

KARL RAHNER – CONSULTATION

Topic: Another World is Possible: Violence, Resistance and Transformation
Convener: Brandon R. Peterson, University of Utah
Moderator: Susan Bigelow Reynolds, Emory University
Presenters: Jakob Karl Rinderknecht, University of the Incarnate Word
David A. Stosur, Cardinal Stritch University
Respondent: Heidi Russell, Loyola University Chicago

In his opening paper, “Another World is Present: Rahner’s Theology of the Church after Failure,” Jakob Karl Rinderknecht proposed that Rahner’s analysis of Protestant ministries and the question of validity can serve as a resource in the wake of scandals and crises, where classical claims about the church’s holiness and Jesus’ promise of indefectibility can present difficulties. Acknowledging the church as *both* a means of grace *and* plagued by failure is a small but necessary step for meaningful reform. To get there, Rinderknecht turned to Rahner’s analysis of Protestant orders, which were ruled “invalid” by Rome in the wake of the Reformation. Rahner did not challenge this ruling, but posited that the impediment to validity was *mala fides* toward the Roman church, a factor which by the twentieth century had diminished significantly. Accordingly, rather than (re)ordaining Protestant ministers, Rahner suggests a better path toward unity is a revised judgment about validity in light of this impediment, as sometimes happens when evaluating the validity of marriages. Here, validity is less “ontological” and more about “recognition.” Such an outlook clearly distinguishes validity from efficacy: Grace can operate even in damaged, “invalid” arrangements, and conversely “valid” structures can be sites of failure and sin. In sum, God’s gracious activity can be affected by sin in the church without being eradicated by it.

Next, David A. Stosur presented “Rahner’s ‘Liturgy of the World’ as a Hermeneutic of Another World that is Possible,” in which he explored Rahner’s theology as a lens for thinking about violence as well as about the place of liturgy in efforts to resist violence. Stosur began by contrasting Rahner’s outlook with the common “dualistic” Christian view of the world. According to the latter framework, human life is sinful and profane, occasionally interrupted by flashes of grace which provide “temporary respite” from the world and, in the liturgy, a foretaste of a separate and extrinsic heavenly realm. Rahner, however, posits that creation is permeated by God’s grace, and so “liturgy” as we ordinarily call it is an expression and symbol of a wider and ongoing “liturgy of the world.” Often, our “darkened eyes and dulled heart” cannot perceive this liturgy of the world; the sacraments serve to open our eyes and hearts to this wider operation of grace. Turning to the conference theme, Stosur argued that the “other world” which is possible is coextensive with *this* world: salvation is an intrinsic dimension of the world we know, a world which God is constantly transforming and redeeming. Stosur closed by arguing that a dualistic outlook, which denies God’s activity in the liturgy of the world, contributes to violence while Rahner’s outlook resists such denial as well as the violence which accompanies it.

Heidi Russell responded to both papers, building on themes raised in each and offering a series of challenging questions. Russell reinforced Rinderknecht’s point about the church as holy *and* sinful, drawing on two essays in *Theological*

Consultation: Karl Rahner

Investigations 6. Rahner insists that the church's failures cannot prevent God's offer of salvation. But, Russell pressed, "Can they so distort the offer... as to make the offer unrecognizable?" She then turned to Stosur's presentation, elaborating on his connection between dualism and violence by considering the roots of clericalism. Russell agreed with Stosur that liturgical rites can resist violence, but she also suggested that "participation in those rites can be a form of acquiescence to the power structures that promote oppression and abuse," and asked whether, in our present moment, God's grace might be more readily discernible in the wider "liturgy of the world."

Susan Bigelow Reynolds moderated a lively discussion, which included suggestions about distinguishing "the church" from simply "the hierarchy," the importance of the Holy Spirit for the church's self-criticism and renewal (and our frequent resistance to the Spirit), and the need to move beyond outrage to constructive theological work in light of the abuse crisis. Margaret Farley raised the question about the place of forgiveness in light of the church's failures, which prompted a fruitful exchange about the roles of repentance and penance as well as power dynamics and relationships in the church.

BRANDON R. PETERSON
University of Utah
Salt Lake City, Utah