

KARL RAHNER SOCIETY – CONSULTATION

- Topic: Social Salvation
 Convener: Mary Beth Yount, Neumann University
 Moderator: David Dault, Loyola University Chicago
 Presenters: Daniel P. Horan, Saint Mary's College (Notre Dame, Indiana)
 Michael Rubbelke, St. John's School of Theology
 Andrew Vink, Marymount University

The first paper “The Cosmic Significance of the Incarnation: Karl Rahner’s Supralapsarian Christology as Social Salvation,” by Daniel Horan. He engaged with conversations about Karl Rahner’s claim in *Sacramentum Mundi* that soteriology and Christology are more united than typically noted in the handbooks of theology, as the Incarnation has cosmic significance. Horan pointed toward Rahner’s distinctive supralapsarian approach to the Incarnation of the Word and the need for further development of the implications this Christological emphasis have for understanding not just individual salvation, but corporate or social salvation, including the whole of creation—human *and* nonhuman. Horan built on the work of theologians including Denis Edwards and Elizabeth Johnson on “deep incarnation” and “deep resurrection” to note the loving and contingent creation of the cosmos into which the divine self could fully enter through the Incarnation. Rahner’s supralapsarian Christology gestures toward a form of “social salvation” understood in a more cosmic and capacious sense.

Participants observed that the paper is two Rahnerian projects—supralapsarianism and revisiting Rahner’s corpus through theologies of creation (addressing the overly anthropocentric bias). Discussion ensued about the separation between the human and the rest of creation and the emerging knowledge of eco-degradation navigated within an anthropocentric framework. Horan noted the “the ecological devastation that we are experiencing” as “a gap in Rahner’s thinking” while emphasizing that the more-than-human world needs to be seen in ways that are beyond our own experience.

Michael Rubbelke’s paper, “Integrating Fragmented History: Social Salvation in Rahner’s Theology of Purgatory and Indulgences,” examined Rahner’s emphasis on human nature and grace made victorious in the paschal mystery. For Rahner, salvation involves reintegrating what sin has disintegrated, and purgatory heals and shapes a person’s whole identity to reflect their fundamental “yes” to God. Such a process involves indulgences, the healed freedom of other people through ecclesially-recognized acts of intercession. Rubbelke explored Rahner’s pre-Vatican II position on purgatory and indulgences as involving postmortem integration of the person using “very little material,” framing this “material” in social and relational terms—especially with a view to the victims of sin—and how that may illuminate social salvation and integration today. Rahner invites us to imagine purgatory and the temporal punishment of sin in terms of his notion that every free action forms an “incarnation” of the human being’s fundamental free decision to accept or reject God’s self-offer in grace.

Rubbelke’s exploration of the social and relational dimensions of sin included noting the effects of sin in the world and the need for a deeply social view of salvation. Sin effects and affects sociality, the human being, human relationships, and the world around human beings. The temporal punishments for sin—their consequences and enduring influence—require healing. For Rahner, these consequences must be endured

in love to integrate the person's whole reality into the decision to accept God's self-offer in grace. If this process of integration is not fully completed in this life, it must be completed after death in purgatory.

Fellow scholars discussed what Rahner might say about forgiveness and reconciliation that happens after deaths from brutalization, such as torture or other violence (the outworking and harm from the effects of sin). Rubbelke responded that Rahner's later writings talk about the resurrection as an almost parallel reality. We can imagine the afterlife as an extension or continuation of what we do here on this earth; Rahner does not believe that is possible, but *we* can.

The third paper, Andrew Vink's "Historical Soteriology as Social Salvation: A Synthesis of Rahnerian and Ellacurían Themes," considered Ignacio Ellacuría's contribution to soteriological thought in relation to social suffering. Vink asserted that Rahner's theological ideas are foundational to Ellacuría's soteriological project. Ellacuría, a twentieth century Latin American liberation theologian, develops Rahner's ideas by placing them within the concrete reality of the suffering of Latin America. A student of Rahner's at Innsbruck from 1958-1962, Ellacuría was intellectually formed by the excitement of his teacher in the lead up to Vatican II. This impact can be seen in the development of Ellacuría's historical soteriology, which serves as his articulation of social salvation. Vink connected several of Rahner's points to relevant elements of Ellacuría's texts regarding historical soteriology. The synthesis of these two thinkers provided a richer understanding of social salvation made concrete by the realities of Ellacuría's experiences in El Salvador. Vink reminded us that theologians need to be conscious of both historicity and change, that the questions we ask and our frameworks of understanding develop over time. Social salvation needs to be considered in the context of anthropocentric questions because human beings are social creatures and must be understood in this way. A failure to engage the historical moment makes us lose touch with the concrete needs of our age.

Ellacuría's historical soteriology is theoretical (referring to salvation as it is presented in revelation, emphasizing its historical character), practical (seeking where and how the saving action of Jesus was carried out in order to continue it in history), and lived/experienced (examples of focusing on the concrete problems facing the poor in Latin America, such as moving from the tension between propheticism and utopia to concrete concerns about the civilization of wealth and the civilization of poverty).

A lively discussion ensued, addressing the differences between Rahner's and Ellacuría's view of death (which is historically necessary in Ellacuría's work and necessarily connected to resurrection). Vink pointed out that Ellacuría watched people dying and saw a bishop shot, so the space in which we have the debates can vary and we need to acknowledge that. A question about nothingness led to Vink expounding on the theology of creation that Ellacuría, who was martyred at age 58, might have held if he had time to write about that. The emphasis was on the implications of Ellacuría's historical openness and view of historical necessity. Vink's presentation, while synthesizing Rahnerian themes made manifest in Ellacuría's writings on historical soteriology, offered a contribution to the conversation regarding social salvation.

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