

RAHNER SOCIETY – CONSULTATION

Convener: Jakob Karl Rinderknecht, University of the Incarnate Word
 Moderator: Mary Beth Yount, Neumann University
 Presenters: Peter Fritz, College of the Holy Cross
 Maeve Louise Heaney, Australian Catholic University
 Respondent: Anthony Godzieba, Villanova University

The section began with two presentations, followed by a formal response, and ended with conversation among panelists and the attendees.

Peter Joseph Fritz's presentation, "Thinking Catholic Translatably: Revising Rahner on the World Church," develops Karl Rahner's 1981 call for a "global pastoral-strategic plan," in conversation with three theologians from the global South, Lamin O. Sanneh, Gemma Tulud Cruz, and Maria Clara L. Bingemer. From this conversation, Fritz argued that something like a global pastoral-strategic plan could emerge, and beneficially, but only if "translation" is its guiding principle. Rahner's transcendental thought tends to "associate globality or catholicity with the stripping away of historical conditions;" that is rightly criticized. However, at his best, Rahner is more precise, using "transcendental" to refer to shared characteristics that can only be described, known, and engaged precisely through the specificity of their various bearers.

Beginning with Sanneh's argument that Christianity is a "vernacular translation movement," Fritz argued that Rahner's vision of a global strategic plan for the church would require not only shifting the center of Christian practice, but also living into authentic developments that occur as the Christian "genetic code" is transformed by its translation into different cultures. This can lead, in the words of Cruz to an authentic "ecclesio-genesis" such that the church's catholicity becomes a kind of sacrament of universal solidarity. Such a church would have to acknowledge both the authentically Catholic, plural, symbolic worlds that emerge and which people navigate between (Bingemer). In this situation, a translatable Catholicism would still require something like Rahner's pastoral-strategic plan, in order to stand against the neoliberal settlement that does not work collaboratively and so leaves the most vulnerable to fend for themselves. Such a plan needs to emerge from ongoing synodality between the varieties of Catholicism that exist.

Maeve Heaney argued that it was necessary to think about Catholicism not only according to different cultural modes, but also by using different means of thinking Catholicism, including through symbolic systems such as music. Drawing on Rahner's insights into grace implicit in the world, she argued that music could provide a way of developing a theology of friendship that could be fruitful for Catholic interreligious engagement. Pairing Rahner's analysis with that of Bernard Lonergan, she argued that "musicking... is a theological act of meaning making that merits a place in the academic intent of theology" and that it "seeks to find ways to exteriorize conversion and re-name, or re-express doctrines according to the insights discovered therein."

This way of proceeding insists that symbol precedes theory in human meaning-making, and so attending to primary symbolic expressions grounds and allows for the kind of analysis that we more typically consider "theologizing." An important corollary to her argument is that engagements with Rahner should privilege his writings on

poetry and creative writing, alongside those on prayer and spirituality as “entry points” to his thought. Indeed, creative writing itself, for Rahner, can serve as a kind of “primordial words” (*Urworte*) that can unlock the depth of human experience.

A composition of Heaney’s called “Meet My Friend” rooted her paper and provided the means for thinking through the question of interreligious friendship in light of Rahner’s insistence that grace was universally available. The song arose out of her experience of interreligious friendship. In interpreting the song, she noted how friendship recognizes the grace already present in the other in their particularity, and therefore in their difference. We find, then resonances, “horizons [that] have colours that match.” And in this recognition, friendship becomes the means by which interreligious engagement can thrive, and out of which Catholicism can be thought interreligiously.

Anthony Godzieba responded to both papers, noting that while the movement in Fritz’s project was centrifugal (recognizing diversity and thus moving outward from traditional centers), Heaney’s was primarily centripetal (emphasizing the unifying effect of Rahner’s notion of “universal salvation”). He saw in Fritz’s use of Sanneh’s idea of a “relativized relativism” an extension of Rahner’s thought that mirrors the contemporary default understanding that cultures are plural. He asked, however, whether this unity in diversity was sufficient to account for the New Testament’s understanding of “no salvation in any other name” (Acts 4:12). He described Heaney’s paper as developing a theological anthropology in which friendship is an incarnation of grace. Noting that the order of the presented paper was different from the pre-circulated text, he wondered to what extent the addition of the musical piece was a robust addition to the argument or whether it was more a recapitulation of the already-worked-out insights. He agreed with her position that “musicking” could broaden the articulation of the theological task beyond texts, at least as a metaphorical structure for describing development. He ended by noting that musicking has more to overcome in doing the work of theology in contemporary culture and for providing a “reason for [our] hope” (1 Peter 3:15).

A lively conversation ensued with those attending, with significant discussion about the role of embodiment, language, and music as theological loci.

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