⁶⁰ Hillesum is conscious that “there will always be suffering, and whether one suffers from this or from that really doesn’t make much difference.”⁶¹ What matters is how we respond: in Frankl’s language, how we “choose our attitude” and “take our stand” in the face of suffering, how we search for and find that which gives our life meaning, a *why* to cope with any *how* we face.⁶²

Each in their own way, Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn witnessed to the fact that humans can respond to suffering and imprisonment by activating their “will to meaning.” Their accounts show that prisoners can “draw strength even from suffering.”⁶³ Solzhenitsyn speaks of the “ripening from

⁵⁷ See Chapter One, Section 1.3.2. “*Scriptural Value and Answer to ‘Humanism’ and Global ‘Militant Atheism’*” in this thesis.

⁵⁸ *MG*, 3: 74. *SW*, 16: 214. *SG*, 447.

⁵⁹ E.T., 307, 616. *Het Werk*, 320, 657. Cf. *MSM*: 10. *ZB*: 10.

⁶⁰ *GA*, 1: 225.

⁶¹ E.T., 358-359. *Het Werk*, 375-376.

⁶² *MSM*: 11-12. *ZB*: 11-12.

⁶³ E.T., 477. *Het Werk*, 504.

suffering,”⁶⁴ and the blessings of prison while Frankl says that “human life, under any circumstances, never ceases to have a meaning, and that this infinite meaning of life includes suffering and dying, privation and death.”⁶⁵ What was true for Hillesum, Solzhenitsyn, and Frankl could also be true for all. Their insights have the potential to significantly change the way prisoners can understand their humanity as they face their sufferings in prison today. Both their testimony and their thoughts on imprisonment challenge ministers to support prisoners in order to weave the “slender threads of a broken life” “into a firm pattern of meaning and responsibility.”⁶⁶

The concrete human person in need is our theological focus and the theology we seek to formulate needs to be “fruitful and beneficial” for that person. The pain and suffering experienced by prisoners in the “dangerous and vulnerable world” of prison today illustrates their need to activate their “will to meaning,” as Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn did to thus find a *why* to bear with their particular *how*.⁶⁷ Unless we can help prisoners to make “larger sense out” of this “apparently senseless suffering,” as Frankl puts it, our ministry to the incarcerated will be empty and fruitless.⁶⁸ What is needed, then, is a theology that takes a meaning-centred approach and meets people where *they* are, that affirms their human dignity even in their suffering and that offers hope and the possibility of transformation and liberation. In short, facing the contemporary challenges of incarceration in light of the insights of Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn makes clear the need for what I call a “theology of empowerment” (*Theologie der Stärkung*). Such a theology will need to have, as explored in Chapter Three, a social-cultural dimension generating a lively interaction between individuals and groups which raises the inmates’ independence and confidence as well as strengthening their self-esteem, self-reflection and personal skills.⁶⁹ Our theology should also reflect on the possibility of “believ[ing] in God” in the midst of existential frustration and pain which,⁷⁰ unfortunately, is the norm in prison.

⁶⁴ *GA*, 2: 611.

⁶⁵ *MSM*: 104 [*italics* my emphasis]. *ZB*: 105-106. *TJL*: 125: Und dann sprach ich schließlich noch von der Vielfalt der Möglichkeiten, das Leben mit Sinn zu erfüllen. Ich erzählte [...] davon, daß menschliches Leben immer und unter allen Umständen Sinn habe, und daß dieser unendliche Sinn des Daseins auch noch Leiden und Sterben, Not und Tod in sich mit einbegreife.

⁶⁶ *MSM*: 9. *ZB*: 9.

⁶⁷ *MSM*: 11-12. *ZB*: 11-12.

⁶⁸ *MSM*: 11. *ZB*: 11.

⁶⁹ See Mery Kolimon, “Empowerment: A New Generative Theme of Christian Mission in a Globalized World,” in: *Exchange: Journal of Contemporary Christianities in Context*, Volume 40, Issue 1 (Brill, 2011): 38. Cf. Castor Michael Goliama, “The Gospel of Prosperity in African Pentecostalism: A Theological and Pastoral Challenge to the Catholic Church – With Reference to the Archdiocese of Songea, Tanzania,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Vienna, 2013, 420pp, esp. 12-13.

⁷⁰ *MSM*: 125. *ZB*: 129.

We will now proceed to outline and explore the elements that would make up such a theology of empowerment, focusing on how such a theology would build on and go beyond Rahner to make prison ministry “fruitful and beneficial” for those in prison.

5.3. Elements of a Theology of Empowerment (*Theologie der Stärkung*)

5.3.1. Dignity

The dignity of the human person is today a widely accepted concept that lies at the heart of all discourse about human rights and constitutional protections. While such ideas began to receive positive acknowledgement in law only after the horrors of the Second World War and the Shoah, they derive in no small part from a Christian understanding of the human person as the image of God (*imago Dei*) based on Genesis 1:27. Prison, however, is an environment where this dignity may be challenged. Prison is a “dehumanising” and at times “inherently inhumane” situation where,⁷¹ as Brandner observes, prisoners can be stripped of their dignity.⁷² The first element and, indeed, the cornerstone of our theology of empowerment is then an affirmation of the dignity of the human person in the prisoners to whom we minister.

In “The Prison Pastorate,” Rahner strongly affirms in profound and eloquent terms the dignity of people who are prisoners and it is here that we take our starting point. He speaks of an “infinite dignity” (*unendliche Würde*), and of “indestructible nobility” (*unverlierbaren Adel*).⁷³ For Rahner, human dignity is based on “an eternal dignity” (*eine ewige Würde*), which is God-given and can be seen beyond all the layers of human instincts, psychology, conditioning, etc.⁷⁴ This lies at the heart of his injunction to pastors to strive to see Christ in the prisoners they serve. If we look deeper, if we look beyond the obvious – what this person has done, what s/he thinks or says about him/herself – we will see “the ultimate truth.”⁷⁵ He puts it this way:

Suppose one sees through all that fate has done in the course of such a life, in terms of heredity, upbringing, environment, latent sickness, psychopathology; and even through true and appalling guilt,... Suppose that our eyes, seeing through all this, should seek and find that

⁷¹ O’Connor & Duncan, “The Sociology of Humanist, Spiritual, and Religious Practice in Prison,” 592, cf. esp. n. 6-12.

⁷² *BWS*: 183. [“...stripped by the depersonalizing routine of imprisonment.”]

⁷³ *MG*, 3: 83. *SW*, 16: 218. *SG*, 453.

⁷⁴ *MG*, 3: 83-84. *SW*, 16: 218. *SG*, 453.

⁷⁵ *MG*, 3: 84. *SW*, 16: 218-219. *SG*, 454.

which is most real and ultimate in this other person: God, with his love and his mercy, who has conferred an eternal dignity upon this person and offers himself to him, without repentance, in the incomprehensible prodigality of the divine foolishness of love.⁷⁶

If we look in this way, Rahner tells us, we will really see Christ in the other person.⁷⁷ In this way, we will truly be able to visit Christ in prison. As Rahner says, whenever even “the most wretched of human creatures, some mean, stupid scoundrel, is received reverently and humbly into our own hearts, it is Christ who is being received and discovered.”⁷⁸ It is as Jesus himself told us, “whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.”⁷⁹ Moreover, Rahner argues that we would thus recognise that there is no “higher dignity or holier calling in ourselves than that which is present” in the other person.⁸⁰ We would bow to the other person “in reverent humility,” realising that our human dignity is in fact shared, being a dignity we bear together in Christ. This, then, is what is “most real and ultimate” about human beings, that which is “abiding and indestructible” (*das Bleibende und Unzerstörbare*) in them, namely: our shared “eternal dignity” (*ewige Würde*).⁸¹

Rahner’s advice to prison pastors, therefore, is to focus on the “eternal dignity” found in the other person, realising that in this way Christ can be “honoured and adored” everywhere, even behind walls.⁸² This happens “whenever one human being is taken absolutely seriously by another.”⁸³ It should be noted here that while we have criticised Rahner for not inquiring directly into the experience of prisoners, his argument about the need to take the other person “absolutely seriously” because of their human dignity requires also taking their concerns and their suffering seriously. *Ewige Würde*, as Rahner explains it, is the bedrock of a theology of prison ministry that is both pastoral and empowering, seeking above all to affirm prisoners in their God-given dignity. Focusing

⁷⁶ *MG*, 3: 84. *SW*, 16: 219. *SG*, 454: [H]indurch durch alle schicksalsbedingten Abläufe in einem solchen Leben aus Vererbung, Erziehung, Milieu, verborgener Krankheit, Psychopathien, ja selbst noch hindurch durch wahre, furchtbare Schuld, weil auch sie nicht das Letzte ist, weil auch sie noch (wie Paulus sagt) umfassen und eingeschlossen ist vom größeren und mächtigeren Erbarmen Gottes, wenn so unser Blick durch alles Vorläufige hindurch das Eigentlichste und Letzte im anderen Menschen suchte und fände, Gott, seine Liebe, sein Erbarmen, die diesem Menschen eine ewige Würde verliehen hat und ihm in der unbegreiflichen Selbstverschwendung göttlicher Torheit der Liebe reuelos sich selbst anbietet und anträgt.

⁷⁷ *MG*, 3: 84-85. *SW*, 16: 219. *SG*, 454.

⁷⁸ *MG*, 3: 85-86. *SW*, 16: 219. *SG*, 455.

⁷⁹ Mark 9:37. Also Matt 18:5, Luke 9:48.

⁸⁰ *MG*, 3: 84-85. *SW*, 16: 219. *SG*, 454.

⁸¹ *MG*, 3: 84. *SW*, 16: 219. *SG*, 454.

⁸² *MG*, 3: 85. *SW*, 16: 219. *SG*, 454: [D]as menschengewordene Wort des Vaters, das überall (ob man es weiß oder nicht) verehrt und angebetet wird [...]

⁸³ *MG*, 3: 85. *SW*, 16: 219. *SG*, 454-455: [W]o ein anderer Mensch absolut ernst genommen wird [...]

on the eternal dignity of the prisoners, we seek to honour “what they perhaps take no account of in themselves”⁸⁴ and to “believe in God in them” – even though “they do not find him [Christ] in themselves.”⁸⁵

The importance of Rahner’s concept of eternal dignity for an empowering approach to prison ministry can be seen in the work of German neurobiologist Gerald Hüther. For Hüther, the work of strengthening and empowering others in society is all about “dignity” (*Würde*): developing a sense of self-worth. He argues that many prisoners are victims of society’s complexity and have very often lost their orientation in life.⁸⁶ Perhaps unconsciously, they are seeking to re-order their personal lives and looking for an inner strength to do this. Yet only the person who becomes conscious of his or her own individual worth or dignity will avoid the temptation to commit offences and so be drawn into another cycle of self-destructive behaviour.⁸⁷ The central task of the prison pastor, therefore, is to assist prisoners to become aware of their human dignity: the dignity to which both Frankl and fellow Auschwitz-survivor Jehuda Bacon witnessed as that *something* in us that cannot die, which Rahner called “abiding and indestructible.”⁸⁸ For Hüther, “dignity” is not only a fancy word or an idea but a decisive prerequisite for a theology that seeks to aid in the reintegration and formation (*Aufbau*) of human beings who have committed crimes.⁸⁹

Hüther believes that each human being has to develop a self-understanding based on his or her own dignity, with a self-worth and respect at the centre.⁹⁰ Like Rahner, he sees the task of the prison pastor as the fostering of this dignity especially where prisoners are unable to see this in themselves. The love God has for us in Christ is the blessing bestowed on us by our creation that needs to “flower again from within.”⁹¹ By awakening their consciousness to their inner dignity, pastors can assist prisoners to arrive at a “deeper understanding” of the meaning of their suffering, and of what makes them human.⁹² This is a journey of inner empowerment.

⁸⁴ *MG*, 3: 86. *SW*, 16: 219. *SG*, 455: [...] was sie vielleicht selbst in sich nicht achten [...]

⁸⁵ *MG*, 3: 86. *SW*, 16: 219. *SG*, 455: [W]enn wir an Gott in ihnen glauben, den sie selbst nicht in sich zu finden meinen.

⁸⁶ Gerald Hüther, *Würde: Was uns stark macht – als Einzelne und als Gesellschaft* (München: Knaus, 2018), 67. Henceforth, the abbreviation used will be: “*WWSM*.”

⁸⁷ *WWSM*: 21: Wer sich seiner eigenen Würde bewusst wird, ist nicht mehr verführbar.

⁸⁸ *WWSM*: 58-59. *MG*, 3: 86. *SW*, 16: 219. *SG*, 455: [D]as Bleibende und Unzerstörbare [...]

⁸⁹ *WWSM*: 65.

⁹⁰ *WWSM*: 65. Cf. Frank Stüfen, “Das Mitmenschliche als Gegenentwurf zu lebenslanger Exklusion. Verwahrung aus gefängnisseelsorgerlicher Perspektive,” *Seelsorge & Strafvollzug* 1 (2018): 29-50.

⁹¹ Galway Kinnell, “St. Francis and the Sow” in: *Ibidem*, *Three Books: Body Rags - Mortal Acts, Mortal Words - The Past* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016), 81.

⁹² *WWSM*: 80.

What becomes clear is that the relationship between pastor and prisoner is of paramount importance in making this journey. Prisoners are people who may never have been treated with respect in their lives and thus may never have learned to respect themselves. As we noted in Chapter Four, love is one of the primary ways in which we may find meaning in life and it is through seeing ourselves mirrored in the eyes of a loving Other that we become aware of our eternal dignity. Prison chaplains will do all they can to facilitate loving relationships prisoners may have with family members or others, perhaps even between prisoners themselves, but the reality is that, for some at least, the relationship with the prison minister may be the only relationship in which this kind of love and respect is offered. The role of pastoral care thus becomes one of empowering love for society's 'unloved,' offering compassion, encouragement and care to those seen as 'impossible people.'⁹³

This is the day-to-day work of the prison minister. What prisoners need most is personal attention: to be listened to and heard, to have their pain and frustrations accepted without judgement. This happens through face-to-face encounters and personal conversations with inmates which are the primary moments of support.⁹⁴ Ministers offer prisoners a protected space for confidential conversation about all that concerns them.⁹⁵ This may include religious and spiritual issues, questions of relationship and family, problems in prison and tensions with fellow inmates, as well as fears about upcoming court hearings or uncertainties regarding their future. Ultimately, chaplaincy work in prison is about patience and listening to people with care and respect in the hope of enabling them to "resolve anxiety, shame, and guilt,"⁹⁶ all that stands in the way of recognising their own dignity and worth.

It is possible to go further. In speaking about the relationship with prisoners in Chapter Three, Hubka mentions two possible ways in which it can become a relationship of mutuality rather than a one-way street. Firstly, ministers must put aside their own 'priestly' or 'pastoral' agenda and be open to what the person him/herself wants to suggest; we must take our agenda from *their* world. Secondly, ministers need to allow themselves to be vulnerable in the presence of the prisoner which may involve disclosing carefully and with appropriate boundaries something of oneself. This requires

⁹³ Cf. Fred Grob, *Liebe für Ungeliebte: Über die Möglichkeit, unmögliche Menschen zu lieben* (CH-Schiers: Urs-Heinz Naegeli, 2004). Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

⁹⁴ *KGH*: 12.

⁹⁵ Cf. Hanns-Stephan Haas, *Diakonat und Gefangenenseelsorge. Zu einer möglichen Berufsperspektive von Diakoninnen und Diakone. Beiträge aus der Evangelischen Fachhochschule Hannover* (Hemmingen: Blumhardt Verlag, 1999).

⁹⁶ Pierce, *Prison Ministry: Hope behind the Wall*, 52.

taking the risk of a true meeting or encounter with the other which in turn allows a relationship of genuine mutual concern to develop. By seeing beyond the person's status as a prisoner and relating to them on the basis of a shared humanity, Hubka's approach arguably enhances the prisoner's ability to become aware of their shared human dignity. Rahner's priest-centred approach in "The Prison Pastorate" could be perceived as somewhat clericalist and Hubka's contribution can be seen as going beyond that in a way that is both loving and empowering, echoing the call of Jesus who "became poor [or vulnerable] so that by his poverty you might become rich."⁹⁷

There is also an ethical dimension to the question of dignity. Arguing from the dignity of the human person, Becka claims this should be at the centre of a common ethical basis for the complex German justice system.⁹⁸ She argues that every human being, regardless of skin colour, sex, or social status – and whatever he or she has done, is "the bearer of human dignity, which includes: 'the thief,' 'the rapist,' 'the drug addict,' and 'the murderer.'"⁹⁹ This raises an uncomfortable question about Rahner's concept of eternal dignity. It challenges us to see this dignity in the criminals of today – the child molesters, murderers and rapists – what today's headlines call "the contemporary monsters," "the unforgiven."¹⁰⁰ We need to understand that Jesus went precisely to them: to the outsiders and sinners, to those who are sick and need a doctor.¹⁰¹ Former prisoner and German author Jens Söring points out that when God became man, he took the form not of a holy man or powerful king but of a convicted criminal sentenced to death with two thieves.¹⁰² If we demonise and turn away from these people, who have done truly terrible things but still are human beings and share in our own eternal dignity in Christ, then we turn away from Jesus and the lessons of his whole life and ministry. As Rahner says, either we are going to go through the prisons like Pharisees, saying "Lord, I thank thee

⁹⁷ 2 Cor. 8:9.

⁹⁸ For Michelle Becka's careful prison ethics and custodial analyses see: "Zwischen Stimme und Stimmung," *AndersOrt* 2 (2011): 9-16; "Gefängnis. Die Auslagerung von Unsicherheit und die Folgen für soziale Gerechtigkeit," *Ethik und Gesellschaft* 1 (2013); "Der Mensch im Mittelpunkt? Eine gemeinsame ethische Basis," *AndersOrt* 1 (2017): 14-19. [Vortragsmanuskript 10 Jahre Osnabrücker Gespräche 18.11.2016.]; *Strafe und Resozialisierung. Hinführung zu einer Ethik des Justizvollzugs* (Forum Sozialethik Bd. 16) (Münster: Aschendorff, 2016); (ed.) *Ethik im Justizvollzug: Aufgaben, Chancen, Grenzen* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2015); "Ethik im Justizvollzug – Professionalität und Organisation," *Forum Strafvollzug* 3 (2017): 156-159; "Ethikkomitees als ethische Reflexionsräume in Justizvollzugsanstalten," *EthikJournal* 4, Number 1 (2017); *Ibidem* and Axel Wiesbrock, *Ethik im Justizvollzug: Dokumentation der ersten Projektphase* (Mainz/Sögel 2013) [Manuskript].

⁹⁹ Becka, "Der Mensch im Mittelpunkt? Eine gemeinsame ethische Basis," 14. [Cf. Marcus Düwell, "Menschenwürde als Grundlage der Menschenrechte," in: *Zeitschrift für Menschenrechte* (1/2010): 64-79.]

¹⁰⁰ *SGKS*: 19. See also Kai Schlieter, *Knastreport: Das Leben der Weggesperrten* (Frankfurt am Main: Westend, 2011).

¹⁰¹ Mark 2:17, Matt 9:12, Luke 5:31.

¹⁰² Jens Söring, *Richtet nicht, damit ihr nicht gerichtet werdet: Barmherzigkeit und Strafvollzug*, tr. Barbara Häußler (Würzburg: Echter, 2008).

that I am not as one of these, robbers, swindlers, adulterers,” or like the publican in Luke’s Gospel who beats his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” (Luke 18:9-14).¹⁰³

Rahner invites us to trust in such moments when we encounter people who challenge our compassion that it is “really God’s hour in our life” (*die Stunde Gottes in unserem Leben*). He asks us to remember that we too are sinners and encourages us to focus on our shared “eternal dignity,” knowing beyond doubt that “*he is there*” (*ER ist da*) and the universality of “God’s love” excludes no one.¹⁰⁴ Following Rahner, the dignity of the human person cannot be denied even in prison. It is the responsibility of the prison minister, as Brandner points out, to be alert to measures that might undermine or threaten the dignity of those in prison and to advocate on their behalf where necessary.¹⁰⁵ In this way, Becka’s ethical analysis and Brandner’s awareness of the social and political implications of actions taken in prison add a critical and practical dimension to Rahner’s concept of dignity.

In essence, empowerment theology calls for a ministry of presence – of being there with the Suffering Christ in prison and being faithful to the Christ-given dignity (*Würde*) within ourselves and the prisoners. Compassion becomes real when we *suffer with* and are *present with* the wounded, not as “magic” healers but as equals in the recognition of our shared humanity.¹⁰⁶ Like Rahner, Hillesum believes that God dwells within people and shares their pain. Prison ministry is thus the compassionate service of encouragement (*Ermutigung*) to *You*, a service to God in individual enslaved human beings who are lost and unaware of their inherent and eternal dignity. Our theology

¹⁰³ *MG*, 3: 95. *SW*, 16: 224. *SG*, 461.

¹⁰⁴ *MG*, 3: 86. *SW*, 16: 219-220. *SG*, 455: [W]enn gerade solche Begegnung mit dem Nächsten uns unsagbar einsam macht und alle solche Liebe nur wie ein vernichtender Sprung in eine absolute Leere erscheint, dann ist eigentlich die Stunde Gottes in unserem Leben, dann ist ER da. For the emphasis on “Er” see Ralf Frisch, *Er: Ein Zwiegespräch mit dem Mann, der Jesus erfand* (Zürich: TVZ, 2020).

¹⁰⁵ An example arises where prisoners face dying in prison. This raises many issues such as the lack of choice as to a medical doctor, choice of pastor, presence of loved ones, etc. It is argued by Wulf that dying in prison violates human dignity and prisoners in such circumstances should be released. Rüdiger Wulf, “Die Würde Sterbender im Gefängnis achten,” *AndersOrt* 1 (2017): 30. Cf. Hille Haker, “Die Würde des Menschen ist antastbar,” in: Lydia Gassner-Halbhauer, Werner Nickolai, and Cornelius Wichmann, *Achten statt ächten in Straffälligenhilfe und Kriminalpolitik* (Freiburg: Lambertus, 2010), 29-44.

¹⁰⁶ Henry Nouwen speaks of “the wounded healer” proceeding to develop “an approach to ministry with an analysis of sufferings – a suffering world, a suffering generation, a suffering person, and a suffering minister.” It is Nouwen’s contention that “ministers are called to recognize the sufferings of their time in their own hearts and make that recognition the starting point of their service. For Nouwen, ministers must be willing to go beyond their professional role and leave themselves open as fellow human beings with the same wounds and suffering – in the image of Christ. In other words, we heal from our own wounds.” Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York, NY: Double Day, 1979).

of empowerment thus invites people in prison to a relationship of love, compassion, and mutual respect which aims to heal their wounds and restore their God-given dignity.

5.3.2. *Meaning*

A theology that seeks to empower prisoners needs to be centred on meaning in order to address the suffering they experience as well as the felt meaninglessness and frustration of their lives.¹⁰⁷ The result of all the restrictions, limitations, and constraints of life in prison in addition to feelings of alienation, isolation, and worthlessness as well as the fears and antagonism of others in the penal system is that individuals in prison will always be searching for a meaning that will transcend their current reality and encourage them in the day-after-day misery of life behind bars.¹⁰⁸ If this question of what makes life meaningful is not addressed, the danger is that many prisoners will be overwhelmed by the negative aspects of prison life and will give up, surrendering to the process of dehumanisation. This will lead to either despair and depression or becoming ever more hardened inwardly and susceptible to bouts of violence and rage, with a greatly increased risk of further criminal behaviour upon their release. A theology of prison ministry needs to be able to speak to this condition of meaninglessness felt by incarcerated persons and engage directly with their distress and vulnerability.

In his writings, as examined in Chapter Four, Frankl offers a meaning-centred approach to life that maintains life can be “meaningful under any conditions, even those which are most miserable.”¹⁰⁹ This proposition is based upon Frankl’s view of the human person. As we saw in Chapter Four, Frankl sees the ‘will to meaning’ as the primary motivational force in human beings. This will to meaning, which “presupposes the human capacity to creatively turn life’s negative aspects into something positive or constructive,”¹¹⁰ causes human beings to strive always to find meaning in their lives or else they will succumb to existential frustration. The will to meaning is itself based upon what Frankl sees as two fundamental anthropological truths: (i) freedom of will – the ability to

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Johannes Rehm, “Kirche im Gefängnis: Seelsorge in einer ‘totalen Institution,’” in: Bernd-Jochen Hilberath and Karl-Josef Kuschel (eds.), *Theologie im Gespräch: Eine Agenda für die Zukunft. Festschrift für Prof. Dr. Urs Baumann* (Frankfurt am Main: Otto Lembeck, 2006), 248-262.

¹⁰⁸ Luke 1:68; 2:38; 24:21; Acts 5:19; Acts 12:3-18; Acts 16:19-40; John 8:32; Rom 6:18; 7:6; 2 Cor 3:17; Gal 1:4; 2:4; 3:13; 4:5; 5:1; Heb 2:15; 1 Cor 8:9; 10:29; Gal 5:13; 1 Pet 2:16.

¹⁰⁹ *MSM*: 161-162.

¹¹⁰ *MSM*: 161-162.

choose one's attitude to one's circumstances – which Frankl calls “the last of human freedoms”¹¹¹; and (ii) the presence of a dimension of Spirit in human beings which enables them to transcend their circumstances and rise above their instincts and their environment to *choose* the values upon which one takes one's stand.

What we can see is that Frankl's anthropology is not dissimilar to Rahner's.¹¹² For Rahner, human beings are open towards the Transcendent God to receive “a meaning” (*eine Sinnzusage*)¹¹³ just as, for Frankl, humans are open towards the dimension of Spirit or *Nous*. Both thinkers see this openness towards God or Spirit as being the essence of what makes one human. As Rahner said, “to be human” – i.e., in our “subjectivity” – is to be “spirit” (*Geist*).¹¹⁴ However, Rahner's thinking on this point remains somewhat abstract while Frankl, in light of his experience as a prisoner and as a psychiatrist, shows how this Spirit which is present in all human beings enables them to find meaning in their concrete situation, no matter how hopeless. Despite his use of the concept of ‘anonymous Christian,’¹¹⁵ Rahner's thought also stays within a specifically Christian sphere whereas the Spirit of which Frankl speaks is present in all human beings regardless of their religious or cultural beliefs or social conditions. Frankl's meaning-centred approach thus enables our theology of empowerment to go beyond Rahner and speak directly to the experience of prisoners in a way that is both uniquely accessible and respectful of all.

What gives Frankl's thinking such concrete resonance, especially in the constraints of the prison environment, is “the human capacity to creatively turn life's negative aspects into something positive or constructive.”¹¹⁶ Through this ‘creative turn,’ Frankl argues that: (i) suffering can be turned into a human achievement; (ii) guilt can give rise to an opportunity to change oneself for the better; and (iii) life's transitoriness can create an incentive to take responsible action.¹¹⁷ This ‘creative turn’ is

¹¹¹ *MSM*: 12. *ZB*: 12.

¹¹² See R. Daren Erisman, “Viktor Frankl Meets Karl Rahner: Two Similar Anthropologies,” in: Melvin A. Kimble (ed.), *Viktor Frankl's Contribution to Spirituality and Aging* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007 [2000]), 25-33. Erisman argues that the anthropology of Rahner is similar to Viktor Frankl's anthropology: “Both Rahner and Frankl are interested in the modern person and their difficulties. Rahner's categories of anthropology include humanity as person and subject, humanity as transcendent being, and humanity as responsible and free, while Frankl described the most fundamental aspect of being human as ‘will to meaning.’” Erisman sees the “similarities and differences” of Rahner and Frankl's anthropological categories, in their “professional and religious perspectives.”

¹¹³ See Chapter One, Section 1.1.1. “*Theological Anthropology: Hearer of the Word (Hörer des Wortes)*” in this thesis.

¹¹⁴ *SW*, 4 (*Hörer des Wortes*): 259. *SW*, 17/1 (*Enzyklopädische Theologie*): 120.

¹¹⁵ See Chapter One, Section 1.3. “*Anonymous Christianity*” in this thesis.

¹¹⁶ *MSM*: 161-162.

¹¹⁷ *MSM*: 162.

what makes change possible, not so much in one's external circumstances as in one's self-understanding. What matters, according to Frankl, is not the pursuit of happiness which is so much commanded by our Western culture today; rather, it is "to make the best of any given situation"¹¹⁸ by "actualizing the potential meaning [that is] inherent and dormant in [it]."¹¹⁹ In this way, people in prison can become conscious "of some meaning and purpose worth living for"¹²⁰ here and now in the reality of their situation. Finding such a meaning or purpose can help prisoners believe that there are good grounds to continue on living and to live *well*. As Frankl writes, "Once an individual's search for a meaning is successful, it not only renders him happy but also gives him the capability to cope with suffering."¹²¹

It is precisely this "creative turning" towards the positive that prison ministry seeks to foster. In face of the existential frustration and disempowerment experienced by prisoners when their will to meaning is frustrated (as it so often is in prison), it is the task of the prison minister to "pilot" prisoners through their "existential crises of growth and development"¹²² towards a potential meaning that lies within their individual situation. To do this, ministers need to guide inmates with their fears, pains and doubts to help them become aware of their needs and deeper desires. It is in the deepest sense of the word an education¹²³ which leads prisoners to become active agents of their own destiny, to take seriously the deepest desires of their hearts, and by acting on them come into the fullness of human flourishing. In no way does the minister seek to dictate the 'meaning' toward which an individual prisoner might be guided. Instead, the prison minister seeks to establish a positive atmosphere which is open to change and to initiate meaningful processes through which prisoners can grow and search for their own meaning in life. The minister reassures, inspires and encourages as the prisoner much as the prodigal son is invited to 'return home' to his/her own self where s/he will encounter the Spirit within the all-embracing love of God. The meaning which emerges from such an encounter empowers prisoners to forge their broken lives anew and to perhaps find for the first time a place for themselves in the world. Finding meaning in life also confers that sense of dignity and self-worth which Hüther argues is necessary for prisoners to overcome their

¹¹⁸ *MSM*: 162.

¹¹⁹ *MSM*: 162.

¹²⁰ *MSM*: 166.

¹²¹ *MSM*: 163.

¹²² *MSM*: 125. *ZB*: 129.

¹²³ The Latin phrase *educio* literally means *I lead forth*.

self-rejection and alienation in order to arrive at a “deeper understanding” of suffering which makes us all human.¹²⁴

A powerful example of this ‘creative turn’ can be found in the life of Malcolm X which is cited by O’Connor and Duncan.¹²⁵ As a youth, Malcolm X dropped out of school and got involved in criminal behaviour for which he was sentenced at the age of 20 to 8 to 10 years in prison. Following an encounter with an older prisoner, Malcolm was inspired to take up education and learning. This led to an interest in religion which in turn led to a religious conversion where, after a week of internal struggle, “Malcolm overcame what he describes as a sense of shame, guilt and embarrassment, and submitted himself in prayer to God” to become a “member of the Nation of Islam.”¹²⁶ This was a turning point for Malcolm, a moment of “quantum change.”¹²⁷ Although still imprisoned, he had a remarkable experience of freedom: “Months passed by without my even thinking about being imprisoned. In fact, up to then, I had never been so truly free in my life.”¹²⁸ He turned away completely from his former life and went on to have a profound effect on American culture after his release until the time of his assassination in 1968. Finding a meaning in life, firstly through education and then more deeply through religion and a relationship with God, empowered Malcolm X to change his life and make a contribution of “immense importance” to the world around him.¹²⁹

An interdisciplinary and integrated pastoral approach is needed to help prisoners make this ‘creative turn’ and find meaning today. From the prison perspectives of Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn, we learned that meaning is found through love/relationship, faith, humour, and creative expression through art, music, and literature. Of course, this is not an exhaustive list. As we have seen, Malcolm X first found meaning through taking up education. Any form of constructive activity (e.g., crafts, gardening, looking after animals, etc.) can provide both meaning and purpose in a person’s life. Chaplaincy initiatives seek to support prisoners in their own spirituality and to strengthen and hearten them through every positive human activity. As a matter of primary importance, prison ministers try to listen to inmates and build on their interests. Anything that helps prisoners to

¹²⁴ *WWSM*: 80.

¹²⁵ O’Connor & Duncan, “The Sociology of Humanist, Spiritual, and Religious Practice in Prison,” 591. Cf. Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York, NY: First Ballantine Books Edition, 1973).

¹²⁶ O’Connor & Duncan, “The Sociology of Humanist, Spiritual, and Religious Practice in Prison,” 591.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* W.R Miller & J.C.D. Baca, *Quantum Change: When Epiphanies and Sudden Insights Transform Ordinary Lives* (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 2001), 212.

¹²⁸ O’Connor & Duncan, “The Sociology of Humanist, Spiritual, and Religious Practice in Prison,” 591. Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 173.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* See also Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (New York, NY: Viking Adult, 2011).

overcome their existential fears and frustration and supports them to find a different, freer and more meaningful human life is to be encouraged.

Nonetheless, the four pathways identified by Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn are particularly significant. Creativity and exploration of the spiritual in music, poetry, and art will be considered separately below. Humour is generally important in generating a sense of perspective and detachment from one's concerns as well as a sense of curiosity. This pushes us to suspend our preconceptions. In order to get in touch with what is human both in ourselves and in others, we must ask, question, seek and listen. For both prisoner and minister, this is an essential attitude for the inner journey involved in searching for meaning in a prison context.

Like all people, prisoners seek to love and be loved. This is a primary human need. In their pain, prisoners reach out for relationship and a sense of belonging. Meeting these needs bestows a powerful sense of meaning and purpose. Thus prison ministers seek to facilitate such relationships for prisoners: with family members outside prison, with fellow prisoners or with the minister her/himself which may be the only meaningful relationship in a prisoner's life. Still more may be required. As we have seen, prison can be an intensely painful experience and, as Sölle points out, we human beings do not love pain. In the present moment of one's lonely suffering, the only relationship possible is with the God who is present and suffers with us. According to Sölle, this God weeps for us, like a mother.¹³⁰ In this moment, prisoners are "no longer alone" with their grief.¹³¹ God is present.

Depending on the individual, such a moment can generate a relationship of love and faith that is not only deeply meaningful but can also empower the person to cope with otherwise unbearable suffering. Such relationships are pre-eminently found in the Bible, particularly in biblical stories of captivity and imprisonment which so powerfully reflect the human condition. Significantly, Christian prisoners today are especially interested in these stories once they connect with a desire to (re-)discover their faith. Listening to the Scriptures, therefore, can give meaning to the stress of imprisonment. It helps inmates to see that these experiences of pain and weakness, of forgiveness and liberation have been part of our human story from the beginning. In the end, it is love that

¹³⁰ *GPOP*: 326

¹³¹ *GPOP*: 330.

comforts the pain and “breaks the heart of stone” to quote Wilde.¹³² “How else but through a broken heart may Lord Christ enter in?”¹³³ As Frankl quotes Wittgenstein, to “believe in God” in the midst of suffering is “to see that life has a meaning.”¹³⁴

5.3.3. Transformation

An issue which must be addressed by any theology of prison ministry is the question of guilt.¹³⁵ As we noted in Chapter Four, there is a difference between contemporary prisoners who have committed serious crimes and people like Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn who were innocent victims of tyrannical regimes. Guilt brings with it a particular type of suffering which takes one deep into the human heart and confronts us with shame and our inability and powerlessness to change ourselves. Rahner refers to this as “the unfreedom of guilt.”¹³⁶ St. Paul captures it well: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.”¹³⁷ It is as if he has been made “captive to the law of sin” in his own body.¹³⁸ If guilt is not addressed but left to fester, it poisons the soul, leading to the type of bitterness, alienation, and self-hatred described earlier in this chapter.

As Rahner rightly points out, guilt can be experienced by people outside prison as well as those held within it. However, the problem of guilt and the issues it raises are greatly intensified in the prison environment and can present a severe challenge to the faith of prison ministers. While ministers, knowing that the dignity of the prisoner’s *imago Dei* cannot be lost, seek to hold out the possibility of reconciliation where there is sin and guilt,¹³⁹ it can be difficult to maintain this stance when dealing with people who lie, manipulate or resort to violence. The reality is that most prisoners have committed crimes (sometimes very serious ones) for which they have been convicted and, whether or not they choose to face it, they are carrying the guilt of those crimes. In addition, prison itself, as we have seen, is a “dangerous place” with a culture of violence where one can easily be drawn into

¹³² Wilde, *De Profundis*, 137.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Ultimate Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Basicbooks, 2000), 153. Cf. Costello, “Towards a Tri-Dimensional Model of Happiness: A Logo-Philosophical Perspective,” 348.

¹³⁵ Pierce, *Prison Ministry: Hope behind the Wall*, 139.

¹³⁶ *MG*, 3: 91. *SW*, 16: 222. *SG*, 459.

¹³⁷ Rom 7:15.

¹³⁸ Rom 7:23.

¹³⁹ *KGH*: 4.

further wrongdoing so that guilt is continually being experienced.¹⁴⁰ Prison is a crucible where one is brought face to face with good and evil within oneself. As we noted in Chapter Four, Frankl and Solzhenitsyn both speak of a tension between “survival” or “conscience” as the basic pattern of the prison experience.¹⁴¹ As Frankl claims, it exposes the soul and “the rift dividing good from evil, which goes through all human beings.”¹⁴² Such questions confront us with the shadow in ourselves and our own human weakness. To use Frankl’s language, what matters is the stand we take before our own guilt and sinfulness: whether we choose to run away from it or whether we face up to the seriousness of our predicament. As Rahner says, “every human being is continually running away”¹⁴³ so facing up to guilt is actually a rare and courageous choice.

It is interesting here to look at the biblical understanding of imprisonment. Although Rahner chose to focus only on Matthew 25, Johannes Beutler shows that Scripture contains many stories of captivity.¹⁴⁴ A glance at the history of the people of Israel reveals they underwent slavery in Egypt and Babylon as well as the Seleucid religious persecution and the imprisonment and ill-treatment of various prophets. In the New Testament, many of the early disciples underwent imprisonment or other forms of persecution. Jesus himself was imprisoned and treated as a criminal, being arrested, tried, mistreated and finally sentenced to death by crucifixion. The biblical stories show us that imprisonment is a deeper and wider phenomenon than that which takes place under the criminal justice system. It can be seen as reflecting an inherent lack of freedom in the human condition. In St. Paul’s words, it illustrates our captivity to the law of sin. In this way, we can see that the prisoner’s story is the human story, the story of each one of us. We are all in need of God’s mercy. As Rahner puts it, “we are [all] unfree, prisoners, unless the Spirit of God, his grace, sets us free.”¹⁴⁵ Thus, the prison minister meets in prisoners the “hidden truth of his own situation,”¹⁴⁶ that s/he her/himself is unfree, captive to sin and guilt.

¹⁴⁰ O’Connor & Duncan, “The Sociology of Humanist, Spiritual, and Religious Practice in Prison,” 591-592.

¹⁴¹ *GA*, 2: 602-603.

¹⁴² *MSM*: 108. *ZB*: 110. *TJL*: 130: Der Riß, der durch alles Menschsein hindurchgeht und zwischen gut und böse scheidet, reicht auch noch bis in die tiefsten Tiefen [...]

¹⁴³ *MG*, 3: 89. *SW*, 16: 221. *SG*, 457.

¹⁴⁴ Johannes Beutler, *Biblical notes and references* (Lecture Handout for the ICCPPC meeting in Dublin, September 2003): 1 Macc 9:53; 13:12; Gen 39-41; 1 Kin 22:1-38; 2 Chr 16:10; Jer 38; 1 Kin 19; Amos 7:12 f. See also Johannes Beutler SJ, “Denn ich war im Gefängnis... Gedanken zur Perspektive der Gefangenenpastoral,” in: *Actio und Contemplatio: Die sieben Werke der Barmherzigkeit* (Geistliche Reihe 2006), hrsg. vom Caritasverband für die Diözese Mainz in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Erbacher Hof – Akademie des Bistums Mainz, 45-54.

¹⁴⁵ *MG*, 3: 90. *SW*, 16: 221. *SG*, 458.

¹⁴⁶ *MG*, 3: 89. *SW*, 16: 221. *SG*, 457: [U]nsere eigene verborgene Situation erblicken.

How then should an empowering theology deal with this question of our guilt and sinfulness? On the one hand, we want to emphasise that guilt is met with the absolving, compassionate love of God as exemplified in the parable of the Prodigal Son. As Lataste says, “One stops all at once being guilty:..., if one returns to the love of God. Then it no longer matters whether someone was guilty or not.”¹⁴⁷ On the other hand, we do not want to avoid dealing with guilt. As Josuttis points out, the love of God cannot spare prisoners the arduous path through guilt.¹⁴⁸ There is a tension here which we do not want to collapse into extremes of either ‘cheap grace’ or an overly rigid, scrupulous focus on guilt. Rahner handles this delicate tension well, clearly acknowledging the “unfreedom of guilt”¹⁴⁹ while maintaining that human freedom depends on the Spirit of God alone. He sees the moment of facing up to guilt as “God’s hour” when a “seemingly sinister abyss in our existence... opens up.”¹⁵⁰ This is nothing less than “the abyss of God himself communicating himself to us;... which feels like nothingness because it is infinity.”¹⁵¹ While Rahner is speaking of pastors facing this abyss in the “hopeless experience” of prisoners they are visiting, the same is equally true of pastors or prisoners facing up to guilt in themselves. ‘God’s hour’ thus makes clear the reality which has been surrounding us all the time: “the unfreedom of guilt, the imprisonment from which Christ’s grace alone can set us free into the freedom of the children of God.”¹⁵² For Rahner, then, the more we acknowledge the reality of our ‘unfreedom,’ our ‘captivity to sin,’ the more we acknowledge our dependence on, and the sheer wonder of, God’s free gift of grace. This gift is given only “to those who acknowledge themselves as sinners and build their lives on one thing only, the incomprehensible grace of God who takes pity on the lost.”¹⁵³

Theologically speaking, Rahner is correct in acknowledging the hopelessness of our situation as

¹⁴⁷ Cited by Markus Roentgen in: “In jeder Kreatur ein Funke Gottes” – Geistliche-biblische Impulse zur JVA Seelsorgekonferenz in Mainz am 20. März 2012 [*my translation and emphasis*]: Man hört auch auf einmal auf, schuldig zu sein: dann nämlich, wenn man die Liebe Gottes erwidert [...] Dann hat es keine Bedeutung mehr, ob jemand schuldig war oder nicht. Cf. Anatol Feid & Florian Flohr, *Frohe Botschaft für die Gefangenen: Leben und Werk des Dominikaners Lataste* (Mainz: M. Grünewald, 1978), 106.

¹⁴⁸ Manfred Josuttis, “Vorträge zur Gefängnisseelsorge,” *Reader GefängnisSeelsorge*, Heft 13 (Hannover: Selbstverlag der Evangelischen Konferenz für Gefängnisseelsorge in Deutschland, 2006), 3; *Segenskräfte: Potentiale einer energetischen Seelsorge* (Gütersloh: Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlagshaus).

¹⁴⁹ *MG*, 3: 91. *SW*, 16: 222. *SG*, 459: [D]ie Unfreiheit der Schuld [...]

¹⁵⁰ *MG*, 3: 86-87. *SG*, 455-456: Dann ist die Stunde Gottes: dann ist die scheinbar unheimliche Bodenlosigkeit unserer Existenz [...]

¹⁵¹ *MG*, 3: 86-87. *SG*, 455-456: [D]ie Bodenlosigkeit Gottes [...] die wie ein Nichts gekostet wird, weil sie die Unendlichkeit ist.

¹⁵² *MG*, 3: 91. *SW*, 16: 222. *SG*, 459: [D]ie Unfreiheit der Schuld, die Gefangenschaft, aus der uns nur Christi Gnade allein zur Freiheit der Kinder Gottes befreien kann.

¹⁵³ *MG*, 3: 95. *SW*, 16: 223-224. *SG*, 461: [W]enn wir für uns selbst die Gnade Gottes finden wollen, die sich nur denen gibt, die sich als Sünder bekennen und ihr Dasein nur auf eines bauen, auf die unbegreifliche Gnade Gottes, die sich der Verlorenen erbarmt.

sinners and showing that our hope lies in the “incomprehensible grace of God.”¹⁵⁴ However, from a pastoral point of view, it is important to say more to those who live on a daily basis with no escape from that hopelessness. For God is present *now* and the wonders of his grace can shine through the hopelessness of our situation to provide moments of hope. We ourselves can strive to cooperate with his grace, to “help *You*, God” as Hillesum puts it,¹⁵⁵ “to dig God out” in the most unpromising circumstances where God himself is powerless and weeps with us like a mother.¹⁵⁶ Frankl tells us that humans are the “the beings that always decides.”¹⁵⁷ Even in the camps, we still choose our attitude: whether to participate in the torment of others or to enter the gas chambers, praying for the tormentors. Even in prison, we choose to accept survival “at any price” or to follow one’s conscience.¹⁵⁸ Even in the unfreedom of guilt, we have a choice and the choices we make can transform our character. In his imprisonment, Solzhenitsyn chose to search out the evil in his own heart and to acknowledge his own guilt. This was the process of ‘soul-searching’ which slowly transformed his soul, helping him to learn to love and care for others. It is empowering for the prisoner caught up in a cycle of violence and fear to recognise that s/he still has a choice. Instead of judging and blaming others, we can choose to look at ourselves. In the words of Jesus, instead of taking the splinter out of our neighbour’s eye, we can attend to the plank in our own.¹⁵⁹ As Hillesum says,

each of us must turn inward and destroy in himself all that he thinks he ought to destroy in others. And remember that every atom of hate we add to this world makes it still more inhospitable.¹⁶⁰

The unfreedom of guilt and imprisonment can cause the prisoner to suffer in a way described well by Hillesum. She writes,

I mean: it is possible to suffer with dignity and without. I mean: most of us in the West don’t understand the art of suffering and experience a thousand fears instead. We cease to be alive,

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ E.T., 488-489. *Het Werk*, 516-517.

¹⁵⁶ E.T., 91. *Het Werk*, 97. *GPOP*: 326.

¹⁵⁷ *MSM*: (108) [my English translation]. *ZB*: (110). *TJL*: 130 [This part here is only in the German original]: Was also ist der Mensch? Er ist das Wesen, das immer entscheidet, was es ist.

¹⁵⁸ *GA*, 2: 602.

¹⁵⁹ Matt 7:1-5; Luke 6:37-42

¹⁶⁰ E.T., 529. *Het Werk*, 560.

being full of fear, bitterness, hatred, and despair. God knows, it's only too easy to understand why.¹⁶¹

Realising that one has a choice, even in these circumstances, enables one to take a stand, to “accept [one’s] fate with dignity and calm.”¹⁶² Each person has to find a way to respond to the anger and injustices in and around them. We are asked to undertake a journey of the heart, to respond to what life (and God) is asking of us in *this* particular situation. Each person’s journey of healing, redemption or transformation is utterly unique so each person has to find their own way, based on their experience of sorrow, suffering, sinfulness and need of God. The task of the minister is to walk with prisoners on this journey, while also undertaking their own journey, guiding, encouraging, inspiring and being inspired as each person seeks to find their path. This path may well take them, like Peter in John 21:18, where they would not choose to go. Such a path takes us on the Easter journey, a journey into mystery that will bring us through the darkness of Good Friday to the dawning of the light of Easter Sunday. This is a journey of *transformation*. It empowers us to rise above our circumstances and become what the ‘Spirit’ within is urging us to be.

Ultimately, we look to Jesus and the journey he took which led him to the Cross where he surrendered himself completely to what was asked of him. Remaining faithful both to the humanity of his experience of suffering¹⁶³ and his relationship with his Father,¹⁶⁴ he trusted utterly and absolutely in the love between him and his Father, a love which led to the mystery of Resurrection and the coming of the Spirit which is the love of God poured into our hearts. Through this love, Jesus opened a way for us, a way in which humanity can be set free and the bonds of our captivity to sin are broken. Love really does change everything. Even the prison experience of apathy and fear turns to blessing when we are changed by love.¹⁶⁵

Our theology of empowerment thus seeks to answer questions of guilt firstly on the basis of Rahner’s understanding of the necessity of the grace of God to set us free but also, going beyond Rahner, to adopt the model of redemption as divinisation, the idea that Jesus became human and underwent all

¹⁶¹ E.T., 459-460. *Het Werk*, 484-485.

¹⁶² E.T., 616. *Het Werk*, 657.

¹⁶³ “Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Mark 15:34, Matt 27:46.

¹⁶⁴ “Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’” Luke 23:46.

¹⁶⁵ See Chapter Four where Solzhenitsyn, speaking from his experience, says “Bless you, prison.” *GA*, 2: 616-617.

that he did so that we could become divine or, as 2 Pet 1:4 puts it, “partakers in the divine nature.”¹⁶⁶ Here, the emphasis is less on our guilt and more on our potential. Focusing on guilt and powerlessness can be paralysing for prisoners who already feel trapped in a hopeless situation. In contrast, drawing on the experiences of Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn to emphasise the freedom of choice that remains to us and our potential for growth and transformation is an approach that empowers. Transformation, of course, is still something that happens not through our own efforts but through grace. Rahner is right to emphasise this, but our actions still matter. We humbly do what we can to prepare the ground for grace remembering that “all things work together for good for those who love God.”¹⁶⁷ Through making good choices and using pastoral tools such as art, music, faith, love of nature and love for others, we open ourselves to be drawn into the divine mystery where we are touched by the Transcendent and changed by it. As St. Irenaeus says, “the glory of God is the living man and the life of man is the vision of God.”¹⁶⁸ Like Jesus, we are invited to trust in the power of God’s love and to entrust ourselves to that love and grace. In this way, we are redeemed from our fallenness and brokenness, not by lamenting our guilt, but by being drawn into the mystery of Love so that we ourselves might become love.

5.3.4. *Liberation*

The next element of our empowerment theology that requires to be considered is liberation. In Luke’s gospel, Jesus proclaimed that one of the reasons for his coming was to bring liberty to captives (Luke 4:18) and the idea of liberation is rich in resonance for those who are actually imprisoned. Liberation theology brings a particular focus – a preference for the poor, an emphasis on action and a spirituality of the oppressed in the everyday – which is highly relevant for our thesis.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Redemption as “divinisation” has its roots in scripture especially in St Paul (see 2 Cor 3:18 and 2 Cor 8:9) and in the thinking of the Church Fathers, especially Irenaeus and Athanasius. As St. Athanasius said, “For the Son of God became man so that we might become God.” See Article 460 of the Catechism.

¹⁶⁷ Rom 8:28.

¹⁶⁸ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 4, Chapter 34, Section 7.

¹⁶⁹ See Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (15th Anniversary Edition with New Introduction by Author), tr. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 1988 [1971]). Also Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro (eds.), *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutiérrez* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989). Jon Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987); *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness*, tr. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, Orbis, 1988); *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994); Leonardo Boff, *Church, Charisma, and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, tr. John Diercksmeier (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1986 [1985]); *The Maternal Face of God*, tr. Robert R. Barr and John W. Diercksmeier (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1989 [1987]); *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, tr. Phillip Berryman (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 1997 [1995]). Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity: The Gospel of Liberation* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1988

It is echoed in the language of Pope Francis when he speaks of creating “a poor church for the poor.”¹⁷⁰ The focus of liberation theology calls us to take seriously the suffering of the poor in a way that challenges both the way we think of God and perceive His presence among us as well as the way we respond to suffering.

Dorothee Sölle is one such theologian who takes the afflictions, joys, and hopes of the oppressed seriously. Coming out of post-war Germany, her theology was profoundly shaped by the memory of war, the Shoah, and the experience of totalitarianism.¹⁷¹ Referring to the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Sölle asks the question: “How does our pain become God’s pain, and how does God’s pain appear in our pain?”¹⁷² What interests Sölle is Bonhoeffer’s claim that God is uniquely present in suffering and powerlessness. According to Bonhoeffer, God voluntarily chose to allow God’s self “to be pushed out of the world” and become powerless on the cross.¹⁷³ Drawing on biblical references such as 1 Cor 1:25,¹⁷⁴ Bonhoeffer argues that the Bible directs people toward “the powerlessness and the suffering of God.”¹⁷⁵ Rather than being omnipotent, as the traditional view of the Church holds, God is seen to be “weak and powerless in the world.”¹⁷⁶ “In precisely this way, and only so,” Bonhoeffer argues, God “is at our side and helps us.”¹⁷⁷ For Bonhoeffer, this powerlessness and suffering of God is real. It is visible in the suffering of Jesus on the cross. Against our natural human instinct to avoid pain, it calls us to enter into and participate in the suffering of

[1976]); Hugo Echegaray, *The Practice of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984 [1980]); José Cárdenas Pallarés, *A Poor Man Called Jesus: Reflections on the Gospel of Mark* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986 [1982]).

¹⁷⁰ See the various online news articles following the election of Pope Francis in 2013: e.g., of the BBC: “Pope Francis wants ‘poor Church for the poor,’” BBC News, 16 March 2013. Cf. Clemens Sedmak, *A Church of the Poor: Pope Francis and the Transformation of Orthodoxy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016).

¹⁷¹ Dianne L. Oliver, *Dorothee Soelle: Essential Writings*, Modern Spiritual Masters Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006).

¹⁷² *GPOP*: 326.

¹⁷³ *LPP*, 360-361. *DBWE* 8: 478-479 [*italics my emphasis*]. *DBW* 8: 533-534: Gott läßt sich aus der Welt herausdrängen ans Kreuz. Gott ist ohnmächtig und schwach in der Welt und gerade und nur so ist er bei uns und hilft uns. Es ist Matthäus 8,17 ganz deutlich, daß Christus nicht hilft kraft seiner Allmacht, sondern kraft seiner Schwachheit, seines Leidens!

¹⁷⁴ “For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.”

¹⁷⁵ *LPP*, 361. *DBWE* 8: 479. *DBW* 8: 534: Die Bibel weist den Menschen an die Ohnmacht und das Leiden Gottes [...] See Bonhoeffer’s letter (May 21, 1942) to the Leibholz family, *DBWE* 16 (*Conspiracy and Imprisonment: 1940-1945*): 284: “So it is good to learn early enough that suffering and God is not a contradiction but rather a necessary unity; for me the idea that God himself is suffering has always been one of the most convincing teachings of Christianity.” [*DBW* 16 (*Konspiration und Haft 1940-1945*): 759: “So ist es gut, früh genug zu lernen, daß Leiden und Gott kein Widerspruch ist, sondern vielmehr eine notwendige Einheit; für mich ist die Idee, daß Gott selbst leidet, immer eine der überzeugendsten Lehren des Christentums gewesen.”]

¹⁷⁶ *LPP*, 360-361. *DBWE* 8: 478-479. *DBW* 8: 533-534: Es ist Matthäus 8,17 ganz deutlich, daß Christus nicht hilft kraft seiner Allmacht, sondern kraft seiner Schwachheit, seines Leidens!

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*.

God wherever it is to be found in the world for “only the suffering God can help.”¹⁷⁸

What Bonhoeffer helps us to see is that, on the cross, God not only shows himself as favouring the poor, God *becomes* one of the poor and helpless. God is with us in our suffering *as* one who suffers. This profound and intimate connection between God’s presence and the suffering of those who are poor (or in prison) holds great significance for Sölle. Following Bonhoeffer and Hans Jonas (who also speaks of “a suffering God”¹⁷⁹), Sölle rejects the idea of an omnipotent God – “a God who has all the power but has chosen not to intervene”¹⁸⁰ – as incompatible with the Christian spirit.¹⁸¹ For her, a theology that sees God as “the almighty ruler of history,” “the one who knows everything, who is really responsible: the one who can... step in and end human torment, assuming God wants to” is repulsive in light of the suffering caused by the Holocaust.¹⁸² Such “[a]n ‘almighty’ God, who inflicts suffering, who looks down from above upon Auschwitz, must be a sadist.”¹⁸³

Instead, Sölle argues that God is connected to us in our pain. This is what compassion means: “*to suffer with, to be present with,*” to be connected with another’s pain, even “*to feel another’s pain in her own body.*”¹⁸⁴ Jesus is shown in the Gospels as having “*this wonderful and rare ability*” to feel *with* people who suffer and it is this that enables him to provide comfort and healing.¹⁸⁵ If it were not so, Sölle goes on to argue, if God was not connected to our pain so that it becomes God’s pain, then it would be difficult to believe in God’s love.¹⁸⁶ As she says, “[w]ithout God’s pain, God is not really present.”¹⁸⁷ But if God is genuinely connected to our pain, we can formulate another image of God than the masculine ‘almighty ruler.’ This is the image of God as “*our mother, who weeps over the*

¹⁷⁸ LPP, 361. DBWE 8: 479. DBW 8: 534: [N]ur der leidende Gott kann helfen.

¹⁷⁹ Coetsier, *The Existential Philosophy of Etty Hillesum*, 106. Ron Margolin, “Hans Jonas and Secular Religiosity,” in: *The Legacy of Hans Jonas: Judaism and the Phenomenon of Life*, eds. Hava Tirosh-Samuelson & Christian Wiese, 231-258 (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2008), 252: “[...] Jonas speaks of a suffering God who identifies with the suffering of His people who stand facing the silent world He created, yet He is unable to stop the evil caused by the independent creatures who have stopped hearing His voice. Although God is the source of all that is good and meaningful in this world, His world is indifferent to His suffering. This paradox is typical of Jewish sources, particularly those influenced by Kabbalah. What philosophy cannot permit, the language of myth can.”

¹⁸⁰ Coetsier, *The Existential Philosophy of Etty Hillesum*, 106.

¹⁸¹ GPOP: 326.

¹⁸² GPOP: 326.

¹⁸³ GPOP: 326.

¹⁸⁴ GPOP: 326 [*italics my emphasis*].

¹⁸⁵ GPOP: 326-327 [*italics my emphasis*].

¹⁸⁶ GPOP: 328.

¹⁸⁷ GPOP: 327.

things that we do to each other and to our sisters and brothers, the animals and plants.”¹⁸⁸ Sölle draws on biblical images such as Ps 131:2 (“I have calmed and quieted myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother”) and Is 49:15 (“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Yet even if these forget, I will not forget you!”) to portray God as one who “comforts us like a mother:... [holding] *us in her lap until we stand up again with renewed strength.*”¹⁸⁹

For those who are suffering in prison today, this image of God is far more healing and empowering than a God who is all-powerful but indifferent to their suffering. This is a God who cares and is a powerful force for good for prisoners who are separated from their families and struggle with loneliness and alienation, many never having known the comfort of being cared for. For perhaps the first time in their lives, they may realise they are “no longer alone” with their suffering. God suffers with them, feels with them, journeys with them. This is “God’s pain” of which Sölle speaks. The task of the prison minister is to hear the call of “God’s pain” in the suffering and powerlessness of prisoners and to respond by becoming one with them and sharing their struggle. As Sölle quotes Bonhoeffer, “Jesus calls us to ‘participation in God’s powerlessness in the world.’”¹⁹⁰

Here we can see how liberation theology goes further than Rahner. It is not enough to witness the prisoners’ struggle and to see Christ in them; the call is to *participate*. The challenge Sölle poses, not just to prison ministers but to all of us, is not to remain aloof and removed from people’s suffering. Rather, in the image of God who weeps with her children, we are called to *connect* to the pain, to *feel with* those who suffer, and to *be present with* them in their pain. This is the call of compassion in which our shared human suffering *becomes* “the power of struggle and solidarity that connects us.”¹⁹¹ Suffering is not a bothersome shadow to be pushed away:¹⁹² it is the means of connecting and bringing people together with God in solidarity. Prisoners can thus be empowered by ministers who enter into their suffering and journey with them in solidarity and compassion, discovering together the God who cares, weeps, and comforts us like a mother.

However, liberation theology does not stop with participation in the suffering of the poor and

¹⁸⁸ *GPOP*: 326 [*italics* my emphasis].

¹⁸⁹ *GPOP*: 326 [*italics* my emphasis].

¹⁹⁰ *GPOP*: 331. *LPP*, 362. *DBWE* 8:482. *DBW* 8: 537: *Leben der Teilnahme an der Ohnmacht Gottes in der Welt.*

¹⁹¹ *GPOP*: 330.

¹⁹² *GPOP*: 327.

oppressed: it calls for action. This is the logical outcome of reflecting on a God who is suffering with God's people and powerless to remove their suffering. If God's suffering and powerlessness are real, as Sölle and Bonhoeffer claim, then it arguably follows that "God needs us as much as we need God."¹⁹³ God is in real need of our help.¹⁹⁴ As Jonas puts it: "Having given himself whole to the becoming world, *God has no more to give: it is man's now to give to him.*"¹⁹⁵ Notably, this contention strongly echoes Hillesum's reflection on her Holocaust experiences: "But one thing is becoming increasingly clear to me: that *You cannot help us, that we must help You to help ourselves.*"¹⁹⁶ Thus, as Sölle argues, to "partake of God" means becoming active and not letting God "rest in peace."¹⁹⁷ To let God alone in "peace" would mean to "evade responsibility for the sorrows of our times."¹⁹⁸ It is our responsibility, as Hillesum would say, "to dig God out" from under "the stones and grit" that "blocks the well."¹⁹⁹

This theological insight *that it is we who can help God rather than God helping us* is key to empowering theology of prison ministry. As we saw in Chapter Four, Hillesum shows us that the experience of a powerless God can,²⁰⁰ paradoxically, be empowering. She herself was empowered and sustained by God as she sought to "dig God out," to defend God's dwelling place inside herself²⁰¹ and to clear a path towards God in the hearts of others. Participation in the suffering of the poor, which is also the suffering of God, is not a licence to wallow in self-pity but a call to take what action we can to relieve the suffering. In the world of prison, it means that prisoners and ministers alike have a responsibility to act. We can see from Hillesum that as they act, they will be empowered to find a way.

Sölle believes it is necessary to turn worldly grief into Godly grief. This distinction is drawn from St. Paul: "For godly grief produces repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly

¹⁹³ Mahn, *Radical Lutherans / Lutheran radicals*, 109.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁹⁵ Hans Jonas, "The Concept of God after Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice," *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (Jan., 1987): 1-13, esp. 12 [*italics* my emphasis].

¹⁹⁶ E.T., 488-489 [*italics* my emphasis, translation revised]. *Het Werk*, 516-517.

¹⁹⁷ *GPOP*: 328.

¹⁹⁸ *GPOP*: 328.

¹⁹⁹ E.T., 91. *Het Werk*, 97.

²⁰⁰ Note: Bonhoeffer, Sölle and Hillesum are no less stimulating when one is inclined to disagree with their theological position that "God is powerless." One could argue, for instance, that it is more accurate to suggest that God refrains to use his power unless it is accompanied by our own free will and the actions that arise from it. In both cases, nonetheless, our attitude and feelings will affect how we make any meaningful decision towards God and towards our fellow creatures.

²⁰¹ E.T., 488-489. *Het Werk*, 516-517.

grief produces death” (2 Cor 7:10). According to Sölle, the presence of God “is always the pain or joy of God.”²⁰² Where there is suffering, there is “sorrow dwelling in God.”²⁰³ This is “Godly grief” which “arises from God’s pain over a barbaric world filled with injustice and the destruction of life.”²⁰⁴ “Worldly grief” says Sölle, “knows no hope, and leads to nothing;”²⁰⁵ “Godly grief,” on the other hand, is an experience of God’s pain that leads to outrage, struggle and resistance.²⁰⁶ The signs of Godly grief are “to become outraged, to engage in resistance, to long for change, to force it to come about, to call the guilty to account.”²⁰⁷ As Sölle says, “this grief does not just turn around in circles or brood over itself.”²⁰⁸ It leads instead to actions, like those of Martin Luther King, that resist oppression and strive for liberation. Our task, then, is to transform worldly grief into Godly grief. When we do this, Sölle believes, “God transforms [our] pain.”²⁰⁹ Using the Biblical image of the pain of giving birth, she declares that “*God will liberate [those who suffer] and God will heal [...] and turn their sorrow into joy.*”²¹⁰ This does not mean that our pain is necessarily removed; rather we are brought to a different place where we are enabled to find joy in the pain.²¹¹

Participation in the suffering of the oppressed therefore requires that we engage in acts of resistance, especially when people are treated as “objects to be controlled, humiliated and confined.”²¹² What might such resistance entail in the prison context? There is a need on the part of the prison minister, as Brandner points out in Chapter Three, to (i) be aware of political and social inequalities in the prison system; (ii) to let go of personal and systemic prejudice; and (iii) to advocate on behalf of prisoners where necessary. Primarily, however, resistance and change take place behind bars in the milieu of creativity and self-expression. When prisoners are empowered to find their voice and speak their truth where that truth is heard and appreciated, a truly liberating act of resistance takes place against the dehumanisation entailed by incarceration which would otherwise be inevitable. Thus, chaplaincy initiatives in areas such as music, poetry, and art are of vital importance as they have the

²⁰² *GPOP*: 327.

²⁰³ *GPOP*: 328.

²⁰⁴ *GPOP*: 328.

²⁰⁵ *GPOP*: 327.

²⁰⁶ *GPOP*: 328. 2 Cor 7:11 (trans. Jorg Zink): “You have understood its meaning. What eagerness it has awakened in you! You have engaged in resistance, putting up a fierce struggle. You were outraged and shocked, you longed for a change, and forced it to come about, and have called the guilty to account.”

²⁰⁷ *GPOP*: 328.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *GPOP*: 329.

²¹⁰ *GPOP*: 329 [*italics my emphasis*]. John 16: 20b-22.

²¹¹ *GPOP*: 329-330.

²¹² Pierce, *Prison Ministry: Hope behind the Wall*, 87.

potential to empower prisoners to live “life to the full” (John 10:10) and to find in the midst of their suffering and powerlessness a joy and a freedom that the world (or prison) cannot take away. In such activities, sorrow indeed turns to joy and the presence of “the suffering God” of Bonhoeffer and Sölle can be felt as the “empowerer” and “liberator” of those who are “weak and powerless in the world.”²¹³ A focus on liberation is thus essential for an empowering theology of prison ministry as is its practical expression in the cultivation of creativity among prisoners, an element to which we shall now turn.

5.3.5. Creativity

Theology of prison ministry to set the incarcerated free must incorporate creativity and the arts as a means of empowering prisoners to seek liberation. There are some very stimulating ways, as Frankl, Solzhenitsyn, and Hillesum, have pointed out, to go about this and it is important to observe that this is an area neglected by Rahner. In “The Prison Pastorate,” Rahner falls short on the pastoral side of prison ministry. However, the pastoral need and benefits of engagement with music, poetry, literature, and art are primary in contemporary empowerment theology. On the one hand, we want to point to God’s grace following Rahner’s theological anthropology. On the other hand, we must go beyond Rahner’s views on prison ministry, as analysed in Chapter Two, with a more spiritual emphasis on creativity and the arts. From the prison perspectives of Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn, we have learned that in incarceration “meaning” is found through music, art and poetry.²¹⁴ These are instruments of “protest and hope,” bringing experiences of “creative freedom” and “transformation.”²¹⁵

It is our contention that creativity can stimulate the incarcerated to move away from existential fear (*Angst*) to a more meaningful and fulfilling expression of life.²¹⁶ This may include reading and

²¹³ LPP, 360-361. DBWE 8: 478-479.

²¹⁴ See Bast, *En Chienneté: Tentative d’Évasion Artistique en Milieu Carcéral* (Saint Avertin: La Boîte à Bulles, 2019). The animator Bast, who organises “comic book workshops” (drawing and scriptwriting) at the Gradignan prison in France, empowers prisoners to develop their creativity through imagination. Cf. “the artwork produced by ‘insiders,’ i.e., prisoners and ex-inmates of Her Majesty’s Prison Service,” in: Matthew Meadows, *Insider Art* (London: A&C Black, 2010). For “art in prison” in Germany see also *Der gemeinnützige Verein Art and Prison e.V.* in Berlin [<https://artandprisonberlin.jimdo.com>].

²¹⁵ ATAL: ix. [Foreword by Dr. Michael Kirwan, SJ]

²¹⁶ For “creative expression” as an alternative approach “to criminal rehabilitation” see Wesley Crichlow and Janelle Joseph (eds.), *Alternative Offender Rehabilitation and Social Justice: Arts and Physical Engagement in Criminal Justice and Community Settings* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). The study shows that it is useful to develop “pro-social attitudes” in order to improve “mental, physical and spiritual health for youth and adults in prison and community

writing, music and painting, or interpersonal encounter with other prisoners of every race, colour, nation and religion.²¹⁷ Creativity in prisons helps ministers as well as the incarcerated to go beyond abstraction towards seeking meaning in *Presence*. This means pastors must listen to the inmates in their own right and empower them through music, poetry, and art because creativity has the potential and “power to help mankind.”²¹⁸

Vicente Chong’s study on “theology and theological aesthetics” strengthens the thesis that “creative empowerment” in prisons works.²¹⁹ Following Chong’s argument one could say that if prison chaplains really “understand the liberating power of art,” the incarcerated too may sense that art can be an empowering and liberating experience for them. Chong establishes “a correlation” and speaks of “a theological aesthetics of liberation.”²²⁰ To bring creativity into prisons invites people both inside and outside those walls to “understand God in his relationship with human beings, especially with those who have been excluded from society.”²²¹ Creative work in prisons adds an important dimension to the liberation of those who are socially excluded. Prison ministry can “heed the plight of the poor” by adopting a creative modus and “be relevant in a world marked by social injustice.”²²²

Creative action as collaboration in “the process of liberation of social outcasts” is a powerful antidote to apathy and violence in prisons. Music, poetry, literature, and art, as Chong shows, have a real purpose which goes beyond the merely “aesthetic delight” of art.²²³ Art in prisons means “action” or “praxis.” It has a clear goal for prison ministry: to liberate the prisoners.²²⁴ Creativity “as an instrument of protest and hope,” frees people and is liberating in various ways. When art presents “what is evil and ugly in our reality,” it functions “as a protest against the horrors” that surround

settings.” That is, with the practice of “mindfulness” (but also with music, poetry, and art) as a “foundational tool of self-reflexivity, creative expression and therapy.”

²¹⁷ To make the interpersonal dimension work in the German prison system today, one arguably needs psychology, as prison psychologist Dr. Willi Pecher shows: The use of psychological findings and methods in prisons are not only of interest to specialists, but also affect the prison pastorate: how can criminals be treated effectively? How reliable are forecasting decisions on granting exits and early release? Prison chaplains arguably need to be psychologically trained. Willi Pecher, “Totale Institution,” in: Willi Pecher (ed.), *Justizvollzugspsychologie in Schlüsselbegriffen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2004), 310-320; “Totale Institutionen und das Thema ‘Schuld und Strafe,’” in: Annemarie Bauer and Katharina Gröning (eds.), *Institutionengeschichten. Institutionenanalysen: Sozialwissenschaftliche Einmischungen in Etagen und Schichten ihrer Regelwerke* (Tübingen: Edition Diskord, 1995), 134-148.

²¹⁸ *GA*, 1, “P.S. – Insights, Interviews & More”: 19.

²¹⁹ *ATAL*: 222.

²²⁰ *ATAL*: 222.

²²¹ *ATAL*: 222.

²²² *ATAL*: 222.

²²³ *ATAL*: 223.

²²⁴ *ATAL*: 223.

prisoners. Likewise, when it presents “a world that is good and beautiful as a real possibility,” it elicits “hope in a better future.” Art can liberate in prisons when it is an experience of creative freedom for the prisoners. Creativity has the power to “transform the whole being of its recipients,” as Chong puts it, and “[b]y transforming human beings, art has the power to transform society.”²²⁵ However, art can only help prison ministry and transform the incarcerated in so far they are willing “to participate” in the experiences of art.²²⁶

Empowerment through creativity enhances the ethical struggle with a “politics of the soul”²²⁷ by changing personal attitudes, values, and norms while addressing critically and emotionally the injustices felt. Active participation in creativity (i.e., with music, literature, poetry and art)²²⁸ can help prisoners to experience liberation.²²⁹ As Frankl and Hillesum pointed out, “the Spirit” or “God” works in the experience of art. Moreover, the “life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ can be interpreted as an event of contrast.”²³⁰ It is this “aesthetic interpretation of the event of Christ”²³¹ that adds something to our theology of prison ministry. Chong argues that it is “the Spirit of God who inspires artists to create works of art,” expressing and mediating aesthetically “the experience of contrast.”²³² With these experiences of contrast in art within prisons, we can start to “interpret analogically the life, death, and resurrection of *Jesus Christ as an event of contrast.*” For example, some artworks show what is ugly/evil/dreadful in our world, while other works “provoke a sense of longing for a beauty.”²³³ So the Spirit of God works in and among the incarcerated manifested by “the experience of liberation through art.”²³⁴

Chong explains that art by itself is “an expression and mediation” of the Transcendent. Art in prisons is “a mediation of a God who wants to communicate God’s self” to the prisoners. Creativity can

²²⁵ ATAL: 223.

²²⁶ ATAL: 223.

²²⁷ Cf. Glenn Hughes, *The Politics of the Soul: Eric Voegelin on Religious Experience* (Lanham, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999).

²²⁸ See also the Section on “Community.” Kolimon, “Empowerment: A New Generative Theme of Christian Mission in a Globalized World,” 38. For retrospectives on the history of pastoral care and its political engagement, along with its cultural work from painting, music and literature cf. Ralf Grigoleit (ed.), *Es wird ein Leben ohne Gitter geben: Festschrift für Manfred Lösch* (Fernwald/Hannover: Ehgart & Albohn, 2004).

²²⁹ ATAL: 223.

²³⁰ ATAL: 223.

²³¹ ATAL: 223.

²³² ATAL: 223.

²³³ ATAL: 223-224. [my emphasis]

²³⁴ ATAL: 223.

become another “mediation of God’s saving action” in the lives of people behind bars.²³⁵ “In this sense, we can say that the experience of liberation in and through art is a mediation of God’s saving action” in prisons.²³⁶ Our creativity facilitates this “saving action” as a “woman in labor,” as a ‘Cry’ or ‘Scream.’²³⁷ It is only with such a “Scream of Art”²³⁸ that empowerment theology will work in prisons by changing the self-understanding of people to deal with the crisis of the modern void. Prison ministers have to become not only theologically, philosophically and psychologically educated but also spiritually aware and creative in their actions. As the experts and thinkers in Chapters Three and Four have shown us, the human spirit is strengthened in prisons through creativity, inspiration and human imagination. To “partake in God,” as Sölle pointed out, grey walls must be turned into dancing colours with either a “Cry” or a “Scream” to which prisoners can respond.²³⁹

Rahner’s reflections in “The Prison Pastorate” present a theological pathway but not a creative one. This thesis offers another path for prison ministry that focuses on Christ, but one which is arguably more artistically and spiritually imaginative. The works of Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn reveal that human love, humour, literature, poetry, and music can be the grounding experiences of meaning and connectedness (*Verbundenheit*) in life and in incarceration. The “Scream” of Art can help chaplains and prisoners to discover their “eternal dignity” (*ewige Würde*). The experience of “inner

²³⁵ ATAL: 223.

²³⁶ ATAL: 223-224.

²³⁷ “The Cry” of Isaiah 42:14: “I have held My peace a long time, I have been still and restrained Myself. Now I will cry like a woman in labor, I will pant and gasp at once.”

²³⁸ See “The Scream” which is the name given to an art piece created by Norwegian Expressionist artist Edvard Munch in 1893. The original German title: *Der Schrei der Natur* (“The Scream of Nature”). The Norwegian title: *Skrik* (“Shriek”). The agonised face in the painting for the purpose of our theological meditation on prison ministry, arguably reflect God’s pain in our pain. Munch’s work has become one of the most iconic images of art, seen as symbolising the anxiety (*Angst*) of the human condition – Christ’s pain on the Cross? I used this painting in one of my Church services in prison to which the prisoners strongly responded, showing me that their ‘scream,’ pain, and suffering is indeed real. For a poetic expression of “The Scream” in prison ministry see also Coetsier & Leipold (eds.), *Born to be wild: Gott, Geld und Gefängnis – Bilderbogen & Lesebuch aus dem Gefängnis*.

²³⁹ See Rachel Marie-Crane Williams (ed.), *Teaching the Arts Behind Bars* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 2003). This anthology shows that a “nation’s soaring prison population has not been forgotten by a dedicated network of visual artists, writers, poets, dancers, musicians, and actors who teach the arts in correctional settings.” It compiles “the narratives of several accomplished arts-in-corrections teachers who share their personal experiences, philosophies, and bittersweet anecdotes, as well as practical advice, survival skills, and program evaluation guidelines.” The prison pastorate today may benefit significantly by joining such networks of “artists, writers, poets, dancers, musicians, and actors.” To bring theology and the arts together is one of the outcomes of our thesis.

growth” (*Wachstum*) as result of the spiritual in music, poetry, and literature is central to an empowering theology of hope today.²⁴⁰

Rahner states that we are not free unless “the Spirit of God, his grace” (*der Geist Gottes, seine Gnade*) sets us free. This is why we have to give “the Spirit of God” a creative chance in our theology and create a sacred space behind bars.²⁴¹ We have to work with symbols, sounds, and words to enable a “powerless God” to manifest God’s own being as the empowerer and provider. Music and literature, as Solzhenitsyn has indicated, may therefore be of help to comprehend what is the hidden truth of our suffering, pain, and powerlessness. In our method of doing theology in prison, we realise that it is grace and meaning that strengthens people while it is the spiritual aspect of music, art and poetry that channels it.

Rahner observes that prison pastors are also among “the lost” (*der Verlorenen*). We are all in desperate need of “the incomprehensible grace of God” (*die unbegreifliche Gnade Gottes*). That is why chaplains, too, must open themselves in their ministry to an empowering creativity, such as music, poetry, and art to participate in the divine-human drama of “helping God to bear God’s pain.”²⁴² We must “share God’s pain” and “take pity” (*Erbarmen*) on “You” in our neighbour and reassure them artistically to try “to find a *dwelling* and a *refuge for You*.”²⁴³ We must show compassion and love to those whose chances are slimmer. “We have no choice” (*wir haben keine Wahl*) in prison; we have to join together and make a ‘creative noise.’

A contemporary theology of prison ministry must ensure that both chaplains and prisoners have creative avenues to relieve stress. Spiritual and creative discourse should be provided that unites a critical analysis of these dimensions of health with an appreciation for the lived experience of the

²⁴⁰ Cf. *WWSM*: 115. For “the rise of prison literature,” for example, cf. Ruth Ahnert, *The Rise of Prison Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Ahnert’s study argues “that the English Reformation established the prison as an influential literary sphere.” The research shows that “[i]n the previous centuries we find only isolated examples of prison writings, but the religious and political instability of the Tudor reigns [The period between 1485 and 1603 in England and Wales] provided the conditions for the practice to thrive.”

²⁴¹ Cf. the creative “growing and outgrowing” of “the living spirit” in Carl Gustav Jung, *Modern Man in Search of A Soul*, tr. W. S. Dell and Cary F. Baynes (New York, NY: Harvest Book, 1955 [1933]), esp. 244. Jung writes: “The living spirit grows and even outgrows its earlier forms of expression; it freely chooses the human beings who proclaim it and in which it lives. This living spirit is eternally renewed and pursues its goal in manifold and inconceivable ways throughout the history of humankind. Measured against it, the names and forms which men have given it mean very little: They are only the changing leaves and blossoms on the stem of the eternal tree.” [Text slightly altered for gender-inclusive translation].

²⁴² *GPOP*: 333.

²⁴³ E.T., 519-520 [*italics* my emphasis]. *Het Werk*, 550.

tension. Hillesum, Solzhenitsyn, and Frankl have shown us that taking care of the available human powers within us gives life. Again, it is the human quality of music, art and literature and its related activities which take our minds off the constant pressure we feel so that we are able to constructively channel its weight. A prisoner who is occupied writing or painting ‘evil’ or singing about darkness is less likely to harm another inmate at the same time.²⁴⁴ Indeed, the fruits of empowering theology include the effort to humanise and destress the community behind bars.

When chaplains and prisoners learn to mediate positive desires through art and music, they evoke aspirations that arguably go beyond “mimetic rivalry” towards that what Rahner calls the infinite.²⁴⁵ Theological praxis shows that concrete distractions through various creative projects are helpful to undermine the ongoing rivalry between prisoners. O’Connor and Duncan argue that it is remarkable, despite the “sense of violence” and “the sense of danger,” that prisons are with their “generally oppressive nature” also “places of reflection, exploration, discovery, change and growth.”²⁴⁶ Men and women like St. Paul, Henry David Thoreau, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Aung San Suu Kyi and countless others “have all used their time in prison for good.”²⁴⁷

What helps prisoners using “their time in prison for good,” Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn believes, is literature and art, and especially music – they can function as vehicles of spiritual strength and orientation in imprisonment. As discussed in Chapter Three, Brandner’s most “precious experiences in prison” had “to do with music.”²⁴⁸ In that sense, God does *not* need to be brought to jail; God is already powerfully present in prison (e.g., in the power of music). Singing, for instance, is “a powerful way of tapping into life’s emotional dimensions; it is a channel for expressing joy or

²⁴⁴ In Germany there is a renowned literature prize for prisoners to stimulate their creativity and honour their talents. For the inmates themselves it is often a matter of surviving the prison day-to-day emotionally. Ingeborg-Drewitz-Literaturpreis für Gefangene (ed.), *Gemeinsam einsam: Literatur aus dem deutschen Strafvollzug 2015* (Münster, 2015); *In jeder Nacht lacht der Teufel leise: Literatur aus dem deutschen Strafvollzug 2011* (Oberhausen, 2011); *Geräusche der Nacht: Literatur aus dem deutschen Strafvollzug 2008* (Münster, 2008); *Nachrichten aus Anderwelt* (Münster, 2002); *Wenn Wände erzählen könnten* (Münster, 1999); *Gestohlener Himmel: Widerstehen im Knast* (Leipzig, 1995); *Fesselballon* (Münster, 1992); *Risse im Fegefeuer* (Hagen, 1989). Cf. Nicola Keßler, *Schreiben, um zu überleben. Studien zur Gefangenenliteratur* (Mönchengladbach: Forum Verlag Godesberg, 2001).

²⁴⁵ Lucas, “War on Terror: The Escalation to Extremes,” 58.

²⁴⁶ O’Connor & Duncan, “The Sociology of Humanist, Spiritual, and Religious Practice in Prison,” 591.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 591.

²⁴⁸ *BWS*: 54. Regarding the experience of music in prison that Brandner refers to, see also the examination of “the therapeutic potentials of creating and performing music within the context of prisons” in Lucy O’Grady, “The Therapeutic Potentials of Creating and Performing Music with Women in Prison: A Qualitative Case Study,” *Qualitative Inquiries in Music Therapy*, 6 (2011): 122-152.

venting anger.”²⁴⁹ Brandner explains, “it often has a direct, positive, immediately tangible impact on one’s mood; and it doesn’t distinguish between believer and nonbeliever.”²⁵⁰ Literature, art, and music are thus “a low-threshold entry point for people who are skeptical about or not ready for a clear religious commitment.”²⁵¹ Brandner further states: “It is a tremendously important form of receiving healing in prison: the joint singing is not only a deep experience of fellowship but also a touching moment of reconnecting with dimensions of life beyond the visible.”²⁵² Menke claims that “music is able to go a little ‘against the grain’ of the penal system. And that is very good for everyone involved.”²⁵³ Music, he says, is a “human form of expression of an unusually high quality and with numerous possibilities.”²⁵⁴ As Victor Hugo (1802-1885) once stated: “Music expresses that which cannot be said and which it is impossible to be silent about.”²⁵⁵

Rahner’s theological anthropology, as presented in Chapter One, is a valuable starting point to structure these insights concerning the ways in which literature, music, and art can empower the incarcerated.²⁵⁶ As we have seen in Chapter Three, Hubka promotes the individual spirituality and creative talents of prisoners. Prison chaplains today, both men and women, can inspire prisoners to write, to draw, and to be creative. They can make a personal contribution to the chaplaincy behind bars by presenting a poem or drawing in church, or joining other pastors in an artistic project.²⁵⁷ Florine Siganos argues that “cultural and artistic activities” like these are an essential contribution to the reintegration of the incarcerated.²⁵⁸ “Cultural activity” is, by its very nature, also a means of correcting the nature of prison institutions. Faced with a repressive system which inflicts a dehumanisation of relations between individuals, Siganos claims creative activity as an empowering

²⁴⁹ *BWS*: 54.

²⁵⁰ *BWS*: 54.

²⁵¹ *BWS*: 54.

²⁵² *BWS*: 54.

²⁵³ *DESL*: 26 [*my translation*]: Die Musik vermag [...] den Strafvollzug ein wenig “gegen den Strich zu kämmen.” Und das tut allen Beteiligten sehr gut. [*my translation*]. See also the efforts of the secretary of the Bishop of Würzburg, Deacon Manfred Müller, who invites people to meditate with pop and rock songs for Advent. This form of prayer and reflection is particularly helpful in the prison context. Manfred Müller, *An Tagen wie diesen... Mit 24 Songs durch den Advent* (Würzburg: Echter, 2015); *Ein Stück vom Himmel: mit 24 Songs durch den Advent Mit 24 Songs durch den Advent* (Würzburg: Echter, 2017). Cf. Willi Oberheiden, *Türen öffnen sich: Ein Adventsbegleiter für Gefangene* (Würzburg: Echter, 2018).

²⁵⁴ *DESL*: 26 [*my translation*]: Denn die Musik ist eine menschliche Ausdrucksform mit ungewöhnlich hoher Qualität und zahlreichen Chancen.

²⁵⁵ *DESL*: 26 [*my translation*]: Victor Hugo (1802-1885) hat einmal gemeint: “Die Musik drückt aus, was nicht gesagt werden kann – und worüber zu schweigen, unmöglich ist.”

²⁵⁶ *ATAL*: ix. [Foreword by Dr. Michael Kirwan, SJ]

²⁵⁷ *HBG*: 118.

²⁵⁸ Florine Siganos, *L’action Culturelle en Prison: Pour une Redéfinition du Sens de la Peine* (Paris, l’Harmattan, 2008).

effort seems to be the best resource to combat the negative effects of incarceration today.²⁵⁹

Finally, in *Prison Blossoms Anarchist: Voices from the American Past*,²⁶⁰ Alexander Berkman gives an account of prisoners who “circulated messages of hope,” and “shared their thoughts and feelings in a handwritten clandestine magazine called ‘Prison Blossoms.’”²⁶¹ Utopian poems and creative “fables of a new world to come” not only exposed the brutal prisons conditions but ingeniously expressed a continuing faith in the ‘beautiful ideal’ of creativity as ‘communal anarchism.’ Ministers today only have to find the courage to integrate such creativity and passions in their ministry to make the lives of the incarcerated more meaningful behind bars. In this way, a theology of prison ministry can really touch the hearts of the prisoners and the community as a whole. With the creativeness of our *theology of empowerment* we can search for answers together. We can paint, write, sing, and find reasons to live and discover “a coded pattern of hope” in the darkness of prison.²⁶²

5.3.6. Hope

The situation in many prisons today is seriously challenging. As discussed earlier in this Chapter, it is such that inmates are often faced with an omnipresent system: a “dangerous and vulnerable world” of violence, control, and oppression.²⁶³ The living conditions are difficult, human dignity is threatened, and the situation faced by the incarcerated is one which leads to crises and “human breakdown.”²⁶⁴ As Brandner pointed out, hope is needed in this “serious crisis” that prisoners experience with the “high levels of stress and disruption to life.”²⁶⁵ As such, hope is indispensable for a theology of empowerment to address the loneliness, alienation, violence and “dangerous world” of prison. Terry Eagleton speaks of the need for a “hope without optimism,”²⁶⁶ and Walter Benjamin

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ See Alexander Berkman et al., *Prison Blossoms Anarchist: Voices from the American Past* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² This could be in doing something trivial. As a chaplain in Germany, for instance, I generated hope by setting up a Music group in jail, where there was none. Encouraging the skills and the musical talent of the inmates over the last few years, I try to create and contribute to a small expression of Christian hope. The love for music in this instance drives the hope of these prisoners, which in turn may evoke in them a renewed sense of faith.

²⁶³ Pierce, *Prison Ministry: Hope behind the Wall*, 79.

²⁶⁴ Pierce, Chapter 4, “Human Breakdown Created by Prison’s Emotional Ethos,” in: *Prison Ministry: Hope behind the Wall*, 79-85.

²⁶⁵ *BWS*: ix, 69.

²⁶⁶ Terry Eagleton, *Hope without Optimism* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2015); *Hoffnungsvoll, aber nicht optimistisch* (Berlin: Ullstein Verlag, 2016), esp. 1.

describes the experience as a “nonprogressivist form of hope.”²⁶⁷ There is no real significant progress in prison other than time passing away, leading to meaninglessness and hopelessness on the part of prisoners. Because hopelessness in prison can be so pervasive, it falls to prison ministers to hold hope, convey it to prisoners, and nurture it wherever it grows. As Cornelius J. Casey says, “Only *for the sake of the hopeless ones* have we been given hope.”²⁶⁸ To empower others, we must try to “live on hope” and use our “time in prison for good,”²⁶⁹ or, as Frankl puts it, whoever is “still alive” has “reason for hope.”²⁷⁰

Rahner speaks of Christian hope,²⁷¹ of “pursuing our pilgrimage in hope,”²⁷² in relation to prison ministry and the case he makes for it is examined by Casey in his article “How Deep Are the Well-springs of Hope?”²⁷³ Hope arises from the ‘Encounter’ with the prisoner, as we discussed earlier about encounters with the incarcerated (e.g., Hubka, dignity). As with dignity, hope does arise from one-to-one encounters with prisoners where prisoners get to tell their story and are heard and witnessed. A connection or relationship is established which, as Hubka disclosed, is not one-way but mutual. As Rahner expressed it, such encounters reveal “the hidden truth” of the minister’s own situation by which one should “never cease to hope” (*immer hoffend*).²⁷⁴ Prisoner and minister alike must with “confidence in God hope in God’s merciful grace” for themselves: together they have “the same duty of hope (since we must love our neighbour as our self) on behalf of each of our neighbours.”²⁷⁵ The prisoner’s story is a mirror revealing the minister’s own faults, failures, etc. Following Hubka, the minister may in an appropriate situation share some of this with the individual prisoner. This reveals the dimension of shared social sin.²⁷⁶ The prisoner is no longer alone in his/her

²⁶⁷ German Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) was a cultural critic and essayist. His works combined elements of western Marxism and Jewish mysticism. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, tr. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992).

²⁶⁸ Cornelius J. Casey, “How Deep Are the Well-springs of Hope?”, in: *Doctrine & Life: Religious Life Review*, Vol. 70, no. 5 (May-June 2020): 2-15, esp. 2 [*italics* my emphasis]. Henceforth, the abbreviation used will be: “HDWH.” Casey also refers to Charles Péguy’s saying: “The faith that I love the best, says God, is hope.” Charles Péguy, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope* (London: Continuum, 1996).

²⁶⁹ O’Connor & Duncan, “The Sociology of Humanist, Spiritual, and Religious Practice in Prison,” 591.

²⁷⁰ *MSM*: 103. *ZB*: 104. *TJL*: (124). This part of the English text is not in the German original.

²⁷¹ For a lived expression of Christian hope see the life and works of Alfred Delp: *Gesammelte Schriften: Aus dem Gefängnis*, Vol. 4. (Frankfurt am Main: Josef Knecht, 1984); *Mit gefesselten Händen: Aufzeichnungen aus dem Gefängnis* (Lehmann. Frankfurt am Main: Josef Knecht, 2007); *Im Angesicht des Todes* (Ignatianische Impulse) (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2007); *Worte der Hoffnung* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2009).

²⁷² *MG*, 3: 92. *SW*, 16: 222. *SG*, 459: [...] in der Hoffnung pilgern [...]

²⁷³ *HDWH*: 2-15.

²⁷⁴ *MG*, 3: 88. *SG*, 456.

²⁷⁵ *MG*, 3: 83. *SW*, 16: 218. *SG*, 453.

²⁷⁶ *HDWH*: 2-15. [The 2017 Lectures on “Hope” by Professor Cornelius P. Casey, the Loyola Institute, TCD.]

brokenness. Evil is not beyond comprehension,²⁷⁷ it has a back story. When we find something of oneself in another, it can strengthen us.

Casey agrees with Rahner about the hope that emerges from encounters with prisoners. However, he also critiques Rahner's understanding of hope on the basis that, while it is appropriate for meeting Christian prisoners, it is challenged when the minister needs to meet with people from other faith and non-faith backgrounds which is frequently the case today. Rahner argues for Christian hope but doesn't see the struggle for a more universal hope necessary in contemporary prison world. Rahner's views, for Casey, may be typical of ruling-class ideology, highlighting the danger for prison ministers of being attached to any ideology, including Christian ones. What is needed in contemporary prison settings are bridges of hope.

Casey goes on to make a case for what he calls "authentic hope."²⁷⁸ To be authentic, hope must be distinguished from optimism.²⁷⁹ As a worldview, optimism "refuses to take the desolation of the world seriously enough."²⁸⁰ "Too easy optimism is an obstacle to true hope"²⁸¹ because it offers the advice: "Always look on the bright side of life." Casey argues that this advice should come with a warning: "*If you do look on the bright side, always, you will fail to see where monsters lurk until it is too late and disaster strikes.* The truth is that humankind is in danger, not just from outside forces, but from itself."²⁸² Optimism fails to take desolation seriously and thus fails to take seriously the pain and suffering of those held in prison. As Sölle would say, they are not prepared to enter into "God's pain." Optimists think all will be well when it won't. They fail to see "where monsters lurk" and fail to acknowledge the "record of violence, domination, exploitation..."²⁸³ Hope, not optimism, is what is needed in prison. Optimism is an enemy to change and an obstacle to true hope. Prison ministers need to see the facts of suffering and acknowledge it in order to serve prison community/those whose care is entrusted to their charge.

²⁷⁷ Austrian philosopher Peter Strasser argues, for instance, against the mystification of the criminal as "bad," or as "sick" – just: different – this today again is very topical. Peter Strasser, *Verbrechermenschen: Zur kriminalwissen-schaftlichen Erzeugung des Bösen* (Frankfurt am Main/New York, NY: Campus, 2005), esp. Chapter IV, "Resonanzen auf das Böse," 163-199.

²⁷⁸ HDWH: 3.

²⁷⁹ HDWH: 4.

²⁸⁰ HDWH: 4.

²⁸¹ HDWH: 6.

²⁸² HDWH: 4 [*italics my emphasis*].

²⁸³ HDWH: 4.

For Casey, hope is performative. It is “something we do.”²⁸⁴ A “social practice,” not just “a mental attitude.”²⁸⁵ It must be enacted if it is to mean anything. Without this performative dimension, hope will be “thin, vague, unformed” (and will not help those who are hopeless).²⁸⁶ Casey outlines three social practices: (i) “prayer” (includes facing the reality of horror and monsters); (ii) living “in the company of the saints” (could be extended to include Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn and others like Mandela²⁸⁷ – the witness of their lives is worth studying as “case studies in hope”); (iii) developing “characteristics” of hope, courage, etc.²⁸⁸ Casey further argues that hope that is authentic needs to be based on reasons: “it needs to be able to pick out features of a situation that render it credible.”²⁸⁹ He states: “Hope scrutinises reasons for persisting in hope,... Reasons for hope are constitutive of hope, part of its nourishment, part of its engagement... It is not a hunch. ‘Always be ready to give reasons for the hope that is in you’ (1 Pet 3:15).”²⁹⁰ Reasons need to be religiously and politically sound, notwithstanding the tension here with Chesterton in *Heretics* who states that hope, like all Christian virtues, is “unreasonable” and “indispensable” at the same time. For him, “hope means hoping” precisely when everything is “hopeless.”²⁹¹

The paradox of hope being hope only when things are hopeless and yet needing to be able to give reasons for the hope one has, like all Christian paradoxes, can only be reconciled in light of the cross and the power greater than death that it reveals – love. Ultimately, for Casey, hope is based on “fidelity”: the relationship between Jesus and the Father as it unfolds on the cross.²⁹² Calvary is the moment of truth where humanity “rejects its own meaning” (as prisoners too often reject their own meaning as children of God and worthy of love).²⁹³ Yet at the heart of this catastrophic event is Jesus’ fidelity to the Father which holds firm before, during and after the unfolding catastrophe. By enduring what the Father asked of him, despite his physical, mental and spiritual suffering, Jesus

²⁸⁴ HDWH: 3.

²⁸⁵ HDWH: 3.

²⁸⁶ HDWH: 3.

²⁸⁷ Cf. Nelson Mandela, *The Prison Letters of Nelson Mandela*, ed. Sahn Venter (New York, NY: Norton & Company, 2018).

²⁸⁸ HDWH: 14.

²⁸⁹ HDWH: 5.

²⁹⁰ HDWH: 5.

²⁹¹ Gilbert K. Chesterton, *Heretics* (New York, NY/ Norwood, MA: John Lane Company/Plimpton Press, 1919 [1905]) [*italics* my emphasis]. Retrieved from <http://www.gutenberg.org> [The Project Gutenberg EBook].

²⁹² HDWH: 9-10.

²⁹³ HDWH: 9-10. For the rejection of “hope” and “meaning” see also Eliot’s poem “Ash-Wednesday, 1930,” which deals with the human struggle that ensues when a person who has lacked “faith” and rejected “hope” in the past strives to move towards God. T.S. Eliot, “Ash-Wednesday, 1930” in: *The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2004), 87-99.

enacted Christian hope. At a time when things were indeed hopeless and there was no obvious reason to hope, Jesus trusted in the Father and surrendered his life and his fate to Him. This released the Spirit of love which ultimately led to the Resurrection which could not have been anticipated. This makes clear that hope is very much linked to faith and love. As Casey points out, God's love precedes hope and the two circle together.²⁹⁴

Because of the reality of hopelessness among prisoners, the role of the prison minister is vital to maintaining hope in situations where there is no obvious reason for it. One might say ministers are locked in a spiritual combat for hope. It can be difficult to find hope when dealing with people who have committed crimes. Dabrowski showed how prisoners are difficult people to deal with, highly manipulative, impulsive, self-centred, with absolutely “hard shells” (*harte Schale*) built around themselves. It is also difficult to face the (hidden) truth about oneself and what one might be capable of as well as facing reality of prison and reasons for prisoners' distress and vulnerability. As Casey points out, there is a need for ministers to leave hypocrisy behind and also grandiosity as highlighted by Rassow. There is also a need not to be elitist or exclusive (as Rahner could be perceived to be) or to ignore the pain and suffering of the marginalized (“God's pain”).

Following Casey, empowerment theology requires ministers to enact hope as Jesus did on the cross. This is not based on delusions of grandeur, but on ‘small local tasks’ as McCabe puts it:

We are not optimists; we do not present a lovely vision of the world which everyone is expected to fall in love with. We simply have, wherever we are, some small local task to do, on the side of the justice, for the poor.²⁹⁵

This “small version of messianic power on behalf of the oppressed”²⁹⁶ sets prisoners free. Humility is key to the prison minister's task to “partake in God” and to “perform hope” behind bars.²⁹⁷ Courage and resilience, as exemplified by Hillesum, bring hope. One must be able “to sing.” A prison, she believes: “needs a poet, one who experiences life there, even there, as a bard and is able to sing about it.”²⁹⁸ This means showing courage, taking heart, and singing despite the darkness or the rain.

²⁹⁴ *HDWH*: 2-15. [Casey, The 2017 Lectures on “Hope.”]

²⁹⁵ *HDWH*: 14, n.15. Herbert McCabe, *God, Christ and Us* (London and New York, NY: Continuum, 2003), 14.

²⁹⁶ *HDWH*: 2-15. [Casey, The 2017 Lectures on “Hope.”]

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁸ E.T., 542. *Het Werk*, 575: Er is geen dichter in mij, er is wel een stukje van God in mij, dat tot dichter zou kunnen

Echoing the “Hope” of Emily Dickinson – singing without stopping:

“Hope” is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the soul –
And sings the tune without the words –
And never stops – at all –²⁹⁹

Prison ministers may be artists of hope in that they are called to sing without stopping. Finally, Casey mentions that hope needs to be ever-watchful, attentive not only to the pain but also to the deliverance that is promised. We “should strive to be such” that we “lie in wait and be alert,” alert to “God’s pain” and to “her comfort” but also to “Your deliverance” in the “Lion’s Den” (Daniel 6).³⁰⁰ Hope calls for a particular kind of waiting. As Psalm 130 says,

I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.
My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning:
I say, more than they that watch for the morning.
Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy,
and with him is plenteous redemption.
And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

Empowerment theology thus calls for, and springs from, performing or enacting hope. Prison ministers are entrusted with the precious and delicate task of holding hope for those who are hopeless. Where prisoners are able to find hope, it can give them a reason to go on. It can help them to find meaning and engage in acts of creativity as we saw from Frankl. Meaning and hope are intertwined so that where one is found, the other is not far away. Hope can also help prisoners overcome the self-rejection and lack of self-worth which, as we saw, is the most profound and enduring difficulty they are likely to face today.

aangroeien. In zo een kamp moet toch een dichter zijn, die het leven daar, ook daar, beleeft als dichter en die er van zal kunnen zingen.

²⁹⁹ Emily Dickinson, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Including Variant Readings Critically Compared with All Known Manuscripts*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 182.

³⁰⁰ *HDWH*: 14.

5.3.7. *Community*

As we saw earlier in this chapter, human beings have a deep, biological need for social connection.³⁰¹ When deprived of the security of their network of social connections (family, friends, colleagues, neighbours), they experience isolation, pain and a pervasive sense of threat. For prisoners, this is an ongoing loss, often compounded with the shame associated with criminal behaviour which impacts on their mental health, their emotional wellbeing, and their sense of self. In order to cope with this loss and survive in the “dangerous and vulnerable world” of prison,³⁰² prisoners may be tempted either to isolate themselves further within prison or to fall into the company of others with tendencies towards intimidating and aggressive behaviours and a generally negative outlook. Neither alternative helps to improve their situation.

One of the most important ways in which prisoners can be empowered is through building meaningful and constructive relationships in prison. Thus, we saw that the prisoner’s relationship with a prison minister can be of great value in helping to restore their sense of dignity and self-worth. As we saw in Chapter Four, the company and fellowship of other prisoners is also of great value. Solzhenitsyn and Frankl both testified to the importance of encounters with fellow inmates and Solzhenitsyn, in particular, described how much it meant to him to realise that he was not alone on the road he was travelling. Likewise, an encounter with an older and much-respected fellow prisoner, a man named Bimbi, was a crucial turning point for Malcolm X, inspiring him to take up the educational studies which subsequently led to his religious conversion and the peace and freedom that gave him.³⁰³ Ultimately, this is what enabled him to make an immense contribution to “culture, community, and country.”³⁰⁴ In a theology of empowerment, a key role of the prison minister is the fostering of social connections behind bars to build up a sense of community and fellowship among prisoners.

Chaplaincy work involves a number of activities through which chaplains attempt to create an experience of community. This takes place primarily through the organization of events and group work in prison to which German chaplains devote considerable energy. Group work tends to be

³⁰¹ Matthew D. Lieberman, *Social: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect* (New York, NY: Broadway Books, 2013), esp. 4-5, 39-70 [Chapter 3].

³⁰² Pierce, *Prison Ministry: Hope behind the Wall*, 79.

³⁰³ O’Connor & Duncan, “The Sociology of Humanist, Spiritual, and Religious Practice in Prison,” 591. Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 157.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

focused on faith and spirituality. It includes faith development courses, classes to prepare individuals for baptism and confirmation, Bible discussion groups, prayer or meditation groups along with days of reflection,³⁰⁵ spiritual exercises in daily life, and seasonal events to prepare for Easter and Christmas. Such groups provide prisoners with weekly opportunities to come together in religious groups to share their faith.³⁰⁶

In addition, there are music and choir groups as well as groups where art and poetry are used to help inmates explore and strengthen their faith or simply express themselves.³⁰⁷ Other activities include larger events such as concerts, film, and theatrical performances. Meetings are also organised with small Christian communities visiting the prison and ecumenical discussion groups taking place.³⁰⁸ Emphasis is placed on making connections with the outside world: through the promotion of volunteer work,³⁰⁹ organising meetings with small Christian communities visiting from outside, facilitating visiting services and self-help groups, or anything else that enables a sense of togetherness and encouragement. Through personal encounters between prisoners and people from the wider political and religious community, positive bridges between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ are being built.³¹⁰

Chaplains also seek to nurture and build up relationships between prisoners and family members outside prison.³¹¹ They support the organisation of family initiatives such as parent-child projects, family days, and so on and work with prison authorities to ensure they run smoothly. In the JVA Hünfeld, we organised a series of “Daddies in Jail” (*Väter in Haft*) meetings, where inmates could share their feelings of alienation, grief and embarrassment at not being with their children. Attention is also paid to the needs of family members and relatives who are often in difficult situations.³¹²

Chaplaincy work seeks to create a broader sense of community throughout the prison by working in cooperation with prison authorities and staff, including specialist services such as medical doctors

³⁰⁵ See Ray Leonardini, *Finding God Within: Contemplative Prayer for Prisoners* (Brooklyn, NY: Lantern Books, 2016).

³⁰⁶ *KGH*: 11.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid*.

³⁰⁸ *KGH*: 14-15.

³⁰⁹ For “volunteers” in prison see Laura S. Abrams et al. (eds.), *The Voluntary Sector in Prisons: Encouraging Personal and Institutional Change*, Palgrave Studies in Prisons and Penology (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016).

³¹⁰ *SGKS*: 19-20. *KGH*: 9.

³¹¹ *KGH*: 12-13.

³¹² *Ibid*.

and psychologists, social workers and teachers to support and accompany the prisoners.³¹³ The aim is to work collaboratively with others to seek and find solutions across the prison service. Pastoral care is also provided to prison staff, attending to their needs and helping them to cope with the stresses and challenges of prison life.³¹⁴ In all cases, chaplains attempt to bring people together in peace despite the difficulties of working in a security environment.

Through it all, chaplains operate out of a sense of solidarity and a shared struggle for meaning and freedom with all others in the prison community, but especially the prisoners. We remain aware that we are dealing with real people, not some unknown and terrifying force of unpredictable Evil. People in prison are our brothers and sisters and the call of prison ministry is to *be with* them and accompany them on their path. Following the example of Jesus who was sent to proclaim freedom to prisoners (Luke 4: 18-19), care for people in prison, whether innocent or guilty, has been one of the Church's most distinguished duties from its beginning. In the words of the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, "Remember the prisoners as if chained with them" (Heb 13:3). Ultimately, ministers experience the meaning and strength of community for themselves through their solidarity, truly *being with* those who are oppressed behind bars.³¹⁵

Experiencing a sense of community especially through group activities is empowering for prisoners in many ways. Firstly, it enhances their sense of dignity and self-worth³¹⁶ and draws them into a relationship of mutual respect and upbuilding (Rom 14:19). Through a communal celebration of the liturgy, reading Scripture and singing together, prisoners can feel supported and valued and treated as human beings. In stark contrast to other prison experiences where human dignity is often threatened, they are called not by number or prison ID, but by their name: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name" (Is 43:1). As Kolimon has noted, through liturgy and other groupwork, people in prison are invited to relationship, community, and respect regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion or social status.³¹⁷ When worship is celebrated, prisoners are invited to receive the sacraments and to join with others in prayer. All are accepted and welcome in the prison Church. This is a powerful message for those whose "most pressing problem," as Pierce puts it, is

³¹³ KGH: 15.

³¹⁴ KGH: 3-4.

³¹⁵ KGH: 18.

³¹⁶ SGKS: 18. KGH: 8.

³¹⁷ Kolimon, "Empowerment: A New Generative Theme of Christian Mission in a Globalized World," 38.

“self-alienation” and “capitulation to self-hate.”³¹⁸

The empowerment offered by building community in prison also has a social and cultural dimension as explored in Chapter Three. An “energetic pastoral care”³¹⁹ that facilitates lively interaction between individuals and groups leads to an increase in prisoners’ confidence and independence as well as strengthening their self-esteem, self-reflection, and personal skills.³²⁰ The possibilities for human growth and development offered by such processes help prisoners to realise their inner potential which can lead to other meaningful and life-changing choices such as accessing education or taking up some form of service. Community activities help prisoners overcome the meaninglessness and monotony of prison life. Thus, Dabrowski noted that prisoners come to church services and other group activities for some variety and a sense of community.³²¹ Coming together in groups brings life and fellowship which can transform the prison experience.

Another area of empowerment for prisoners is the engagement with ethics and politics that results from having access to, and active participation in, creativity with music, literature, poetry and art.³²² The importance of creativity has been explored separately but it is worth noting here that individual and communal involvement in creative activities has the potential to initiate an ethical struggle with changing personal attitudes, values, and norms. It can also lead to a fresh critical examination of injustices felt and discovery of a capacity to express them emotionally. In this way, a new political awareness can take shape which can in turn lead to further activism and advocacy on behalf of prisoners. Prisoners are thus empowered to find their voice and use it.

Drawing from the different experiences of chaplains in the field as well as lessons learnt from Frankl, Hillesum and Solzhenitsyn, we can now say that visiting prisoners not only strengthens them in their suffering but also brings them together in a meaningful context with imagination, humour, energy and respect. Community-building activities inspire solidarity and fellowship along with a joy and enthusiasm that is heartening and empowering. This is the type of pastoral care that my German

³¹⁸ Pierce, *Prison Ministry: Hope behind the Wall*, 81.

³¹⁹ The concept “energetic pastoral care” (*energetische Seelsorge*) goes back to the theology of Manfred Josuttis (1936-2018). See Josuttis, *Segenskräfte: Potentiale einer energetischen Seelsorge* (Gütersloh: Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlagshaus).

³²⁰ Kolimon, “Empowerment: A New Generative Theme of Christian Mission in a Globalized World,” 38. Cf. Castor Michael Goliama, “The Gospel of Prosperity in African Pentecostalism: A Theological and Pastoral Challenge to the Catholic Church – With Reference to the Archdiocese of Songea, Tanzania,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Vienna, 2013, 420pp, esp. 12-13.

³²¹ VVV: 152.

³²² Kolimon, “Empowerment: A New Generative Theme of Christian Mission in a Globalized World,” 38.

Protestant colleague, Dr. Andreas Leipold and I have introduced in the prisons where we work – gathering “two or three” people in “my name,” (Matt 18:20) and experiencing the power and uplifting energy of the One who says: “I am among them.” The community dimension of prison ministry is not addressed at all by Rahner in “The Prison Pastorate” but, for those with experience of providing pastoral care in a prison setting, it is essential. Thus, while accepting and greatly valuing the profound insights in Rahner’s understanding of Matthew 25, our theology of empowerment moves beyond Rahner in the spirit of Matthew 18:20 “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I among them.”

Reflecting upon the text of Matthew 18:20 takes us beyond the idea of community into the profound Christian concept of *koinonia*. *Koinonia* is a term used by early Christian leaders such as St. Paul to refer to the dynamic relationship of intimacy and unity of Christian disciples with each other and with Christ. *Koinonia* is more than fellowship or togetherness among Christian believers. It is a new relationship based on Christ. One could say this new relationship is neither horizontal (among humans) nor vertical (between humans and God) but rather cross-shaped being both horizontal *and* vertical. To use the language of St. Paul, Christians are members of a body of which Christ is the head (1 Cor 12:12-27; Col 1:18). In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus puts it this way to Peter: “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me” (John 13:8). *Koinonia* is a relationship grounded upon having a share in Christ, being a member of his body. It signifies the living Presence of Christ among us, strengthening and empowering his community of believers.³²³

The Presence of Christ is what makes *koinonia* different from secular notions of community and is the ultimate means of empowerment for prisoners, as it is for all of humanity. As Sölle and Bonhoeffer, along with Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn discovered: we are not alone in our suffering. God is with us (Matt 28:20). Celebrating liturgy (*leiturgia*) is a reminder to prisoners of the core biblical message: God is with us and unconditionally loves us. This is the Good News at the heart of our testimony (*martyria*),³²⁴ and at the centre of our empowering theology of prison

³²³ SGKS: 19-20. KGH: 9.

³²⁴ SGKS: 19. KGH: 9. *Koinonia* and *martyria* means too that “You will always have the poor among you” (Jn 12: 8). Jesus was convinced that he was sent to proclaim freedom to prisoners (Lk 4: 18-19), and that it is very important to turn to these people. *Martyria* in prison chaplaincy finds also resonance in Jesus’s answer, “Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going” (Jn 8: 14). Jesus testified and preached to those on periphery of society, building up the outsiders, the poor, the sick, and the prisoners. German prison chaplain Hermann Josef Immekus argues that the Church must be a community-building community *with* the poor: Then the needy of all countries cry out. Hermann Josef Immekus, *Testament meines Glaubens: Ich fand und suchte* (Leipzig:

ministry.³²⁵ As Brandner stated in Chapter Three, Christian love, which depends entirely upon having a share in Christ, can break through the “walls of separation” that keep prisoners isolated and powerless – “the visible walls of stone, the invisible walls of social exclusion and the emotional walls of shame and self-imposed isolation.”³²⁶ It is only this love, anchored in the presence of Christ *with* both ministers and prisoners, that can transform the self-alienation and self-hate experienced by so many prisoners (and perhaps some ministers too). “Presence,” according to Pierce, “is paramount to a prison ministry.”³²⁷ However, the minister’s presence will only be truly healing and empowering for those in need when the minister remains connected to God’s revitalizing *Presence* through *koinonia* with Christ and with others. *Koinonia*, or being one with God and with our neighbour, is thus not simply one among other elements of our theology of prison ministry – it is the heart and soul of a theology of empowerment.

Conclusion

This final chapter moves beyond Rahner towards a “theology of empowerment” (*Theologie der Stärkung*) that emphasises the spiritual in music, poetry, literature, and art in prisons. It demonstrates, in spite of its limitations, the value and contemporary significance of Rahner’s theory. To move, towards this more contemporary theology of prison ministry, the chapter looks at the situation faced by prisoners today in the German prison system and the suffering likely to be experienced by them. The study then turns to the need of a theology of empowerment in the context of Rahner’s reflections on “The Prison Pastorate.” An outline of the core elements of a theology of empowerment (*Theologie der Stärkung*) is offered which supports a more contemporary and pastoral approach to prison ministry and is more able to meet the needs of prisoners today. Accordingly, the main elements of empowerment theology are divided into the following parts: dignity, meaning, transformation, liberation, creativity, hope, and community.

The arguments presented throughout the chapter aim to fulfil the third objective of this thesis which is to develop an *empowering theology* with more ecumenical, interreligious and less sacramental viewpoints. The thesis adopts a meaning-centred approach by acknowledging the role of prisoners as contributors in their own right to the process of rehabilitation. Using the pastoral principles – found

St. Benno Verlag, 2007). See also Karl Barth, *Deliverance to the Captives?* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1961).

³²⁵ *SGKS*: 20. *KGH*: 9.

³²⁶ *BWS*: 188.

³²⁷ Pierce, *Prison Ministry: Hope behind the Wall*, 15.

in our examination of Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn, of love, faith, and humour as well as the spiritual dimension of art in all its forms, we seek to outline a theology that prioritises the cultivation of healing and hope in a way that respects and defends the dignity of each prisoner.

We do this by enhancing Rahner's views in "The Prison Pastorate" with a lively pastoral theology that sets out to empower and liberate the incarcerated in the 21st Century. In being creative together with the prisoners and joined together in "performing hope," chaplains may discover the literary and artistic talents of the inmates and arouse their personal charisms. Through a *theology of empowerment* pastors can help prisoners in their suffering to become more aware of their own human value and dignity (*Menschenwürde*). This can be done by putting into practice Rahner's theology in the light of Hillesum's dialogue with "You, God." That is to say, "we find" You – Christ – "in the prisoners"; "we have got to" find You there; You are really "there to be found, and to be found in such a way that our encounter" with You will reveal the freedom and the intrinsic meaning of our lives. In this way, "our pain" and "helplessness" is being drawn into God's "own pain" (Sölle) and "powerlessness" (Bonhoeffer), and our friendship with You is restored.

Lastly, our *Theology of empowerment* can transform prisoners and bring human dignity back to the consciousness of society. Prison ministry is as such committed to "find" and "help" You, which also confers a spiritual responsibility to the human community of peace and justice in the world. Empowering theology seeks to give detainees a voice and an oriented meaningfulness, and to bring them into contact with the wider community outside the walls. With the help of these pillars: music, poetry, literature and art, education and culture – a presence of human dignity and authentic hope can be created in prisons. Our study has also attempted to show the urgent need for lay people in ministry and for a respectful *togetherness* with the incarcerated to meet the challenges of our time. Despite a generation gap, Rahner has most certainly succeeded in "The Prison Pastorate" in establishing a fruitful common ground for a theological *empowerment* whence future pastoral care and the necessary collaborations in prisons can draw their strength.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This work set out to explore the theology of prison ministry based on a study of Karl Rahner's lecture-meditation on "The Prison Pastorate." Rahner's treatise is of particular interest because it demonstrates the challenge and the value of ministry in the penal system. The theoretical framework based on his theological anthropology is significant to the research topic in the sense that it lays the theoretical foundation for further reflections on encounters with God and humankind within confinement. Although his theology of prison ministry is profound, the thesis argues that it is unfortunately dated in the practice of helping the incarcerated to live a better, more fulfilling, and more meaningful life.

The work consists of five chapters. The study begins with an examination and presentation of the key anthropological sources of Karl Rahner related to prison ministry. Chapter One gives an overview of Rahner's theological anthropology, of his influence on *Gaudium et Spes* and of his notion of the anonymous Christian. This provides the theoretical framework that serves the analysis of Rahner's conceptual views on prison chaplaincy in Chapter Two and supports the development of a theology of prison ministry in terms of *empowerment* in Chapter Five.

With this theoretical groundwork done in the first chapter, we turn in Chapter Two to a careful analysis and description of Rahner's lecture-meditation on "The Prison Pastorate." This essay, his one writing on the topic, is relatively short and written for a particular audience; this means that in articulating our critique this needs to be borne in mind. However, his treatise has a clear and explicitly-stated reason for being in the thesis: it is of high theological standard and quality, and it is one of the best documents on the topic in Catholic theology today. Moreover, it has not been critically analysed by scholars before. In the thesis, we highlight both the possibilities and limitations of Rahner's paper. The chapter provides a way of anchoring this exposition in the argumentation that comes in the subsequent chapters.

The third chapter critiques Rahner's treatise on "The Prison Pastorate" presented in Chapter Two. The study shows the possible limitations of his theological position, and the chapter focuses on the pastoral perspective of chaplains in the field. The dialogue partners chosen are the Swiss prison chaplain and Professor Tobias Brandner; the German emeritus chaplain of the JVA Tegel in Berlin, Rainer Dabrowski; and the Austrian prison Chaplain Dr. Christine Hubka who has ministered to

prisoners in der Justizanstalt Wien-Josefstadt. The study develops and defines what the identified limitations are and clarifies what prison ministry today seeks to do, give and share among the incarcerated.

Chapter Four examines the perspective of the prisoners and their human needs during confinement. It focuses on the inmate's search for meaning in the acclaimed works of (i) the Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist Viktor E. Frankl; (ii) the Dutch Jewish writer and Holocaust victim Etty Hillesum; and (iii) the Russian writer and thinker Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, who suffered as a prisoner in 'the Gulag-system' of the former Soviet Union. This chapter reflects on "The Will to Meaning," on "Three Mental Stages" and "Prison Perspectives," and seeks another way of looking at prison chaplaincy, presenting the core principles that assist prison pastors to help and support prisoners to find meaning in pain and suffering at institutions of incarceration today.

Using the sources identified so far, Chapter Five goes beyond Rahner and brings the experiences and insights of people in prison together: the pastoral perspective of chaplains in the field and the perspective of the incarcerated through the voices of former prisoners Frankl, Hillesum and Solzhenitsyn. The pastoral principles found in our examination of their works – love, faith and humour as well as the spiritual dimension of art in all its forms – helps this final chapter outline a theology that prioritises the cultivation of healing and hope in a way that respects and defends the dignity of each prisoner.

A theology of prison ministry which emphasises pastoral care and is firmly grounded in respect for the dignity of each individual prisoner and the spiritual value of engaging in art, music, poetry, and literature can become a sign of hope for people behind bars. This ministry is meaning-centred, creative, and focuses on the struggle to help *You* – Christ – behind bars. It addresses contemplative action to transform and liberate, and is attentive to the poor. Prisoners need to be equipped, motivated, and prepared for their freedom. In befriending and strengthening (*Stärkung*) them, we have to meet and get to know them: the persons who are incarcerated today are going to get out tomorrow.

The thesis has thus attempted to show the need for a meaningful and respectful *togetherness* with the incarcerated. This is precisely why we have to build further on Rahner's views in "The Prison Pastorate" in order to support all who encounter the inmates. Chaplains are the ones especially who

have answered the biblical call to be the human *face-to-face* relation with those behind walls but they cannot do their ministry on their own. They need human support, community, as well as creative theological tools to empower the prisoners. They seek to improve their listening and to help to change lives, so that when people get out they are transformed and have the strength not to repeat their mistakes again. In this concrete way, the study aims to make a step towards a theology of prison ministry as an energetic and communal based, strengthening (*Stärkung*) and empowering pastorate: a theology that is based on respect for the dignity of the person as *imago Dei*, and the communication of authentic hope for the oppressed today.

The conclusion of this research is that Rahner's theological work is of significant value on its own terms for two reasons. First, Rahner's thought makes a unique and valuable contribution to the theology of prison ministry, to the discourse about God in prison, and to the religious practice of visiting the incarcerated. Rahner's thought about finding "Christ" and "ourselves in prisoners" is of enduring significance: a contribution towards understanding something of the divine-human interaction and suffering in prisons. Second, his methodology in "The Prison Pastorate" based on Matthew 25 has encouraged us to make a contribution that goes beyond Rahner. This seems to be vital for further dialogue and reflection on a complicated, desolated, and highly sensitive reality.

Finally, the purpose of this thesis is that it cannot be reasonably or ethically justified to avoid responding theologically to the way prisoners are treated today as progressively longer prison sentences become widespread. Countless inmates feel increasingly separated, alienated, forgotten and unseen. A bravely prophetic and reflective theological stance on behalf of men and women, specifically the poor of the world, against the powers of the age is needed to face the challenges of existential frustration and meaninglessness in the twenty-first century. The process of rehabilitation and restoration must arguably include a quest towards a "theology of empowerment" (*Theologie der Stärkung*) in defence of the dignity of the human person. So the only way our theology can pastorally respond to this negativity that prisoners experience, following Frankl, Hillesum, and Solzhenitsyn, is by creating something that was not there before. For Frankl, this must be a "positive output in response to a negative input." To give such a response by conveying authenticity and hope in prisons, this thesis concludes with a *threefold method* as to how our pastoral ministry can move beyond Rahner's "The Prison Pastorate" and find meaning in prisons today:

GENERAL CONCLUSION

- (1) By being compassionate, imaginative and creative *with* the incarcerated. That is, through pastoral empathy and a didactic approach that takes into account *their* ‘playground’ and perspectives, *their* behaviour, *their* pain and suffering, *their* needs.
- (2) By experiencing *something* together in prison, for example, with lay people, choirs and volunteers, and by organising opportunities and events *for* the prisoners, using music and poetry, literature, theatre, and art. Through imaginative and creative meetings, it is possible to experience the *togetherness* in the “Jailhouse rock” of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful in the human community behind bars and to encounter *You* precisely in these situations of powerlessness where *You* are most needed and least expected.
- (3) By changing our spiritual and pastoral attitudes (perhaps less religious and more secular) to the unavoidable suffering and the unchangeable situations within the prison context. We do this by using the “Weapons of the Soul” (*Waffen der Seele*): that is, with humour and love, with performing hope, and with faith in the power of the Powerless One.

The *threefold method* of our *theology of empowerment* offers a framework of understanding and entails facing pastoral ministry in prison with spiritual confidence and social skill, with self-esteem and passion. Participating in empowering activities is for the incarcerated also an unrestricted way of dealing with the possibility of becoming a different person from the one who was sentenced to jail. We are called to the shared human “search for meaning” (Frankl) and are directed in this process toward “the powerlessness of God” (Bonhoeffer): “only the suffering God can help.” The liberative power of “God’s pain and our pain” (Sölle) is joined to the message of Christ: heal the brokenhearted and proclaim liberty to prisoners, to set at liberty those who are oppressed (Lk 4:18).

Empowerment in prisons offers a dynamic ‘sacred space’ where people can feel safe and respected. It teaches basic human and spiritual techniques to find access to divine-human support: it is the creative urgency to find *You* – Christ – in all our pastoral interactions with people (Rahner). It is a way of understanding *existential* prison reality that “You cannot help us, but we must help You and defend Your dwelling place inside us to the last” (Hillesum). We must comfort *You* and invite the prison community to a creative form of fellowship through love, humour, poetry, music, literature, and art. Empowerment is the energy that transforms and liberates. It is the resourcefulness of

“performing hope” (Casey) with more genuine, spiritual reasons which has it “in its power to help humankind” (Solzhenitsyn).

The creative vitality and spiritual activity of empowerment looks for new directions and has profound and meaningful implications for the *life of faith* behind prison walls and razor wire fences. The aim, in the long term, is that our *Theologie der Stärkung* will be reflected in the life of the Church worldwide. It will be meaning-centred with a greater understanding of and deep respect for the divine-human relational aspect of the spiritual in music, poetry, and art. To sum up, between separation and estrangement, rich and poor, religious and secular, convicts and the outside world, we will struggle to find and help *You – God*. *Empowering theology* begins where Scripture ends: “Be mindful of prisoners as if sharing their imprisonment, and of the ill-treated as of yourselves, for you also are in the body” (Heb 13:3). Echoing the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s poem “By Powers of Good” (*Von guten Mächten*) that was sent out from jail early 1945:

BY POWERS OF GOOD

By faithful, quiet powers of good surrounded
so wondrously consoled and sheltered here—
I wish to live these days with you in spirit
and with you enter into a new year.

The old year still would try our hearts to torment,
of evil times we still do bear the weight;
O Lord, do grant our souls, now terror-stricken,
salvation for which you did us create.

And should you offer us the cup of suffering,
though heavy, brimming full and bitter brand,
we’ll thankfully accept it, never flinching,
from your good heart and your beloved hand.

But should you wish now once again to give us
the joys of this world and its glorious sun,
then we’ll recall anew what past times brought us

and then our life belongs to you alone.

The candles you have brought into our darkness,
let them today be burning warm and bright,
and if it's possible, do reunite us!
We know your light is shining through the night.

When now the quiet deepens all around us,
O, let our ears that fullest sound amaze
of this, your world, invisibly expanding
as all your children sing high hymns of praise.

By powers of good so wondrously protected,
we wait with confidence, befall what may.
God is with us at night and in the morning
and oh, most certainly on each new day.¹

¹ *LPP*, 400-401. *DBWE* 8:548-550. *DBW* 8:607-608: GEDICHT „VON GUTEN MÄCHTEN“

1. Von guten Mächten treu und still umgeben behütet und getröstet wunderbar, – so will ich diese Tage mit euch leben und mit euch gehen in ein neues Jahr;
2. noch will das alte unsre Herzen quälen noch drückt uns böser Tage schwere Last, Ach Herr, gib unsern aufgeschreckten Seelen das Heil, für das Du uns geschaffen hast.
3. Und reichst Du uns den schweren Kelch, den bitteren, des Leids, gefüllt bis an den höchsten Rand, so nehmen wir ihn dankbar ohne Zittern aus Deiner guten und geliebten Hand.
4. Doch willst Du uns noch einmal Freude schenken an dieser Welt und ihrer Sonne Glanz, dann woll'n wir des Vergangenen gedenken, und dann gehört Dir unser Leben ganz.
5. Laß warm und hell die Kerzen heute flammen die Du in unsre Dunkelheit gebracht, führ, wenn es sein kann, wieder uns zusammen! Wir wissen es, Dein Licht scheint in der Nacht.
6. Wenn sich die Stille nun tief um uns breitet, so laß uns hören jenen vollen Klang der Welt, die unsichtbar sich um uns weitet, all Deiner Kinder hohen Lobgesang.
7. Von guten Mächten wunderbar geborgen erwarten wir getrost, was kommen mag. Gott ist bei uns am Abend und am Morgen, und ganz gewiß an jedem neuen Tag.

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CHRONOLOGY

A Brief Outline

Karl Rahner's Life and Times in Context

1904

March 5 Karl Josef Erich Rahner is born in Freiburg in Breisgau, now the German Federal Republic.

1905

March 26 Viktor Emil Frankl is born in Vienna.

1906

February 4 Dietrich Bonhoeffer is born in Breslau, Germany.

1914

January 15 Etty (Esther) Hillesum is born in Middelburg, the Netherlands.

July 28 Outbreak of the First World War.

1917 The Russian Revolutions.

1917-23 Russian Civil War.

1918

December 11 Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn is born in Kislovodsk in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), now Stavropol Krai, Russia.

1919

June 28 Treaty of Versailles.

1922-24 Karl Rahner finishes secondary school.

Rahner enters the Society of Jesus; the novitiate of the Jesuits.
Formation in Ignatian spirituality.

1924-27 Philosophical Studies in Feldkirch (Austria) and in Pullach (Munich, Germany).

1927-29 As a part of his Jesuit training, Rahner teaches Latin to novices in Feldkirch.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1929-33** Theological studies at the Jesuit theologate in Valkenburg aan de Geul in the Province of Limburg, the Netherlands.
- 1929**
- September 30 Dorothee Steffensky-Sölle (née Nipperdey) is born in Cologne.
- 1932**
- July 26 Karl Rahner is ordained a priest in Munich.
- 1933**
- January 30 Hitler becomes Chancellor.
- February 27 The Reichstag is burnt.
- 1934-36** Rahner undertakes Graduate Studies in Philosophy at Freiburg; attends seminars of Martin Heidegger.
- 1936** Undertakes and completes doctoral and postdoctoral studies in theology at Innsbruck.
- December 19 Dr. theol. from the University of Innsbruck.
- 1937**
- July 1 Dr. habil. in Dogmatic Theology. Soon after Rahner is appointed a *Privatdozent* (lecturer) at the University of Innsbruck.
- October Begins lecturing in Dogma and in the History of Dogma until the Jesuits are expelled by the Nazis in 1939.
- 1938** First (German) edition of *Encounters with Silence* published.
- November 9-10 *Reichspogromnacht* (“Night of Broken Glass” or “November Pogroms”)
- 1939** Rahner’s rejected doctoral thesis in philosophy published under the title *Geist in Welt* (“Spirit in the World”).
- September 1 Outbreak of the Second World War.
- 1939-44** Rahner continues teaching and is involved in pastoral work at the Diocesan Pastoral Institute in Vienna.
- Solzhenitsyn serves as an officer in the Red Army.
- 1940**
- May 15 The Netherlands capitulates to the Germans.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1941** *Hörer des Wortes: Zur Grundlegung einer Religionsphilosophie* (“Hearer of the Word”) published.
- March 9 The first diary entry of Etty Hillesum. The total period of the diaries is from March 9, 1941 till October 13, 1942.
- 1942**
- January 20 The Wannsee Conference meets to implement the Final Solution.
- July 1 The Germans take over Westerbork in the Netherlands, which changes from a refugee camp to a transit camp.
- July 30 Etty Hillesum goes to Camp Westerbork.
- September Viktor and his wife Tilly Frankl are arrested and are sent to Theresienstadt.
- 1943**
- April 5 Bonhoeffer is arrested and placed in Tegel Prison, Berlin.
- July 5 Hillesum becomes a camp internee (the end to special status of Jewish Council personnel at Camp Westerbork).
- September 7 Etty, her parents and her brother Mischa are put on transport.
- September 10 They arrive at Auschwitz; Etty’s parents are gassed immediately.
- November 30 † Etty Hillesum dies at Auschwitz.
- 1944**
- April Bonhoeffer writes his first ‘theological letters’ from prison.
- July Solzhenitsyn is awarded the Order of the Red Star (for great contribution to the defense of the USSR in war).
- July 20 Assassination attempt on Hitler.
- September *Abwehr* documents relating to the conspiracy of the Plot on Hitler’s life are uncovered.
- October Viktor and Tilly Frankl are sent to Auschwitz. Later Tilly moves to Bergen-Belsen and Frankl is selected for further transportation to a labor camp. He comes to Kaufering and later Türkheim, both are Dachau’s subcamps.
- 1944-45** Rahner’s pastoral work in the Bavaria.

CHRONOLOGY

1945

February Solzhenitsyn is arrested for criticizing Stalin and the Soviet government in private letters.

Bonhoeffer is accused of association with the conspirators and is secretly moved to Buchenwald.

April Bonhoeffer is moved to Regensburg and then Schönberg and finally to Flossenbürg concentration camp.

April 9 † Dietrich Bonhoeffer is executed by hanging.

Frankl's camp in Türkheim is liberated, and he returns to Vienna.

July Solzhenitsyn is sentenced to eight years of incarceration in a "corrective" labour camp to be followed by "perpetual" internal exile in a remote area of the USSR.

September 2 The War's end.

1945-48 Rahner teaches theology (Dogma) in Pullach.

1946 Frankl's *Ein Psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager* ("A Psychologist Experiences the Concentration Camp") is published.

1949-64 Rahner Lectures in Dogma and in the History of Dogma at Innsbruck; Professor in 1949.

1951 Bonhoeffer's *Widerstand und Ergebung* published.

1953 *Letters and Papers from Prison* (E.T.) published.

1954 Rahner's first volume of *Theological Investigations* published.

1957 Solzhenitsyn is cleared of the charges on which he had been imprisoned as part of Nikita Khrushchev's campaign of de-Stalinization.

1958-68 Solzhenitsyn works on his three-volume, non-fiction text *The Gulag Archipelago*.

1959 Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* published in the USA.

23 June Summer meeting of prison ministers (*Tagung von Gefängnisseelsorgern*) in Innsbruck. Rahner delivers his paper on "The Prison Pastorate."

1962-65 Rahner becomes *peritus*, theological expert and consultant, at the Second Vatican Council.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1964-67** Succeeded Romano Guardini in the Chair for Christianity and the Philosophy of Religion at Munich.
- 1966** “The prison pastorate,” in: *Mission and Grace: Essays in Pastoral Theology* (Vol. 3) published.
- 1967-71** Professor of Dogmatic Theology at Münster (Westphalia), Germany.
- 1968-72** Dorothee Sölle co-founds the so-called “Political Night Prayer” (*Politisches Nachtgebets*) in Cologne.
- 1969** Rahner becomes a member of the International Theological Commission; one of 30 appointed by Pope Paul VI to evaluate theological developments since the Council.
- 1970** Solzhenitsyn is awarded the 1970 Nobel Prize in Literature “for the ethical force with which he has pursued the indispensable traditions of Russian literature.”
- 1971 -81** Rahner retires from teaching and is now Emeritus at Munich.
- 1972** Appointed Honorary Professor of Dogma and in the History of Dogma at Innsbruck.
- 1973-74** Solzhenitsyn’s *The Gulag Archipelago: An Experiment in Literary Investigation* is published in Russian, followed by an English translation the following year.
- 1976** Rahner’s *Grundkurs des Glaubens: Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums* (“Foundations of Christian Faith”) published.
- 1981-84** Emeritus in Innsbruck.
- 1984**
- March 30 † Karl Rahner Dies in Innsbruck, Austria; and is buried in the crypt of the Jesuit Church.
- 1986** The complete and unabridged edition of Etty Hillesum’s works are published with the title: *Etty: de nagelaten geschriften van Etty Hillesum 1941–1943*.
- 1995** The first publication of Rahner’s *Sämtliche Werke* by Herder Verlag.
- 1997**
- September 2 † Viktor Frankl dies in Vienna and is buried in the Jewish section of the Vienna Central Cemetery (*Zentralfriedhof*).
- 2002** *Etty: The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum 1941-1943* (E.T.) published.

CHRONOLOGY

2003

April 27 † Dorothee Sölle dies in Göppingen, Germany.

2008

August 3 Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn dies in Moscow, Russia.
The funeral service is held at Moscow's Donskoy monastery.

2018

The edition of Karl Rahner's *Sämtliche Werke* completed.

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PLATES



Fulda Prison, Germany (private collection).



Prisoners and the search for meaning (private collection).



Jail House College

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*Musik, Bildung und Kultur, Menschen im
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Jail Cinema – Silent film with Charlie Chaplin as prisoner (private collection).



Humor hinter Gittern

Der hat gegessen!

“Humor Behind Bars: A joke Book from the Jail” (private collection).



Expressions of faith in a prisoner's painting (private collection).



In 2017, the Catholic Church in Germany gave 40,000 Bibles to the prisons. The presentation of the Bibles at the *Deutsche Bischofskonferenz* by Bishop Reinhard Hauke, Daniela-Maria Schilling, Winfried Kuhn and Bishop Franz-Josef Bode to prison chaplain Meins G. S. Coetsier. (Photo: DBK / Harald Oppitz)

Theology of Empowerment

“Transcending prison walls through the spiritual in music, poetry and art”

Karl Rahner's views on prison ministry, although valuable and of significance in their context, are not adequate to deal with the more complex needs and demands of prison ministry in the twenty first century. A greater pastoral appreciation is necessary of the traumas, conflicts and suffering experienced by prisoners, prison pastors, prison staff and, indeed, in the wider world. The subjective world of the prisoner also needs to be addressed in an effort to engage with the innate human desire for meaning and fulfilment. Prison ministry today draws on concrete experience of the above-mentioned traumas and conflicts and must be sensitive to and inspired by the search for meaning as experienced by prisoners. Such an approach leads to a theology based on empowerment that can be found through a creative and meaning-centred response to suffering, as illustrated by the lives of Viktor Frankl, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Etty Hillesum. The fact that no extensive Rahner-study has been done before in relation to his theology of the prison pastorate, this study about his understanding of pastoral ministry in correctional facilities creates and advances the comprehension of a theological foundation for further scholarly analysis of a timely and imperative subject.

Meins G.S. Coetsier studied philosophy at The Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosophy, a Recognised College of the National University of Ireland and was awarded doctorate degrees from Ghent University in Philosophy (2008) and Comparative Science of Culture (2012). After postdoctoral research at Zurich University, he works as a deacon and prison chaplain for the Diocese of Fulda in Germany and as a part-time researcher in theology at Trinity College Dublin.