CHAPTER 8:

A PROPOSAL FOR COVENANTAL IMAGE CONFORMITY

8.1   Introduction

Having detailed several problematic features of Rahner's theological methodology and theology of trinitarian personality, we may now explore their effects upon his understanding of ontological self-communication. The two are intimately related. If God gives the gift of himself through an interpersonal exchange with humanity, the nature of the giver has everything to do with the nature of the gift. This aspect of the present study stands to offer the most to contemporary Reformed theology. Whereas Cornelius Van Til develops a helpful theology that addresses the challenges inherent in Rahner's proposal, we must do more originally constructive work before we can offer meaningful criticisms of Rahner's doctrine of divine self-communication. The landscape is in great transition at the moment. Debates rage regarding the nature of trinitarian theology, but at least the issues are well defined. In terms of confessionally Reformed scholarship on divinization, deification, participation, glorification, and related subjects, scholars are still identifying the issues, much less solidifying a response to them. And therefore, before explicating the implications of Rahner's theology of divine self-communication, we will offer guidelines for developing a theology of glorification that accounts for the type of perichoretic personality we proposed in the previous chapter. This chapter is offered as a Reformed alternative to Rahner's proposal. It is not a full-fledged defense of a Reformed approach against the Roman Catholic theological

tradition. For that, we would have to undertake an extensive treatment of the entire medieval tradition to demonstrate how the Reformed tradition differs from the Scotist trajectory that Rahner follows. Such a project would far exceed the limits of this present work. Nonetheless, we hope this study will lay a modest foundation for such a work and meaningful dialogue between Reformed and Catholic theologians on these issues.

In light of recent Reformed scholarship, the salvific benefits most closely related to Rahner's understanding of ontological self-communication are union with Christ and glorification. Justification and sanctification receive much attention in Reformed discussions of the *ordo salutis*, and union with Christ has become a present fixture in the literature, but glorification remains a rather vague concept in the minds of many. Thorough biblical-theological definitions are noticeably lacking in the literature on soteriology, and developed understandings of precisely what is communicated in glorification are rarer still. Many times, glorification is simply identified with future bodily resurrection, but as we will see, Scripture speaks of the bestowal of glory in a fuller and more diverse sense.[1] The threads of a robust response to Rahner are present

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[1] Basic views of glorification include, Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 688–689; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2000), 828–839, 1242–1243; J. van. Genderen and W. H. Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub., 2008), 495, 858, 868; Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1998), 795–801. Bavinck recognizes a broader concept behind Paul's use of the word ἐδόξασεν in Rom 8:30, but still speaks of glorification properly as the resurrection of the body on the last day. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 3:594–595. Frame recognizes an eschatological dimension to glorification, exhibited in present and future aspects. John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 1009–1013. God's glory is revealed in the things that have been made and climactically through His Son Jesus Christ. He bestows his glory and honor upon his people in creation and then in redemption and consummation. The concept of glorification—or more generally the bestowal of God's glory—includes bodily resurrection, but is also much more. For example, Exod 28:2, 40; 40:34; Isa 6:3; 43:7; 60:1; Ezek 39:21; Hab 2:14; Hag 2:7, 9; Zech 2:5; Ps 3:3; 8:5; 21:5; 84:11; Prov 3:35; 8:18; 15:33; 29:23; Mt 17:2; Jn 1:14;

within Reformed teaching, but they have not yet been woven together into a tightly knit fabric. Before turning our attention to Rahner's view, we will seek to advance a doctrine of glorification that draws particularly upon the theological contributions of Geerhardus Vos, Herman Ridderbos, Meredith Kline, and Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.[2] Following a positive construction of the doctrine, we will seek to put it to use polemically against the theology of Karl Rahner, which we have detailed up to this point. Though this study will be necessarily brief, we are optimistic that this analysis will suggest areas for future critical dialogue with Eastern Orthodoxy and the growing number of emerging deification and divinization theologies.

The vocabularies used by traditional Reformed dogmaticians and the twentieth-century Catholic theologians are quite different, even though the traditional Reformed *loci* are covered largely in Rahner's theological corpus. Whereas Reformed, and to some extent evangelical, theologians speak of glorification in the context of a detailed *ordo salutis*, Catholic theologians, such as Rahner, speak generally of receiving God's grace in the beatific vision.[3] The latter tend to emphasize the unity of God's program of

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2:11; 5:44; 7:18; 8:54; 13:31, 32; 15:8; 17:1, 4, 5, 10, 24; Rom 2:7, 10; 5:2; 8:17–19, 21, 30; 9:4, 23; 1 Cor 6:20; 1 Cor 15:43; 2 Cor 3:7–11, 18; 4:6; Phil 3:21; Heb 2:10; 1 Pet 4:13–14; 5:4; 2 Pet 1:3.

[2] The following works are particularly helpful for constructing a Reformed theology of glorification: Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Banner of Truth, 1975); Geerhardus Vos, *Pauline Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1979); Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977); Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999); Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1987).

[3] A sequential approach to the *ordo salutis* began with Theodore Beza's "table" and was further solidified later in William Perkins's "golden chain." William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine, Or, The Description of Theologie: Containing the Order of the Causes of Salvation and Damnation, According to God's Word: A Viewe Whereof Is to Be Seene in the Table Annexed; Hereunto Is Adjoined the Order Which M. Theodore Beza Used in Comforting Afflicted Consciences* (Puritan Reprints, 1597). This theological

consummation rather than its constituent parts. Justification is a transformative benefit according to official Catholic teaching, and strictly forensic notions of pardon from sin are alien to Catholic dogmatics. Instead of sharply distinguishing between forensic and renovative categories, as the Reformed have done, Catholic dogmaticians such as Rahner prefer to treat all of salvation from the perspective of the whole—in one graced sum that comes to consummation when Christ returns and believers are raised imperishable. Even though these approaches seem widely divergent and have underscored the division between Catholics and Protestants since the sixteenth-century, official Catholic teaching in general, and Karl Rahner's writings in particular, provide ample opportunity for dialogue with Reformed thought. The renewed interest in union with Christ and growing trends toward varieties of deification and divinization theologies have only served to bring these two traditions into closer orbit. Yet while the vocabulary and theological issues with which these theologians deal are converging, the underlying biblical, systematic, and philosophical assumptions remain worlds apart. With these opportunities and provisos in mind, we will begin to construct a Reformed theology of glorification.

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tradition is echoed in contemporary theologies (such as the basic views referenced above) that treat glorification at the end of this sequence of salvific events. Rahner's view is helpfully summarized in Karl Rahner, "Beatific Vision," *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (New York, N.Y.: The Seabury Press, 1975).

8.2   Glorification Themes in Scripture

Glorification is the bestowal of divine glory upon God's people. In short, God's

glory is his essence, the sum of his eternal attributes. But for a more thorough

understanding, we ought to look first to Paul's words in Rom 1:20:

> For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have
> been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that
> have been made . . .

> τὰ γὰρ ἀόρατα αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου τοῖς ποιήμασιν νοούμενακαθορᾶται,
> ἥ τε ἀΐδιος αὐτοῦ δύναμις καὶ θειότης . . .

God's glory is evident in the things that have been made, because they reveal and

manifest his being. Created things disclose his eternal attributes not as original sources

of divine being, but as derivative demonstrators of God's being in accommodated form.

This is true especially of man's constitutive being. Basic to the notion of Christian

anthropology is the teaching that Adam was created in the image of God. Image is

bound up with the notion of God's glory, because man manifests God's glory precisely

as image. Much has been written regarding man being created in the image of God, but

little has connected that image to an eschatological conception of glory-bestowal.

Meredith Kline is a welcome exception. Though he relates the two, Kline distinguishes

slightly between image and glory as "twin models in the Bible for expressing man's

likeness to the divine Original. If they are to be distinguished, the distinction might be

that image-likeness is reproduction of the original and glory-likeness is reflection of the

original."[4] Both conceptions have an eschatological dimension. Original archetypal

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[4] Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, 30.

glory is comprehensive, and when man is made to be like the glorious God and reflect

the divine glory as created copies (ectypally), we should anticipate this glory

encompassing all aspects of human existence. This is precisely what Kline develops:

> Under the concept of man as the glory-image of God the Bible includes
> functional (or official), formal (or physical), and ethical components,
> corresponding to the composition of the archetypal Glory. Functional glory-
> likeness is man's likeness to God in the possession of official authority and in the
> exercise of dominion. Ethical glory is reflection of the holiness, righteousness,
> and truth of the divine Judge (not just the presence of a moral faculty of any
> religious orientation whatsoever). And formal-physical glory-likeness is man's
> bodily reflection of the theophanic and incarnate Glory.[5]

This glory-image is thoroughly eschatological. It was given as good, but not as

perfect (in the sense of being complete). This dynamic is formally similar to Rahner's

notion of elevating grace. God blessed man with his glory as created, but he had an

eschatological goal intended for this image—one that would realize in consummated

union and communion with the triune God. Nonetheless the glory with which the

protological son was invested did not remain in its pristine form.[6] Adam fell from glory

when he sinned by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As a result, he

no longer imaged properly. The image was not lost entirely, but it was damaged in all of

its aspects. Adam lost dominion when he failed to keep the garden pure, by succumbing

to the serpent (Gen 3). He was darkened in his understanding through the knowledge of

sin (Eph 4:18; Rom 1:21). And finally, his flesh became subject to corruption and death

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[5] Ibid., 31.

[6] In using the word "protological" we refer to the characteristics of protology, the covenant-historical age from creation to man's fall into sin. Adam is the premier "son" of this age. Typology characterizes the time after the fall leading up to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. The nation of Israel represents God's son in this covenant-historical era. Eschatology refers to the end and consummation of all things. Jesus Christ is the eschatological Son of God.

(Rom 5:12; 6:23). Though the glory-image in man in some sense remains (see Gen 9:6), it has been altered significantly.

This basic pattern of bearing God's glory-image was recapitulated at a typological level for the nation of Israel. Like the protological son before them, the nation of Israel bore God's glory as typological son (Exod 4:22; 28:2, 40; 40:34; Ps 3:3; Zech 2:5). As a type, the nation exhibited a form of the glory that anticipated the eschatological glory yet to be recovered and consummated. The glory of the nation was most closely identified first with the tabernacle and premier prophet, Moses, and later with the temple. Second Corinthians 3–4 explains this glory within the typological period of redemptive history. Here Paul focuses on the glory of God shining in Moses's face. This was a manifestation of God's own glory. It was so significant that Moses had to place a veil over his face so the Israelites would not look upon the glory directly and perish. But as great as this glory was, it was only provisional and faded. It was not original to Moses and depended upon him going before the Lord in the tent of meeting (Exod 34:29–35; 2 Cor 3:7–18). Typological glory was provisional by nature, but even it was forfeited. Just as Adam lost the protological glory when he fell in the garden, so also this typological glory did not remain. The nation of Israel, after repeatedly breaking covenant, "fell" from glory and was exiled into Babylon. In climactic conclusion to God's typological presence with the national image bearer, the glory of the Lord left the temple (Ezek 10:18; cf. 1 Sam 4:21).

Even after two forfeitures—protological and typological—God's original plan of glory-bestowal and consummated union and communion was still possible. In God's plan of redemption, the eschatological son would come to redeem his people (Gen 3:15;

cf. 1 Cor 15:20ff; Rom 5:12–15). But this image-bearer differs markedly from the previous two. His experience of glory and his mode of displaying it are categorically different from Adam, Israel, and the rest of humanity. Christ is not simply a reflection of the divine glory, but the origin and source of it, the perfect image of the invisible God (Col 1:15; cf. Heb 1:3; John 14:4; 17:5). Though being the eternal God and partaking in the fullness of triune glory, he took the form of a servant (Phil 2:7). He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, or any beauty that we should desire him (Isa 53:2). Rather, he humbled himself for a servant's life of suffering unto glory. The hypostatic union of divine and human natures in the person of Christ has great significance for the bestowal of glory to God's people. His glory is original to his person and divine nature, but changes in relation to his human nature. This understanding of glorification refracted through hypostatic union offers a paradigm for understanding how glory is bestowed upon God's people, who come to be united to Christ. Christ's life between incarnation and resurrected glory was a redemptive-historical movement that elevated his human nature to a consummative glory in closer relationship to his eternal glory as eternal Son of God. This eschatological trajectory toward Christ's glorious climax is seen in stages throughout his earthly ministry. It was manifested when the angels confess glory to God at Christ's birth (Luke 2:14), and it was demonstrated as Christ performed miracles. But it breaks through even more strikingly at his transfiguration (Matt 17:1–9; Mark 9:2–8; Luke 9:28–36; cf. 2 Pet 1:16–18).

The glory demonstrated by Christ, the eschatological son, is not substantially different from the glory demonstrated by the protological or typological son. It is the same divine glory, but the mode and fullness of the manifestation differs. This can be

understood better by comparing Moses's glorious transfiguration to Christ's. Paul

connects the account of Moses transfiguration to Christ's original glory. Believers are

made to behold and see (κατοπτρίζω) this glory through the Spirit in union with Christ.

In the transfiguration, the eternal glory of the Son breaks through in redemptive-history

with a foretaste of the eschatological glory that will adorn him in the fullness of his

kingdom for all eternity (Ps 68:18; 110; Heb 10:13). This is trinitarian glory. The Son

possessed it with the Father from all eternity, but he is also functionally identified with

the Spirit when his glory is manifested through his resurrection (1 Cor 15:45; 2 Cor

3:17). If Christ came to restore the originally promised trinitarian glory to his people by

accomplishing redemption and offering a redemptive-historical paradigm pattern to

them, it behooves us to consider how the transfiguration might be proleptic of the

believer's experience.[7] It is also necessary to understand the significant difference

between Christ's original glory as the eternal Son of God and believers's manifestation

of derivative glory, which they receive as part of the body of Christ. For this we should

consider the relationship between glory and transformation within the context of union

with Christ.

Christ bestows his glory through a mystical and *covenantal* bond. By contrast,

Rahner identifies the hypostatic union as the conduit of *ontological* self-communication

in the beatific vision. The nature of a mystical glorious bond between Christ and his

people is described in in 1 Cor 15:20, 23. Paul invokes the agricultural term ἀπαρχή

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[7] The operative word μεταμορφόω appears in Matt 17:2; Mark 9:2; Rom 12:2; and 2 Cor 3:18. The 2 Cor 3:18 passage especially connects Christ's glory with believers' glory. The transfiguration is an important redemptive-historical event that sheds light on the beatific vision, though necessarily there will be differences between Christ's and the believer's experience, since Jesus is the eternal Son of God. His glory is original. The glory of his people is and will be derivative.

(firstfruits) to characterize this relationship of glory, which culminates in resurrection.

Resurrection is the eschatological manifestation of glory, and Christ's resurrection is

organically connected to the resurrection of those who follow in the harvest. According

to this conception, the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of his people are not

conceived as separate events. It is a single harvest event, which is reaped in two stages.[8]

This has tremendous implications for the doctrine of union with Christ.[9] For if Christ is

organically connected with his people in his resurrection, and if Christ's resurrection

brought him glory, then union between Christ and his people must bear an important

character and role in their glorification.[10] The means of glorification must be

circumscribed by several programmatic biblical texts. One is Rom 8:29, which identifies

the purpose of predestination as bringing the elect into conformity to Christ's image so

that he could become the firstborn of many brothers. In other words, the resurrected

Christ becomes the prototype for a glorified family resemblance.[11] As significant as this

text is for an overall program of covenantal image conformity, perhaps the keystone

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[8] Gaffin, Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption*, 35–36.

[9] The scope of this study will not permit us to ask what kind of metaphysical significance we can ascribe to the apostle's use of ἀπαρχή. In short, we must maintain that it is a Spiritual union, that is, the work of the Holy Spirit. The bond with Adam is natural, but the bond with Christ is Spiritual. For further study, see John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), 22ff.

[10] Martin points out that μεταμορφούμεθα in 2 Cor 3:18 "strongly suggests a link with Christ as God's 'image' who is the prototype." Ralph Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary 40 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), 71.

[11] According to 2 Cor 3:18, Christ's people are being transformed from one degree of glory to another. The transformation does not occur in an instant. Rather, it is progressive (ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν). This differentiates transformation of 2 Cor 3:18 from the transformation spoken of in 1 Cor 15:52, which occurs "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye " (ἐν ἀτόμῳ, ἐν ῥιπῇ ὀφθαλμοῦ). We should note that while these are two aspects of life giving, the life that is given is the same. It is life in Christ via personal, Spiritual, and eschatological union (Eph 1:3).

passage as it pertains to Rahner's particular concerns is 2 Pet 1:4. We will now turn to a

more detailed treatment of this passage with a view to providing an overall framework

for understanding God's gift of himself in glory.

8.3   An Æonic Interpretation of 2 Peter 1:4

Theologians with an affinity to forms of divinization and deification often appeal to

2 Pet 1:4 in support of their views. In this passage, Peter speaks of partaking of the

divine nature. Rahner references it with regard to the metaphysical attributes of God.[12]

The language of 2 Pet 1:4 is unique in Scripture, and its similarity to philosophical

terminology has given theologians the opportunity to interpret the text according to

metaphysical rather than ethical considerations.[13] For instance, one interpretation views

Peter as teaching that believers become gods.[14] Defenders of this interpretation appeal to

Ps 90:2, Hos 11:9, Gal 4:8, or John 10:34 for textual warrant. In some measure, this may

be what Rahner presents with his notion of divine ontological self-communication. The

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[12] Karl Rahner, "Theos in the New Testament," in *Theological Investigations*, trans. Cornelius Ernst, vol. 1 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), 112.

[13] For a sampling of views, see Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Baker Academic, 2008). Blackwell describes Cyril of Alexandria's use of 2 Pet 1:4 to advance a theology of deification in Ben C. Blackwell, *Christosis: Pauline Soteriology in Light of Deification in Irenaeus and Cyril of Alexandria*, Wisssenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 2/314 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 86–88. Reformed theologians have devoted little effort to developing a metaphysics of glorification. Whether or not such a development would be a positive metaphysical definition or simply a biblical-theological set of guidelines and boundaries for metaphysical speculation, the theological product is absent.

[14] This view finds a home in the Eastern Orthodox Church and Mormonism. Current scholarship has demonstrated that metaphysical views of transformation are also finding a foothold in the Reformed orbit of thought, particularly in Calvin studies such as Carl Mosser, "The Greatest Possible Blessing: Calvin and Deification," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55, no. 1 (February 1, 2002): 36–57. Mosser is certainly not advancing a view such as Eastern Orthodox theosis, but he is advancing a view of deification, which many confessional Reformed thinkers would find uncomfortably close to blurring the Creator-creature distinction.

task for Reformed theologians is to develop a robust theology of glorification without compromising the Creator-creature distinction or resorting to utter metaphysical speculation. These concerns should be kept in the background when considering Peter's words in 2 Pet 1:4:

> by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire (ESV).

> δι' ὧν τὰ τίμια καὶ μέγιστα ἡμῖν ἐπαγγέλματα δεδώρηται, ἵνα διὰ τούτων γένησθε θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως, ἀποφυγόντες τῆς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἐν ἐπιθυμίᾳ φθορᾶς (NA28).[15]

8.3.1 Interpreting "Nature"

Peter's use of φύσις is of greatest importance, since one's understanding of the use of this word will govern the interpretation of this text. It is common to find φύσις in ancient Greek, even in Greek philosophy. For instance, it demonstrates a broad semantic range in works such as Plato's *Phaedo* and *Cratylus*.[16] One way to consider φύσις is in terms of essentialism or a substance metaphysic. In this sense, believers come to participate in the divine life by sharing in the divine essence. In another sense, φύσις may be understood as referring to divine qualities that God "takes to himself" by condescending to relate to his creation.[17] In this view believers assume properties that God has assumed in condescension. Sound exegesis should direct us toward one of these

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[15] This and subsequent references to the Greek New Testament refer to the Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed.

[16] TLG. "φύσις." University of California, accessed December 1, 2011, http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/inst/textsearch.

[17] For a treatment of this approach to God's relationship to creation, see K. Scott Oliphint, *God with Us: Divine Condescension and the Attributes of God* (Wheaton Ill.: Crossway, 2011).

options, a middle position, or perhaps an entirely different type of understanding. For that we must begin with the use of this word in the Bible.

Though it occurs four times in the Apocrypha (4 Mac 5:8–9: 13:27; Wis 19:20), Rom 2:27 is the only other biblical instance of φύσις in the feminine genitive singular (φύσεως). The word does appear, however, in other forms throughout the NT. It demonstrates a broad semantic domain, which ranges from the sense of "physical" (Rom 2:27) and ethnicity (Gal 2:15) to "kind" or "type" (Jam 3:7). Furthermore, Romans 1:26 speaks about homosexuality as an act which is contrary to *nature.* Later, Paul uses φύσις in Rom 2:14 to speak of Gentiles who *by nature* do the works of the law. Then in Rom 11:21, 24 Paul speaks of ethnic Jews as *natural* branches, that is, those belonging to the people of God by virtue of their physical birth and Israel's national election. First Cor 11:14 even declares that *nature* teaches that long hair on a man is a disgrace. Each of these uses help to inform the use of φύσις in 2 Pet 1:4, but Galatians 4:8 might be the closest Paul comes to a metaphysical sense. Paul refers to those who "were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods."[18] Each of these uses is important to the respective context of Paul's arguments. However, none is principally concerned with Paul's theology of eschatological transformation.

The Pauline use of φύσις is often æonic, pertaining to the relationship of this age (æon) to the age-to-come. This is evident in passages such as Eph 2:3, which speaks of those fallen in Adam as "by nature children of wrath." In this type of use, φύσις refers to

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[18] Luke records Paul making a similar comment in Acts 14:15. The people of Lystra witnessed Barnabas and Paul performing miracles, and as a result, they identified Barnabas as Zeus and Paul as Hermes. But Paul says, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them" (Acts 14:15, ESV).

one's basic identity and the characteristics that are concomitant with that identity. This is likely the sense in which Peter uses the word. Peter invokes an æonic consideration in chapter three of his second epistle where he speaks about the "last days" (v. 3) and of "the world that then existed" (v. 6). He divides world history into three fundamental orders or ages. The flood destroyed the world that then existed (v. 6). The present world will be burned up in a judging and purifying fire (vv. 10, 12) and will yield to a new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells (v. 13). This æonic framework is being employed in 1:4 when he speaks of the corruption that is "in the world" (ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ) in a manner similar to Paul's æonic language in Eph 1:10 and Col 1:16 (cf. Col 3:2). In both places, Paul speaks of things in the heavens (ἐν/ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς) and things on the earth (ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς). Peter's ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ invokes a similar division of world orders. Furthermore, Peter speaks of a "time of exile" (1 Pet 1:17), "the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 1:6–8), and the manifestation of Christ in the "last times" (1 Pet 1:20). In so doing, he clearly exhibits an æonic mindset similar to Paul's. Therefore, it is natural to read a two-age eschatology into Peter's second epistle. This paradigm should then condition what it means to participate in the divine nature. As such, we should interpret partaking of the divine nature to mean sharing in some characteristic in accord with a heavenly mode of existence of the age to come. This æonic sense is the sense in which Peter employs φύσις in 2 Pet 1:4 to advance his own theology of eschatological transformation.

8.3.2 Incorruptibility

It is indeed surprising that this passage has been used as a foothold for all manner

of philosophical speculation, particularly since Peter qualifies his intent in the very next

phrase. There he writes that partaking of the divine nature means, "having escaped from

the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire" (ἀποφυγόντες τῆς ἐν τῷ

κόσμῳ ἐν ἐπιθυμίᾳ φθορᾶς). Partaking in the divine nature then involves a new mode of

existence, namely, one characteristic of a new age. Thus, if partaking of the divine nature

is a matter of escaping corruption, we must then ask when this happens. Surely,

believers remain subject to physical decay and eventual death in this life. Yet they also

have already received new life in Christ and have been liberated from sin's corruption

(Rom 6ff), not simply its guilt. This evokes the tension requisite to the overlap of the

ages. Though Christ has been raised and his eschatological benefits have intruded into

the present, believers still endure the present effects of sin. Though they have been saved

definitively, they await final and consummated deliverance when Christ returns.

Believers have escaped corruption in the eschatological sense, but nevertheless

experience it presently in so far as they experience the present age. If Peter's concern is

to address the eschatological deliverance, we must consider this divine nature-partaking

in conjunction with other passages that address liberation from corruption. Meredith

Kline summarizes our concern well:

> In the vocabulary of Peter, "partakers of the divine nature" expresses renewal in
> the image of God (II Peter 1:4). In the context of this expression in II Peter 1, the
> figures of reflective transformation and of investiture are both found, the former
> with reference to the transfiguration of Jesus into the radiant likeness of the
> overshadowing Glory (vv. 16ff.) and the latter in reference to Peter's anticipated

death, described as a divestiture, a negative counterpart to the resurrection investiture with glory (v. 14).[19]

Becoming a partaker of the divine nature means bearing the image of God, namely in the consummated form of the resurrected Christ. It is a likeness to the divine original as well as a bestowal (or investiture) of divine glory. In salvation, believers escape the corruption in the world, which is a result of sin, by partaking in the likeness and benefits of the resurrected Christ. So we come to see how the eschatological progression of glory for the person of Christ has significance for the eschatological bestowal of that glory upon his people in redemptive history. But we should also note that this general head-image relationship is not exclusive to Christ and the age to come. A single representative, whose image is replicated among his progeny, characterizes both ages. Post-Fall, this worldly age is characterized by the first Adam: the disobedient son. The age to come is characterized by the last Adam: the obedient son. Each of these representatives embodies the wisdom or spirit of his particular age, and all men are found in one of the two Adams (Rom 5:12–15; 1 Cor 15:45). Through covenant identification and image conformity to the pattern of their federal head, each person acts according to the representative character of the age to which they belong. According to Eph 1:3, the character of this union is personal, spiritual, and eschatological.[20] We may use this verse as a paradigm for understanding aspects of this two-age eschatology and its corresponding federal heads:

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[19] Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, 29.

[20] Lane G. Tipton, "Union with Christ: Its Foundational Status and Fundamental Structure (Part 1)" (Class lecture presented at the Doctrine of Salvation II, Westminster Theological Seminary, Glenside, PA, March 12, 2010).

Characteristics of Union (Eph 1:3)	This Age	Age to Come
Personal	First Adam	Last Adam, Jesus Christ
Spiritual	"spirit" of this age	Spirit of Wisdom, Holy Spirit
Eschatological	Hell	Heaven
Corresponding Deeds	Disobedience	Obedience
Existence Characterized By	Guilt/Corruption/Death	Life

Figure 2. Characteristics of æonic identity

This overarching process of covenantal identity transfer and image conformity is fully trinitarian. As they are transferred from this age to the age to come, believers are given a new life principle in the person of Christ. The Spirit enacts this union and enables believers to put this principle into action. This model elucidates Peter's eschatological conception behind the phrase "divine nature." To partake in the divine nature is to be identified with the ἔσχατος Ἀδὰμ having escaped this world's sinful corruption by being conformed to his image (Rom 8:29) and ultimately resurrected in consummate glory (1 Cor 15:20ff).

8.4   A Reformed Biblical-Theological Definition of Glorification

Having sketched an æonic framework of image conformity as a biblical model for explicating God's gift of himself, we may now attempt a succinct definition of glorification. This subject warrants its own full-length study, but even an initial attempt will have value for addressing Rahner's alternative proposal of ontological self-communication. The already/not-yet dimensions of glorification have not been fully explored by Reformed thinkers, and glorification is often considered entirely in terms of

a future event. But significant elements of glorification remain unrealized, for example, further degrees of glory and bodily resurrection (2 Cor 3:18; 1 Cor 15:20ff). At the same time, Paul often speaks about the present reality of the "new man" (Eph 4:20–24). These aspects of glory are identified with the new creation (2 Cor 5:17). The new creation is *yet* to come (2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1; Isa 65:17ff), but it has also *already* come. God's program of transformation is not entirely future. Those whom the Spirit has called, regenerated, and united to Christ experience the new man in the present time (Heb 12:22). They have been made alive together with him and seated in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph 2:6). They rise to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4). Having died to sin, they have been and are being renewed (2 Cor 4:16; Eph 4:23; Col 3:10). In a very real sense, believers already share in the glory of Christ and the hope of the glory to come, namely that which is inextricably linked with Christ's return and the transformation, which ensues as a necessary entailment of that event.[21] Still, the new man awaits a consummation. Believers do not yet outwardly manifest the glory they one day will manifest when they see their Savior face to face. For at that time they will be changed, in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye (1 Cor 15:51–52).

The Reformed tradition's mild neglect of glorification as an overall program of image conformity becomes a pronounced challenge when Reformed theology is brought into compared with contemporary Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and the

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[21] Bodily resurrection still awaits the believer when Christ returns not only to raise the bodies of the faithful but also to raise the bodies of all people—both the just and the unjust (John 5:25; Acts 24:15). Of course, this general resurrection results in two very different modes of existence and eternal destinies. Believers are raised unto glory, receiving a σῶμα πνευματικόν (1 Cor 15:44), which are bodies of the same harvest as the resurrected Christ (cf. 1 Cor 15:20, 23). Unbelievers, however, are raised to a form of dishonor, being resurrected for judgment.

growing variety of deification and divinization theologies. On this score, it is no more

adequate than the others for addressing the particular challenges of Rahner's theology.

The narrow view of glorification, which equates it with bodily resurrection, leaves open

the opportunity to compromise the eschatological character of the salvific benefits.

Within a comprehensive understanding of glorification as conformity to the image of

the resurrected Christ, each distinct salvific benefit should be a component of this

process insofar as each salvific benefit is given for the purpose of making God's people

more like Jesus Christ. For example, the Reformed tradition defines justification as the

imputation of Christ's righteousness and the acquittal of sin's guilt. The Spirit imputes

Christ's active and passive obedience to his people by faith alone. And therefore, by

justification, God's people share in Christ's righteousness, one facet of the glory of the

resurrected Christ. Adoption and sanctification also contribute to moving believers

from one degree of glory to another. In adoption, believers are received into the family

of God and become heirs according to promise. Through sanctification, the power of sin

is broken, and they are set apart as holy to the Lord. Throughout the rest of their earthly

lives, the Spirit applies the death and resurrection of Christ to them, making them die

increasingly to sin and raising them to newness of life. These distinct salvific benefits

contribute in particular ways to reproducing the image of the resurrected Christ in each

individual believer.

Justification, adoption, and sanctification—no less than glorification—are

eschatological in character. With respect to believers, they are already true but not yet

consummated. The punishment for sin is death (physical and spiritual) and as long as

believers are subject to physical death, they live under the effects of sin. The elect are

already justified in this present age, but the outward manifestation of this acquittal from

sin's guilt does not occur until the bodily resurrection. Only at the resurrection of the

body does justification reach its open and public, future and eschatological, form (Rom

8:1). Bodily resurrection marks the final and conclusive transition from this age to the

age to come. This eschatological dynamic is true also with respect to adoption. Bodily

resurrection also marks the revealing of the sons of glory and consummates adoption

through the redemption of the body (Rom 8:23). Furthermore, sanctification is

completed when believers are finally redeemed. They are no longer subject to the

struggles of the flesh and are finally and completely confirmed in righteousness. Each of

these benefits brings increasing glory to God as his elect progressively take on the form

of the man of heaven. They are being conformed to his image, reflecting his glory

increasingly as the Spirit applies Christ's death and resurrection to them. To isolate and

quarantine this progress of glory within the bodily resurrection truncates the

eschatological glory-dimension of each salvific benefit. Still, bodily resurrection is the

premiere event of glorification; it is its capstone.

Therefore, by broadening the Reformed conception of glorification to include the

not-yet aspects of justification, adoption, and sanctification, we seek to provide a more

nuanced (i.e., biblically and systematically informed) position. This will afford a true

bestowal of trinitarian glory that is neither possible on Rahner's own terms nor subject

to their liabilities. Understood comprehensively, glorification is a complex of salvific

events summarized as the redemptive historical and progressive application to the elect

of Christ's death and resurrection in all of its aspects, which culminates at the *parousia*

in psychosomatic[22] resurrection and marks the terminal point of this age and the consummation of the age to come.

These concerns are bound up with our understanding of the image of God, how it changed post-Fall, and how the Spirit restores and surpasses that original state in which man, as the image of God, was created. This image is renewed progressively and eschatologically in line with its threefold character. First, the functional glory increases as man increasingly fulfills his mandate on earth. Second, his ethical glory moves from a state of simple righteousness to one of confirmed righteousness.[23] Third, man's formal-physical glory advances as each believer receives a glorified body and moves from a σῶμα ψυχικόν to a σῶμα πνευματικόν (cf. 1 Cor 15:44). This glorification of the individual recipients of saving grace follows the pattern of Christ's life, which exhibited a redemptive-historical progression from suffering unto glory. Still, for Christ, archetypal experience is refracted by the reality of hypostatic union. As *Logos asarkos* the eternal Son of God possesses eternal, infinite glory, though in his human nature even Christ progressed from one degree of glory to another. In terms of the formal-physical dimension of the image, he has moved from σῶμα ψυχικόν to σῶμα πνευματικόν (see 1 Cor 15:44). Along the lines of the official dimension, Christ progressively exercised dominion over this æon as he ministered and exercised his sovereignty through miracles—particularly over demonic forces operating according to the prince of the power of the air (see Eph 2:2). His kingdom progressively unfolded in

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[22] Here we intend to nuance the language of bodily resurrection to include not simply the physical body, but also the soul.

[23] Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, 31.

power (see Luke 11:20). And in terms of the ethical dimension of the image, Christ grew

in knowledge and stature in his human nature (Luke 2:52). His active obedience likewise

progressed toward a consummation until he yielded his soul to death in his passive

obedience (Ps 31:5; Luke 23:46). Therefore, the threefold image of God was glorified

eschatologically in the human nature of Christ until that time when it is consummated

in its fullness with the eternal original glory that the Son possessed from all eternity.

In his high priestly prayer, Jesus asked the Father to glorify him, "with the glory that

I had with you before the world existed" (John 17:5). Yet somehow he did not have this

glory at the time of this prayer. The change of glory with respect to Christ's changing

estates occurs for his human nature and must be understood in terms of the

Chalcedonian Creed. At his resurrection, Christ is glorified in his human nature such

that the original glory of the Trinity is now revealed in a consummate, though ectypal,

sense through his human nature. Christ exclaimed to Philip that if Philip had seen him,

he had seen the Father (John 14:9). This can be so because the Son of God lives in

perichoretic relationship with both the Father and the Spirit from all eternity. To

consider or to see any one of the divine persons is to consider and see the Trinity.

Surely, the persons of the Godhead are distinct, but they are also inseparable. Given this

trinitarian life, with respect to the person of Christ, his glory is original and unchanging.

Though with respect to Christ's human nature, his glory is derivative and eschatological.

The Christian life then analogously recapitulates this movement from one degree of

glory to another (2 Cor 3:18) circumscribed by the more basic and paradigmatic

movement from suffering and humiliation unto glory (Phil 2:5–11). This relates directly

to Christ's life and glory, but not identically or exhaustively. The image to which

believers are conformed is an analogue or ectype of the heavenly archetype, which is the

triune God perfectly imaged through hypostatic union by Jesus Christ (Col 1:15). God's

plan for the elect, then, is to move them from a position of protological and anticipatory

glory to a position of eschatological and consummative glory by which they imitate and

reflect climactically the divine glory. In this model, the glory that believers exhibit in

their resurrection is doubly derivative. It originates with the Godhead, is mediated

through Christ's human nature, and then reflects off glorified images of Christ. This

eschatological program of image conformity climaxes in the beatific vision, which

occurs at Christ's return when his people see him and become like him (1 John 3:2). The

triune God has always planned for the elect to move from one degree of glory to

another, but after the fall into sin this program of image conformity took on a

redemptive-historical and christocentric character. Rahner's conception of ontological

self-communication is vastly different.

8.5   Glorification Distinguished from Ontological Self-Communication

Rahner's formulation of trinitarian ontological self-communication runs directly

counter to the preceding formulation of glorification as image-conformity. To rehearse

briefly our previous analysis, Rahner refocused the theological discussion of this

traditional distinction by incorporating the scholastic concept of uncreated grace.

Though Rahner maintains a place for both created and uncreated grace within his

theology, his particular doctrinal concern centers on the latter, which for him is God's

personal self-communication. God offers this gift to all human beings, and by virtue of

their constitution, they may freely accept this gift in transcendence. But not all reach for

this gift. To guarantee the free offer, its free acceptance, and the subsequent elevation of human nature, Christ comes as *Realsymbol* through the hypostatic union.

The hypostatic union of the divine and human in the person of Jesus Christ is the pinnacle of history and metaphysics. Rahner formulates his particular doctrine of the hypostatic union in accord with his Ignatian and philosophical influences. He argues that the hypostatic union bears metaphysical significance for all humanity. The Son's incarnation incorporates all humanity into a new divine-human metaphysical relationship. In effect, it forever and nearly universally links the transcendent and immanent, Creator and creature. For Rahner, the beatific vision—the event and process of glorification—occurs through an ontological communication of God's person to the believer. While Rahner develops aspects of the beatific vision that are particular to Christ's personal human experience, the hypostatic union also bears salvific and metaphysical significance for humans universally. The bond between Christ and his people is ontological rather than Spiritual, and therefore, Rahner must also reject a covenantal view of union through which the elect are identified with Christ.

Rahner does speak of an "indwelling" of the Holy Spirit when addressing the trinitarian implications for grace.[24] But throughout his writings, an overwhelming emphasis is on Christ, and the personality of the Holy Spirit is underdeveloped. Christ, as the hypostatic union of divine and human natures, occupies a singular role in the gracious elevation of human beings. This is evident in Rahner's explanation of the beatific vision of Christ's human nature:

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[24] Rahner, *The Trinity*, 34.

Now it may and indeed must of course be said that the doctrine of the unconfused and unchanged real human nature implies, as the struggle against monothelitism after the rejection of monophysitism shows, that the 'human nature' of the Logos possesses a genuine, spontaneous, free, spiritual, active centre, a human selfconsciousness, which as creaturely faces the eternal Word in a genuinely human attitude of adoration, obedience, a most radical sense of creaturehood. Indeed it is emphatically maintained that this sphere of consciousness proper to a subject, a sphere enclosed in itself in creaturely fashion by reason of the gulf that distinguishes and separates God from the creature, only knows and only could know of its hypostatic union with the Logos in virtue of an objective communication. This communication is said to depend on the *visio beatifica* of this human consciousness, and cannot be a datum of Jesus' *human* selfconsciousness—if by selfconsciousness is understood the simple being-present-to-itself of an independent entity (in the identity of the act and object of knowledge). Thus by maintaining the genuineness of Christ's humanity, room is left within his life for achievement, and the possibility of a real Mediatorship and thus—if you will—of a real Messiahship is preserved.[25]

Christ is fully personal in his human nature, but this personality changes with respect to his self-consciousness when he receives the beatific vision. In that event he receives the divine gift of self and transcends his previous earthly existence. Christ's human consciousness recognizes that it is united hypostatically to the Logos only through an objective communication, which itself depends upon the beatific vision. But we may question where this leaves the Spirit, who has no corresponding created personal nature. Moreover, what becomes of the *personal* role of the Spirit in Christ's beatific vision seeing that he receives the indwelling of the Holy Spirit himself? The hypostatic union complicates Christ's experience of the beatific vision, but Rahner does not develop the *personal* effects of Spiritual indwelling for individual men and women either. It is not clear which person indwells: the Spirit or the Father. If the Father is the personal agent of *self*-communication, he must be identified more closely with the gift

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[25] Rahner, "Current Problems in Christology," 157–158.

than the Son and Spirit. The Son and Spirit are means by which the Father's gift of self is given, and therefore ontological divine self-communication is not trinitarian not in content, but only in delivery.

Rahner is correct to insist that we receive God's grace through union and communion with him. However, he regrettably characterizes this gift as an original and immediate gift of essence. This gift of essential glory is always mediated through Christ's human nature. Rahner's protological impulse is sound, but his Scotist view of the incarnation is problematic. Christ came to this earth to save sinners, a distinctively *salvific* and *redemptive* purpose (see 1 Tim 1:15; Heb 2:14, 16–17; 9:24–26; Mark 2:17; 10:45; Titus 2:14). If the incarnation is then contingent upon the need for redemption, and the offer of eschatological glory is not, we must inquire how this glory would be bestowed if man had not sinned. In other words, we must elucidate the mode in which prelapsarian union and communion with the trinitarian God is effected. Developing a response will further distinguish our view from Rahner's, because we must consider this union and communion in covenantal terms. The glory of the beatific vision is bestowed according to an image paradigm, and an image presupposes a relationship between that image and the original. This relationship between God and the recipients of saving grace should be understood covenantally, that is, as a bilateral and reciprocal bond of fellowship between God and his people. Rather than conceiving of this communion as an ontological gift of self, it should be seen as an eschatological perfection of human nature. It is eschatological, not essentially ethical.

This basic paradigm is in effect whether or not man falls into sin. In other words, glory-image conformity is not a postulate of soteriology.[26] If Adam had obeyed the terms of obedience in the garden, he would have been confirmed in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. The Spirit would have elevated him to a consummated mode of existence according to a covenantally qualified image of the triune God. The original man would have entered into a higher form of communion with God. But seeing that Adam disobeyed, redemption becomes necessary before consummation can be possible again. A new federal head was needed who must recover and consummate the covenantal glory held out to Adam from the very beginning. Only a divine-human could do this, Jesus Christ, one person with divine and human natures. As God, he can succeed perfectly according to the terms of the covenant. As man, he can serve vicariously for his people. In contrast to Rahner's view, the mediation of hypostatic union would not be necessary prior to the Fall into sin. This model arises more naturally from exegetical and biblical-theological reflection upon Scripture.

If the Biblical texts present a clear picture of eschatological transformation considered in light of a two-æon federal eschatology, then Rahner's position is far from the mark. The preceding Reformed proposal of æonic glory and kingdom identity, which is derivative of Christ's glory and identity as resurrected covenant Lord, differs from Rahner's conception of ontological self-communication through hypostatic union. The Holy Spirit indwells believers personally, yet the union that is established between believers and Christ is mystical, not hypostatic. Moreover, it accrues to God's people

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[26] For a fuller treatment of the relationship of soteriology to protology and eschatology, see Gaffin, Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption*, 82n14.

according to a covenantal arrangement, not through a substance metaphysic. The recipients of saving grace are conformed to the image of their new federal head, and the mode of image conformity is decidedly analogical or better, *covenantal*.[27] Eternal, archetypal, trinitarian glory cannot be communicated essentially and unequivocally to anything that has been created. The glory that Christ exhibits in his resurrection is trinitarian in source, original with respect to his person, but ectypal as it is displayed throughout creation. Glorified saints participate in Christ's glory, but not essentially. Even before the Fall into sin, God intended to perfect the trinitarian glory-image in his people through the covenantal communion bond. After the fall into sin, this original plan of glorification through image conformity required an additional step of redemption and covenantal transfer. Christ became the redeemer and new federal head of his people by saving them from the consequences of the previous failed covenant arrangement and provided a new archetypal covenant image of glory. The Holy Spirit, who indwells believers, applies this image.

8.6   Conclusion

Rahner's desire to explicate the personal union and communion offered at creation and consummated in salvation is sound, but his theological formulations prevent him from explaining precisely how God gives the gift of *himself.* Rahner unwittingly concludes that divine self-communication is a partial gift that results in sub-trinitarian

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[27] Cornelius Van Til often spoke of human knowledge as *analogical* to God's knowledge. Whereas Van Til's teaching on the subject is insightful, the choice of language is less than helpful since it brings to mind the Thomist conceptions of analogy and of other theological and philosophical schemes at odds with traditional Reformed theology.

union and communion. Thus he does not deliver on his original promise.

Notwithstanding, in Rahner's model, this partial gift effects entitative change, and

therefore comes dangerously close to blurring the Creator-creature distinction. It

remains to be seen how Rahner's conception of the hypostatic union, in its metaphysical

significance for all believers, avoids committing this error. For the Son to assume

human nature in general, and thereby incorporate each individual partaker of that

nature, the hypostatic union (broadly considered) becomes a union of multiple

personalities. Certainly, the Son retains his unique personality, but he also posits

"hypostatic union" between the Son and each individual recipient of grace. If the

hypostatic union found in the incarnation has *metaphysical* and *substantial* significance

for all of humanity, there must be a plurality of persons united to the Son's divine

nature. Since there is a genuine ontological (as opposed to mystical or covenantal)

union of persons, this borders on an augmented form of Nestorianism.

Furthermore, if this gift is archetypal and results in an unmediated entitative

change, we run increasingly counter to biblical teaching. Rahner's formulation lacks the

theological category of "image" and "imitation," which protects against this danger (see

Gen 1:26–27; Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18). In brief, Rahner's theology cannot sustain a fully

trinitarian self-communication. His errors result largely from a deficient methodological

starting point of human experience and a deficient understanding of trinitarian

personality that subordinates the Son and Spirit to the Father. The gift of divine self is a

patrimonic gift with no discernible metaphysical means for preventing an essential

merger between God and humanity.