

# Karl rahner and the anonymous christian theology religion essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Before we go into talking about Karl Rahner's idea of the anonymous Christian, let me tell you a little bit about Karl Rahner himself. Most of my information about Karl Rahner comes from the Karl Rahner Society. When you get a chance, you should check out the website. There is a lot more information on there about his life and some of his works. Karl Rahner was born in Freiburg, Germany on March 5, 1904 and died in Innsbruck, Austria, March 30, 1984. In 1922, Rahner entered the Jesuit order and he was soon one of the most influential Roman Catholic theologians in the Vatican II era. He wrote many essays that covered a broad range of topics. Most of these essays were on what concerned the Catholics from the 1940's to the 1980's. His essays provided many resources for both academic and pastoral theology.

Karl Rahner was very popular in his native German-speaking countries. He became popular through his teaching, lectures, editorial labors and membership in learned societies. Rahner was published in international publications like *Concilium* and he had a large collection of works. Rahner also enjoyed a positive reception of his contributions by many Protestant thinkers. After Rahner's service as an official papal theological expert from 1960 to 1965, his influence became more evident.

The term "anonymous Christian" was thought up by Karl Rahner in an attempt to explain how non-Christians could still be saved by the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ. To better understand how Rahner arrives at his concept of the anonymous Christian, it is important to first understand the basis of Rahner's ideas. Karl Rahner was greatly influenced by Immanuel Kant and two contemporary Thomists, Joseph Maréchal and Pierre Rousselot.

<https://assignbuster.com/karl-rahner-and-the-anonymous-christian-theology-religion-essay/>

Maréchal and Rousselot were said to play a major role in the influence Rahner's understanding of Thomas Aquinas.

**The basis of Rahner's thoughts comes from his belief of "God's self-communication." Rahner says the self-communication of God is transcendent. It transcends all of the tangible means in history by which we have known God, such as holy people, places, and things. He says we all know God when he communicates to us. God communicates by becoming "immediate" to us. We recognize God as a supporter, or someone who fills an emptiness when we need help because God hears our unconscious call and fills that emptiness. Through this communication God offers people forgiveness. This thinking process is what leads Karl Rahner to the idea of the "anonymous Christian."**

Rahner's first two books were *Spirit in the Word* and *Hearer of the Word*.

Through these books and in Rahner's essays, it shows his way of thinking and believing. Rahner believes that God is in all things and he shows a deep devotion to Jesus and the Catholic doctrine.

Rahner talks about the anonymous Christian in an interview provided to Rev. Norman Wong Cheong Sau in an article titled *Karl Rahner's Concepts of the "Anonymous Christian" an Inclusivist View of Religions*; in this article, Rahner provided his personal definition of an anonymous Christian:

"We prefer the terminology according to which a man is called 'anonymous Christian' who on the one hand has de facto accepted of his freedom this gracious self-offering on God's part through faith, hope and love, while on the other he is absolutely not yet a Christian at the social level (through

baptism and membership of the Church) or in the sense of having consciously objectified his Christianity to himself in his own mind (by explicit Christian faith resulting from having hearkened to the explicit message.) We might therefore, put it as follows: the ' anonymous Christian' in our sense of the term is the pagan after the beginning of the Christian mission, who lives in the state of Christ's grace through faith, hope, and love, yet who has no explicit knowledge of the fact that his life is orientated in grace-given salvation to Jesus Christ."

In another interview with the State of Catholic Theology Today, Karl Rahner answers a question about his " anonymous Christian" idea.

Interviewer: Tell us something about your ideas on what you call anonymous Christianity.

Rahner: " Anonymous Christianity means that a person lives in the grace of God and attains salvation outside of explicitly constituted Christianity... Let us say, a Buddhist monk... who, because he follows his conscience, attains salvation and lives in the grace of God; of him I must say that he is an anonymous Christian; if not, I would have to presuppose that there is a genuine path to salvation that really attains that goal, but that simply has nothing to do with Jesus Christ. But I cannot do that. And so, if I hold if everyone depends upon Jesus Christ for salvation, and if at the same time I hold that many live in the world who have not expressly recognized Jesus Christ, then there remains in my opinion nothing else but to take up this postulate of an anonymous Christianity."

A non-anonymous Christian is someone who has accepted Christ into their lives. Someone who lives with the grace of God's grace, love, hope and understanding. A person who declares themselves a Christian is someone who has been baptized and lives by God's laws. Rahner basis his belief in the anonymous Christian as someone who lives a Christian lifestyle, but has not yet declared himself a true Christian.

According to Rahner, to declare yourself a true Christian, you must be baptized, attend mass, and pray in the traditional standard way. A true Christian should live in a Christ like manner and follow God's laws. This type of person declares themselves a Christian in every way possible: the way they talk, the way they pray, and their absolution from original sin. Think of Mother Teresa, she would be a good example of a declared Christian. She followed God's words and teachings and accepted Jesus in her life. Rahner accepts the idea that there is more than one way to reach God. He says through Jesus is only but one way. Gandhi can be an example of an anonymous Christian. Although, he did not call himself a Christian by name, he lived in a Christ like manner. Gandhi followed his religion faithfully and lived by God's laws.

On page 75 of the Rahner Reader there is a quote that describes how Gandhi could be called an anonymous Christian, " The mind of even the anonymous Christian is raised to the supernatural order by the grace of Christ, philosophy is not purely " secular" activity. The best of modern philosophy should be considered the self-reflection of a mind to which God has revealed himself implicitly through his grace." Through Gandhi's self-awareness and through his thought process, he has Christian like beliefs. Though Gandhi is <https://assignbuster.com/karl-rahner-and-the-anonymous-christian-theology-religion-essay/>

not a declared Christian, he would be considered an anonymous Christian because his lifestyle and beliefs brought him into the grace of God.

Can just anyone become an anonymous Christian?? The answer is yes, but the answer to this question is also based on a person's beliefs, their way of thinking, and their supernatural salvation. God denies no man. God's grace is open to all men, according to Rahner. Jesus Christ died on the cross for all men's salvation. Even the ones who don't realize it will still be saved. This must mean that the non-Christians who end up in heaven must have received the grace of Christ without their realizing it. Again, this is where we get the term, " Anonymous Christian."

This idea and thinking can cause some mind-boggling issues. Upon doing my research on this subject on the internet, I came across some other people's point of view on the subject. The main question that really stood out to me was " If I am going to be saved anyway, then why should I convert to Christianity?" While this is a good question and made me do some further research. When you take a minute and actually think about the question at hand, it is a horrible way for someone to think. Yes, you will probably get into heaven anyway because Jesus already died on the cross for our sins, but wouldn't you want to convert to Christianity to give yourself an even better chance of getting into heaven?? And there again, it all depends on the person and their personal beliefs.

The Catholic Church believes that, although Christ is the Savior of the human race, a person does not have to know him personally to be saved. I think Rahner is just trying to get that message across to people through his works

<https://assignbuster.com/karl-rahner-and-the-anonymous-christian-theology-religion-essay/>

and his idea of the “ anonymous Christian.” Salvation can only come through Christ, but God makes offers of salvation to non-Christians through their culture and own religion. Those who accept this offer are these “ anonymous Christians.” Rahner says that even though they are not aware of Christ, they are saved by accepting God’s supernatural offer of grace through Christ.

I can believe in this. If someone shows that they are a good person and does good things for themselves and other people (Think back to Gandhi and Mother Teresa) then I believe they will get into heaven regardless of their religion. I believe this because God sees that they are good people and that they have accepted God’s grace (knowingly or un-knowingly) into their lives. A person’s actions determine whether or no they are worthy of God’s grace. The world is full of anonymous Christians. Some are people we walk by every day.

In a summary, the term “ anonymous Christian” to Karl Rahner could refer to a person who believes in the teachings of Jesus Christ, but is also someone who is not associated with any organized religion. “ Anonymous Christian” could also be a term used for someone who does not wish to reveal their religious identity. Basically Karl Rahner is keeping to the Catholic religion in his belief that ALL people have a chance to be saved because Christ is the Savior of the human race. A person does not have to know Him personally to be saved. Rahner also insists that people should not give up on all missionary efforts. A person’s chances at salvation are better if that person has an understanding of the Christian offer of grace.