

KARL RAHNER—CONSULTATION

Topic:	Graced Encounters with Soteriology and Science
Convener:	Michael Canaris, Loyola University Chicago
Moderator:	Jessica Coblenz, St. Mary's College of California
Presenters:	Brandon R. Peterson, University of Utah Sarah Thomas, Boston College
Respondent:	Annie Selak, Boston College

Brandon R. Peterson's opening paper was titled "Grace in Our Place? Rahner's Understanding of Christ as a Representative." Brandon offered a nuanced analysis of Christ's role in salvation history whereby he posited Rahner as offering a "thick" interpretation of that mission through the category of *das Realsymbol*. Via extensive research on Rahner's soteriological writings, Brandon argued that Rahner opts for language of *Repräsentanz* rather than *Vertretung*, and thus provides a more nuanced theological approach that is rooted in an intrinsic relationship between Jesus' humanity and the self-revelation of the Second Person of the Trinity in history. Highlighting Hans Urs von Balthasar's challenge to Rahner's understanding of this divine and redemptive activity, Brandon claims that the latter reads Jesus as "standing for all," in a way that "incorporates rather than vitiates freedom." All of this is to say that Rahner's vision of what exactly Christ does for and with humanity is much more radically person-centered than act-centered. Peterson concluded that Rahner's vision of salvation does not then compromise the importance of Christology in the manner that Von Balthasar alleges.

Sarah Thomas then offered a contribution on "Karl Rahner's Theology of Neighbor Love in Dialogue with Social Psychology and Neuroscience." Her paper drew on contemporary neuroscientific studies to analyze altruism and "neighbor-love" in the sophisticated means whereby humanity is called to attend to the other, and where we often fall distressingly short in doing so. The nexus of "interhuman" love provides a forum whereby God's loving self-communication can be and is mediated and experienced, for it is clear that the mutually reciprocal and intrinsic relationship Rahner espouses between love of God, love of self, and love of neighbor allows one to love despite not knowing who the beloved will become or whether our love will be required. But developments in the science of empathy are now allowing theologians to rethink in-group preference and the human capacity to overestimate our own pain tolerance and heroism while underestimating the debilitating limiting factors caused by things like hunger, thirst, and exhaustion on our ability and desire to react to particular stimuli or situations. Thus, the Rahnerian vision of neighbor-love and the science of empathy and compassion training prove to be important dialogue partners in the twenty-first century.

Annie Selak offered a stirring response, drawing out threads of continuity between the two presentations. In her reformulation of the conference theme in Rahnerian language—"God's love at work in the world"—Annie connected the two presentations by exploring sacramental ecclesiology and its relationship to the theology of the symbol. The church as "a product of grace and history" manifests a mission in the world but also remains (and must remain) eschatologically open to conversion. A crucial and public application of this "neighbor love" can be read in a call for the church's service in dismantling white supremacy. Rahner's insistence that the world can be transformed through intercessory prayer led Annie to compose such a dialogue

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with God infused with his unique spirituality, to work for a world “where there is no in-group and none are marginalized,” and where we do not “love some neighbors at the expense of others.”

Jessica Coblenz helped foster exchange in the remaining discussion period. The conversation centered to a large degree around Leo O’Donovan S.J.’s suggestion that both papers and the prayer offered by Annie in her response helped speak to a concern he has pondered in recent statements by the Jesuits and Vatican, namely how language describing Christians as “beloved sinners,” should in a Rahenrian vision focus more on the optimistic and primordial category of the former, rather than the fragility and frailty implied by the latter.

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