Bruno Brinkman's work draws on a wide and eclectic range of scholarship, both from within theology and beyond. It would not be an easy task to list the figures who have influenced him, nor to assess their relative weight. But surely Karl Rahner would feature large in the account, and in particular Rahner's lifelong concern for making connections, both between the various aspects of theology, and between Christian thought and other visions of the human condition. Introducing The Heythrop Journal's tribute to Karl Rahner in 1984, Brinkman wrote of how Rahner's greatest concern,

...was the inner unity of human experience, a structured unity. Out of it man could in the same breath philosophize and theologize.

While noting that Rahner's tone was often introspective, Brinkman stressed how Rahner's exploration of the human person was always also an exploration of the other: both God and other human selves. Rahner's vision of the human was,

...eccentric, even ek-static. The eccentricity was this: to draw near to man, even from within, you must draw near to God. And the ultimate existentializing of that philosophy is the Incarnation.

In the later Rahner, Brinkman saw this openness to God's otherness leading to an ever sharper sense of perplexity and aporia.

These themes also influence Brinkman's own work on Christology, much of which he brought together for the essay published as 'Christ Relevant'. How can we respect particularity in Christology – the distinctiveness of each believer's relationship to Christ, the specific ways in which a culture appropriates the gospel – without compromising Christ's universal significance? How should we reconceive Christ in a post-Freudian culture? Brinkman insists that there must be connections between Christ's identity and ours: our experience here and now derives not from a principle which is purely immanent but which is 'all of Christ'. Our growth in grace cannot be reduced to any psychological schema. Moreover, Christology and the theology of grace are in correlation: 'faith
in Christ and God’s grace ... are facets of one reality in the subject who believes.²

I hope it is fitting, therefore, that this essay in Bruno’s honour explores the links in Rahner’s work between Christology and the doctrine of grace, between the identity of Jesus under God and the perplexities of our ongoing experience. It will fall into two parts. The first will remind readers of how Rahner sets his Christology within a vision of God’s gracious gift of self to the cosmos; it will also draw out some of this approach’s more radical implications. In the second part, I will explore how, for Rahner, grace in us and the hypostatic union in Jesus Christ, though inseparable, remain distinct. Rahner was not a neo-adoptionist or neo-Nestorian; critics who level that charge miss important points in his work. However, Rahner’s linking of Christology with a tenable account of how God relates to the world did lead him to subvert conventional approaches to Christ’s distinctiveness, and to express this distinctiveness in unfamiliar, though more adequate, ways.

I

Rahner’s contribution to Christology, as in so many other fields, came through provocative essays rather than systematic treatises.³ The late treatment in Foundations of Christian Faith is the nearest we have to an integrated presentation, although even here the sixth, Christological chapter (or Gang) consists to some extent of earlier essays repeated verbatim, and one senses that Rahner’s synthesizing energy had begun to flag. Rahner opens this chapter with material from his 1962 essay, ‘Christology within an Evolutionary View of the World’ (5.157–92), in which he explores how Christology might relate to modern science. The question leads him to place Christology within an overall vision of the relationship between God and creation, a vision drawing both on philosophy and revelation. Towards the end of the section, he summarizes his central contention:

... although the hypostatic union is also a once-and-for-all event in its own essence, and viewed in itself it is the highest conceivable event, it is nevertheless a moment within the whole, the whole which is the gracing of the self-conscious creation in general (der Begnadigung der geistigen Kreatur überhaupt)... Grace in all of us and hypostatic union in the one Jesus Christ can only be considered together, and as one reality they signify the one free decision of God for the supernatural order of salvation, for his self-communication (F 201).

How does Rahner ground this contention? There is a brief reference to tradition: the Nicene Creed’s statement that the incarnation took place ‘for us and for our salvation’ is no redundancy (F 200). In the background, too, are familiar Rahnerian transcendental arguments: our profession of
faith in Jesus as divine presupposes that our faculties can apprehend the divine; only if God's own reality informs our subjectivity can we recognize God as God. But in context Rahner's major stress lies on the divine unity and simplicity. All that God creates, spirit and matter, nature and grace, Christ and ourselves, has, as such, an inner unity and finality. However chaotic and fragmentary our everyday experience, however partial our viewpoint – and Rahner's version of metaphysics meets many 'postmodern' concerns – nevertheless.

... if we presuppose that evolution has any ultimate and one-way direction at all, then this process by which the cosmos becomes conscious of itself in humanity ... must have a final result (F 191).

Any distinction between Jesus and ourselves must be contained within a more fundamental unity.

Moreover, God is not a particular reality, but an all-sustaining creator, who is as such radically different from any creature, and who does not change. Therefore, any understanding of the incarnation in terms of God altering plans, say in reaction to creaturely sinfulness, or of God intervening as a creature within the chain of created causes, is impossible. If God 'intervenes', then what occurs is not confined to one part of the cosmos, but rather is all-pervasive:

A special 'intervention' of God ... can only be understood as the historical concreteness of God's transcendental self-communication, which is always intrinsic to the concrete world ... (E)very operative intervention of God in his world, for all that it is free and underviable, is always only the becoming historical and becoming concrete of that 'intervention' in which God, as the transcendental ground of the world, has from the outset embedded himself in this world as its self-communicating ground (F 87).

If Christ represents some action of God beyond the gift of creation, then that extra gift is also present in the whole cosmos. One cannot have a doctrine of incarnation without a doctrine of graced creation. If there are particular realities with special religious significance, this significance consists in their pointing beyond themselves to something present in all things. Rahner reinforces the point by insisting that God can be historically present only in one of two modes, both of which imply that any particular occurrence of grace is always to be superseded. God can be present historically,

... in the mode of promise – the promise of the ongoing transcendence of the categorical which affirms absolutely hope's starting point and categorical goal, but only as a mere stage in hope – and in the mode of death – death as the most radical event of that negation which belongs to the very nature of every historically mediated revelation, and which becomes absolute in death because nothing categorical can any longer be hoped for (F 210).
It is this sense of how a doctrine of the incarnation implies a doctrine of grace, rather than the need to find a solution to the extrinsicism–intrinsicism dilemma, that grounds Rahner’s concept of the supernatural existential. A similar concern accounts for the centrality of Christ’s heart in Rahner’s Christology, despite the understandable distance taken by Rahner from the pious excesses and tasteless art which Sacred Heart devotion has generated. Rahner, perhaps questionably, sees the primordial word ‘heart’ as a universal shorthand for how human beings find their identity only in and through interaction with the external world, with the body, with other people:

... human beings go out and away from themselves, they must realize themselves in something other that they have done and suffered, and can only in this way, in this other, looking away from themselves, become conscious of the well-spring and unity of their being. And such a well-spring, from which the alien other really flows and which possesses itself only in the other, is called the heart (3.324).

Talk of Christ’s heart thus denotes how Christ finds his identity in and through his relationship to the world in which he lives, and hence what makes the difference between Christianity and Jesuanity. It is therefore important to distinguish the idea itself, which when rightly understood is implicit in any adequate Christian theology, from its sentimental, romantic accretions.

Three passages from Rahner’s writings illustrate how radically, at least on occasion, he understood the interpenetration between Christ’s identity and that of other human beings. In late 1936, he submitted a theological doctorate, following the failure of Spirit in the World in Freiburg, entitled E latere Christi. In this work, he explores the tradition according to which the Church’s origin is the pierced side of Christ on the cross, and the birth of the Church fulfils typologically the creation of Eve from Adam’s rib. He traces the history of these ideas, and dates them to the apostolic period. In his conclusion (pp. 113–5), he speculates on some systematic implications. If it is legitimate to read the Gospels typologically, then the events of Christ’s life ‘work themselves into the life of the Christian with a salvific power, over and above the moral example they embody’. They are not just signals of Christ’s time-transcending work, but rather an invitation, an ‘address’ (Anrede) to us who come later in history. As such, then, what we make of these invitations constitutes an aspect of their identity as created by God: it must be ‘intrinsically and from the outset simultaneous with the “later” person’. Moreover, such an approach leads us to an enriched understanding of Gospel meditation: our responses to the narratives – for all their plurality and for all that their authenticity is limited – constitute under God part of the very meaning (Sinn) of the salvific events:

... meditation on the life of Jesus will never be able to avoid making ‘applications’ of the events in Jesus’s life which are being contemplated. Now, if one can read the
New Testament typologically, then this yields ‘applications’ which really from the outset belong to the meaning of the narrated events themselves, and thus count as God’s thoughts – they are not just ‘pious meditations’.

Rahner goes on to suggest that such an approach might help us understand better the theology of Christian vocation, and why reference to Christ is important for our decision-making. Nearly twenty years later, Rahner gave an Ignatian retreat to seminarians at the German College in Rome, and used similar ideas to explain the link in the Spiritual Exercises between our life-choices and the story of Jesus. If the incarnation is the central event in the world’s history, it determines our understanding of everyone else’s identity:

... the most central feature in the world’s constitution is that it forms the ‘surroundings’, the ‘life-space’ for the God who, in person, ‘becomes world’ ... There is therefore no human person whose reason for being here is, in the end, anything whatever except to make this adventure of love for what lies outside himself possible for God – and to make this possible through a life and existence shared with the Word made human.

Rahner then goes further, suggesting that there is a sense in which our growth here and now in the life of grace enriches Christ’s own humanity:

In the Incarnation, the Logos emptied himself into his human nature, which is essentially orientated to the ‘thou’ of other human beings (wesentlich auf das mitmenschliche Du angewiesen ist). If human persons are to find their own existence, they need those who are human with them genuinely to be other, to be different, i.e. precisely not clones (Doppelgänger). Human beings find their own perfection only in the otherness of those who are human with them, an otherness acknowledged, affirmed and sheerly loved. This applies also to Christ, indeed especially so. Of him too we must say: through the Word made human loving human beings as others and because they are others, he too attains the fullness of this nature. He becomes what he is meant to be in his humanity, in a true historical presence, only – really only – through his being our brother and affirming our validity as others.”

It follows that Christianity is processive, permanently unfinished. We come to realize – in both senses of the word – what is at stake in the Christian gospel through a life-long process which is also the process of our own self-discovery. Rahner takes up this aspect of the relationship between Christology and grace in the penultimate, ninth section of the Christological chapter, significantly entitled ‘The Personal Relation of a Christian to Jesus Christ’. ‘A person is always a Christian in order to become one’ (F 306); ‘salvation does not mean a reified and objective state of affairs, but rather something made real personally and ontologically’ (F 309).8 Thus Christian belief, Christian commitment is not something which is simply either ‘there or not there’ (F 306). On the one hand, God’s grace, mediated through Jesus Christ, is always present in human existence; people may reject the offer, but cannot alter the fact
that it has been made and continues to be made. On the other, the accept-
ance of the offer is always a matter of growth: it is always already given
as something which the human person,

... has still to make good and appropriate (einholen), and to bring it to radical
actualization in the commitment of their whole existence through the whole length
and breadth and depth of their lives (F 306–7).

Conversely,

... human experience is nothing else but a challenge to entrust oneself to the
development of one's own Christian existence in patience, openness and fidelity,
and to do this until slowly, and perhaps painfully and with failures, this life unfolds
and develops into the experience of a personal relationship to Jesus Christ (F 307).

Because ongoing human experience is therefore constitutive of who
Christ is, dogmatic Christology should regard that experience, often
marginalized as mere 'spirituality', as part of its own subject-matter:

... Christianity in its full and explicit form is not merely an abstract theory and an
objective reality, ultimately thought of as thing-like after all, on which one sub-
sequently and additionally takes a personal position. Christianity understands itself
as, in its most distinctive essence, really an existential (existentiellen) event: just
what we call a personal relationship to Jesus Christ (F 305–6).

Christology remains mysterious and open-ended. Christ's identity
continues to unfold throughout the process of history, and moreover
it centres on Jesus' relationship of surrender to the one whom he called
Abba. Thus the 'further course' and 'outcome' of the process remain
'surrounded in mystery':

The clarity and ultimate definitiveness of Christian truth is the irrevocability of
humanity's having been consigned into the mystery (die unerbittliche Überant-
wortetheit des Menschen in das Geheimnis hinein), and not the clarity that comes
from comprehending a partial element of humanity and its world (F 181).9

Faced by his research with a historical Jesus hopelessly alien from
contemporary concerns, Albert Schweitzer could only resort to pulpit
rhetoric to express his sense of the abiding power of Christ:

He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side. He
came to those men who knew him not. He speaks to us the same word: 'Follow thou
me!' and set us the tasks which He has to fulfil for our time. He commands. And to
those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal himself in the
toils, the conflicts, the sufferings and the peace which they shall pass through in His
fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience
Who He is ...

In Schweitzer, these words conclude a devastatingly negative review
of a whole approach to Christology, and come across as a rejection of
the whole theological enterprise. Against Rahner's philosophy of God,
of history and of the human person, however, these sentences appear rather differently. They express a principle of theological epistemology: the identities of God, Christ and ourselves are interrelated, and can only be discovered through a cumulative experiential process, through the unpredictable contingencies that happen to us.

II

What, then, of the distinctiveness of Jesus, of the tradition whereby Jesus somehow stands in a relationship to God different from that of human beings at large? Rahner’s approach openly relativizes this to the ongoing process of graced history:

The divine-human being is the initial beginning of the finally definitive success, the beginning of the movement of the world’s self-transcendence into absolute closeness to the mystery of God. One may in the first instance regard this hypostatic union not so much as something which distinguishes Jesus from us, but as something which must happen once and only once when the world begins to enter upon its final phase ... in which it is to realize ... its radical closeness to the absolute mystery called God (F 181).

For Rahner, Jesus’ human experience is not different in kind from our own:

... the prerogatives which accrue intrinsically to the human reality of Jesus through the hypostatic union are of the same essential nature as those which are also intended for other self-conscious subjects in grace (F 200).

On the other hand, Rahner also affirms a version of Jesus’ uniqueness and distinctiveness. Jesus is not just one among other ‘prophets, religious geniuses and reformers’; rather, ‘in Jesus God has turned to us in such a unique and unsurpassable way that in him he has given himself absolutely’ (F 289).

How does Rahner’s own position accommodate this traditional concern? Jesus’ uniqueness consists in his being the guarantee of an all-pervasive process, the point where God’s self-identification with the creation becomes irrevocable, and can be recognized as such, even though God is not yet all in all. So Rahner describes the absolute saviour as:

... that historical subjectivity in which, first, this process of God’s absolute self-communication to the self-conscious world as a whole is present irrevocably; second, that event where this divine self-communication can be unambiguously recognised as irrevocable ...

Yet, though Rahner adds a third characteristic of this event, that of representing the divine self-gift’s climax, he explicitly relativizes the claim: it is valid only,
... to the extent that this climax must be thought of as a particular moment in the total history of humanity, and thus not simply identified with the whole of the self-conscious world within the divine self-communication (F 194).

Jesus' distinctiveness is thus conceived not as some metaphysical or psychological structure internal to Jesus the individual, but in terms of the promise he signifies for others:

... when God brings about humanity's self-transcendence into God through absolute self-communication in such a way that these two constitute the irrevoicable promise which has already reached fulfillment in one human being, then we have precisely what is meant by 'hypostatic union' (F 201).

Rahner grounds Jesus' uniqueness on the claim that his revelation is eschatological, unsurpassable and irreversible. As such it must involve the self-gift of God. God's self-manifestations to creatures – with the doubtful exception of the beatific vision – occur through a mediating created reality:

But so long as this finite mediation of the divine self-expression is not a reality of God's own self in the strict and most proper sense, it is fundamentally provisional, fundamentally prone to obsolescence. For in the end, its finitude makes it not simply God's own reality, and thus it can be made obsolete through God's own agency positing a new finite reality. If, then, the reality which is Jesus, in which 'is present' for us the self-communication of God in an absolute way to the whole of humanity – if this is really definitive and not prone to obsolescence, then we have to say: 'it is not simply posited by God: it is God's own self' (F 202).

It is the quality of signification that makes the difference between Jesus and ourselves. The hypostatic union,

... is distinguished from our grace not by what has been offered in it, which in both instances, including that of Jesus, is grace. It is distinguished rather by the fact that Jesus is the pledge (Zusage) for us; we ourselves are not the repetition of the pledge (wir nicht selber wieder die Zusage), but those who receive God's pledge to us (F 202).

Because Rahner interprets Jesus' specialness, the Chalcedonian 'consubstantial with the Father as regards his divinity', in terms of a particular relational function within the economy of grace, he is able to retrieve more Antiochene approaches to the 'consubstantial with us as regards his humanity'.

For many of Rahner's critics, his position on this issue is unacceptably reductionist, and fails to express a necessary theological distinction between Jesus of Nazareth and the rest of the human race under God. I take two representative statements of this criticism: the discussions of Rahner's Christology in Walter Kasper's standard Christological textbook and in a comparative study of Rahner and Barth by the American scholar, Bruce D. Marshall.
Kasper picks out a formula from a footnote in Rahner’s 1954 essay, ‘Current Problems in Christology’: ‘Christology as an anthropology transcending itself, and anthropology as a deficient Christology’. Kasper describes this phrase as ‘the basic formula of the whole of Karl Rahner’s theology’. Rahner appears to Kasper as the chief exponent of an ‘anthropological’ approach to Christology, i.e. one which takes as its starting-point a claim that all human beings have an openness to the infinite. For Kasper such an approach, despite the good intentions of such proponents as Rahner, inevitably reduces revelation to philosophy. By contrast:

Christology is something which determines the content of anthropology – anthropology which, in itself, remains open-ended. In line with the classical doctrine of analogy one must therefore say: however great the similarity between anthropology and christology, there remains a still greater dissimilarity.

For Kasper, Rahner’s account fails to accommodate the difference Jesus makes, the newness and utter unexpectedness of God’s initiative in Christ. It also cannot allow that Jesus Christ is necessarily unique. If the idea of the absolute saviour is contained in the transcendental experience of all human subjects, then, surely, there is no reason why the concept need be instantiated only once. Kasper makes Balthasar’s question his own: on this Christology, what is the difference between Jesus and Mary? Further, alluding to David Friedrich Strauss, Kasper claims that Rahner is ultimately committed to the heresy whereby Jesus Christ is merely one instance of a reality so rich that it in fact requires a manifold variety of mutually complementary manifestations.

Marshall articulates similar criticisms, but with more explicit reference to the liberal Protestant tradition and in a more logical idiom. For Marshall, Rahner’s procedure is to establish the meaningfulness of traditional belief about Christ on the basis of universal human experience, in particular the experience of what human beings might regard as salvific. According to Marshall, the most such a strategy can show is that Jesus is, contingently, the only person in history who happens to satisfy some description couched in general terms. But it is always logically possible that another person qualitatively similar in all that matters for salvation could appear. By contrast, an acceptable, orthodox Christology must make intrinsic reference to the particularity of Jesus Christ, to the fact that it is he and no other in whom we are saved:

... the Christian belief in an absolute saviour and in salvation is essentially and necessarily tied to Jesus Christ. Because the Christian belief in redemption is necessarily tied to Jesus Christ, it cannot be regarded as a paraphrase of some more basic belief, from which Jesus Christ is absent, that the world is redeemed. Jesus Christ, and hence the actions and events that make up his life, is not ... an optional enrichment of the Christian belief in redemption.

Marshall, like Kasper, reads Rahner as a mainstream believer, and hence as one committed to the uniqueness and distinctiveness of Christ. But Rahner’s lived and prayed ‘actual Christology’. 
... is inconsistent with some of his most basic christological assumptions and commitments; Jesus Christ appears to be the absolute saviour for Rahner not in so far as he is Jesus, but only in so far as he is 'someone'.

Both critics claim an inconsistency between the credal commitment Rahner professes, as a theologian, to be interpreting, and the theological method he adopts.

Against such criticisms, at least three points can be made in Rahner's defence. Firstly, both Kasper and Marshall read Rahner as grounding Christological claims on an understanding of the human person arrived at independently of revelation. This is false. Rahner is not denying the sheer gratuity and otherness of revelation—a point on which he sometimes insists with exhausting rigour, and where he can be as Barthian as Barth—but rather stressing how whatever we say about Christ on the basis of revelation has all-pervasive implications. As we have seen, Rahner certainly does see Christology as 'something which determines the content of anthropology'—but this content is located, not uniquely in Christ, but also in all of us who are one flesh with him, in the whole cosmos that God creates in him. Similarly, though Marshall is correct to read Rahner as situating the incarnation within 'the sphere of credibility which our basic human aims define', he misses Rahner's insistence that our whole existence is moulded by God's self-communication in the supernatural existential, and hence that 'our basic human aims' cannot themselves adequately be understood without reference to Christ. Rahner's concern is not to establish the truth of the New Testament through philosophy, but rather to integrate Christology within theology as a whole, to insist on the mutual dependence between the incarnation and grace.

Secondly, neither Kasper nor Marshall seem to acknowledge the role of individuality and otherness in Rahner's vision of the human. For both critics, it appears, Rahner sees salvation as some kind of static property within the self that can be 'possessed' indifferently by any number of individuals. Kasper describes Rahnerian 'Christology from below' as starting,

... from a seeking and anonymous Christology, which the human person lives out whenever he or she involves themselves in their humanness and accepts this latter completely. Christology 'from below' can thus appeal to the other and ask them if what they most deeply seek in their lives does not find its fulfilment precisely in Jesus.

Jesus is what humanity is, only more so. Again, Marshall sees Rahner's Christology as dependent on:

... the methodological assumption that the ideas of redemption and a redeemer are only credible, meaningful and intelligible for us as, or on the basis of, general criteria or patterns.
However, Rahner's Christology in fact centres, as we have seen, on relational categories, on the idea of self-transformation through ongoing encounter with the distinctive otherness of Jesus, and in him with all creation.

Thirdly, one should bear in mind that Rahner's Christology abstracts from soteriology. Rahner holds the Scotist position whereby the incarnation would have taken place even in an unfallen world, and creation takes place for the sake of incarnation, not vice versa (F 123, 197). Thus, however heinous human sinfulness may be, it does not, in Rahner's theology, disrupt the basic structure of divine-human relations, nor determine Christology. Nevertheless, in the real order, it remains the case that Jesus is the unique, sinless saviour of a sinful human race. When Luther writes of how Christ must be preached and faith in him established so 'that he may not only be Christ, but be Christ for you and me', his idiom is shaped by a soteriology of exchange:

Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life and salvation will be the soul's ...

Rahner would obviously not deny that Christ is saviour, nor indeed that, in our sinful world, the relationship between Christ and ourselves takes the form of an exchange of sin and grace. But this soteriological mutuality is grounded on a relationship given in the creation.

By stressing what Christology implies for our understanding of humanity at large, Rahner does attenuate the conventional doctrine of Christ's distinctiveness. But that conventional doctrine had shortcomings. Given a relational understanding of the human person, given the unity and simplicity of God's action, then within the order of grace, the dissimilarity between Christ and ourselves is contained within a more fundamental unity. Any Christology which implies division in God's work, a change in the divine mind, or the disruption of God's plans by human sinfulness, reduces God to a creature.

Rahner grounded his version of Christ's distinctiveness by invoking the historical structure of human knowledge. The all-pervasive truth of God's self-gift to the world nevertheless requires a particular moment of symbolic significance, a moment when this self-gift is definitively and irrevocably realized:

If this total event of the bestowal of grace on all humanity finds its fulfillment, it must have a concrete tangibility in history. It cannot be sudden and acosmic and purely meta-historical, but rather this fulfillment must happen in such a way that the happening spreads out in space and time from one point (F 201).

Why only one point? After all, people realize universal truths of mathematics in indefinitely many situations, and indeed people realize –
in both senses of the word – God’s self-gift through any number of particular events. But there is nevertheless an important dissimilarity between the all-pervasive reality of God’s self-gift to humanity and the universal truths of mathematics. The latter are abstractions from everyday experience, whereas the economy of grace is a gift to us who are bodily, relational and temporal beings. All-pervasive though this economy is, it can only be communicated to us if there is one guaranteed historical focus, with which all the other moments of grace stand in continuum, and which itself is part of the reality of grace. Christ’s life, death and resurrection offer a guaranteed framework within which we can struggle to interpret our own experiences as experiences of grace. Just as any discourse presupposes various sorts of unquestioned axioms, the all-pervasive life of grace, always tentative and ambiguous, can only be recognized at all against an unquestionable, generative reference-point. The universal bestowal of grace ‘just cannot be thought of as such without the hypostatic union of one individual human being’ (F 199).

Bruno Brinkman’s writing on Christ lays much stress on the Lutheran theology of the cross, and on its ecumenical significance. If, together with those who share with us in Christ’s baptism,

... we desire that our faith in God shall be both the same and sincere, then only in the ‘godforsakenness’ of the cross can we find where is that faith, and where is God.24

Growth in Christ is not identical with psychological maturation; ‘the kingdom can never become a possession of ours, never our season’, and life in Christ depends on a gratuitous, permanently transformative initiative which follows its own logic. But to stress the distinctiveness and irreducibility of Christ is not to deny either the all-pervasiveness of the grace he symbolizes, or the extent to which his identity is linked with ours and indeed ours is linked with his. Though our possessiveness is always prone to distort the christiformity of grace, though ‘our pseudo-wisdom has to become folly’, nevertheless the new life which Christ inaugurates ‘in his season’ is also ‘our new wisdom, “our righteousness and sanctification and redemption”’.25

Notes
References with F followed by a number refer by page to Karl Rahner, Foundations of Christian Faith, translated by William V. Dych (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1978). References with two numbers separated by a full stop refer by volume and page to the twenty-three volumes of Rahner’s Theological Investigations. When possible, I have checked quotations from published translations against the originals, and made appropriate alterations. Where these are minor, page references are given for the translation; where a major issue is involved, I refer to the original.


4 The *locus classicus* for this aspect of Rahner's theology is ‘Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace’ (1.319–346).

5 See Nikolaus Schwerdtfeger, *Grunde und Welt: Zum Grundgefüße von Karl Rahners Theorie der “anonymen Christen”* (Freiburg: Herder, 1982), pp. 164–9 for a refutation of what was till then the standard view that Rahner had developed the concept in the famous 1950 essay, ‘Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace’ (1.297–317), and for documentation of the position I follow here. Schwerdtfeger draws on an important 1970 study of the early Rahner by the Protestant scholar Tuomo Mannermaa — unfortunately published only in Finnish, although the Karl-Rahner-Archiv in Innsbruck has a rough typescript German translation.


7 This passage is both textual and translationally complex. I work from the published German version *Betrachtungen zum ignatianischen Exerzienbuch* (Munich: Kösel, 1965), and quote from pp. 117, 121–2; the whole of chapter 13 (pp. 117–28) is of relevance for the present discussion. There is a published English translation: *Spiritual Exercises*, translated by Kenneth Baker (London: Burns and Oates, 1966).

8 ‘Dabei ist immer zu bedenken, daß Heil keine sachhaft objektive Zuständlichkeit, sondern eine personale ontologische Wirklichkeit besagt.’ For Rahner’s unusual, sub-Heideggerian use of ‘ontological’ see F 302–3: ‘... alongside an *ontic* Christology, i.e. a Christology that makes its statements with the help of concepts such as “nature” and “hypostasis” which can be taken from thing-realities, an *ontological* Christology could also perfectly possibly come on the scene, i.e. a Christology with concepts and heuristic models etc. that are orientated to ontological realities in the strict sense, and to the ultimate identity between what makes such realities exist and what makes such realities conscious (an streng ontologischen Wirklichkeiten und deren ursprünglicher Selbstigkeit von Sein und Bewußtsein orientiert sind).’ Relational categories, in other words, are not secondary, merely ‘moral’, but rather denote what is most specifically human.


11 It would be interesting to explore the relationship between this 1960s account of the issue with a distinction in scholastic idiom made in a passage added to the book version (1954) of ‘Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace’ (1.345). Here Rahner draws a distinction between two ways in which the economy of grace involves formal causality: the hypostatic union in Jesus alone, and uncreated grace in human beings at large, where ‘a true ontological communication of the hypostasis takes place, but to the end and only to the end that it can become, in virtue of this quasi-formal causality, the object of immediate knowledge and love’.


13 Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, p. 49, quoting 1.164n.

16 Ibid., p. 44.
17 Ibid., p. 60.
18 See for example the intricate argumentation in ‘Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace’ (1.297–317), especially pp. 303–10, and in Karl Rahner, Hearer of the Word: Laying the Foundation for a Philosophy of Religion, translated from the first edition by Joseph Donceel and edited by Andrew Tallon (New York: Continuum, 1994), especially pp. 58–64. A passage from the beginning of this work (more accurately titled in this newly published translation) is highly significant here: ‘If the philosophy of religion is to respect the intrinsic autonomy and historicity of theology, it cannot primarily consist in setting up a natural religion. It is not to lay down the great lines that a theology would only have to follow up and to fill out. Of itself it has merely to refer us to a possible revelation of God, a revelation which, if occurring at all, will occur in history. It must not and cannot establish a religion of its own, to be completed or superseded later by a revealed religion’ (p. 8).
20 Kasper, Jesus the Christ, p. 48.
22 Quotations from ‘The Freedom of a Christian’ in Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961), pp. 66, 60.
23 I allude here to Rahner’s important distinction between the Realsymbol and the ‘representative symbol’ (Vertretungssymbol), made, for example, at the outset of ‘The Theology of the Symbol’ (4.225).
24 ‘The Cross in Question’ in Brinkman, To the Lengths of God, p. 162.
25 Brinkman, ‘Christ Relevant’, p. 95, citation from 1 Cor 1:30.