

"Murray was not a very good prophet in the sense of a fortune cookie. In 1964, at the death of John XXIII, he proclaimed that the church could no longer turn a deaf ear to anyone to whom John had listened. In 1966, after the release of the Majority Report of Paul VI's commission on artificial birth control, Murray endorsed as a true conclusion (based in historical consciousness) the majority's endorsement of artificial birth control, and suggested that Paul VI had himself released the report to prepare the faithful for an upcoming change in magisterial dogmatic teaching. No fortuneteller here. At various times he predicted that we could reasonably apply limited nuclear strikes in Korea, but also that we could reasonably defend selective conscientious objection during Vietnam—positions that will appall one or the other of us. But behind them all was his hope for the ongoing correction that emerges only within conversation.

"Civility as Murray practiced it, as he endured it, led him where he at various other points in his life would not and could not go. Thank God he went there. Thank God he was a faithful servant.

"But we should allow Murray the last word. This is a clip from the earlier part of that 1964 address, where Murray is describing what happened during the first session of the Council, the session that he sat out at Woodstock College.

[Murray:] At the beginning of the second session, a text on religious freedom was submitted. Its major author was Bishop Emile Joseph de Smedt, the bishop of Bruges. And his inspiration came very largely, I understand—I was not around at the time. I was not at the first session. Not that I was uninvited. On the contrary, I was de-invited—which is much, much nicer.

Hooper: "And, he might have added, it is much, much nicer yet to be reinvited. And even nicer yet to find there our living, working God."

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Karl Rahner, S.J. (1904–1984)

The following brief biography, by Leo J. O'Donovan, S.J., appears in the commemoration booklet.

One of seven children of Karl Rahner, Gymnasium Professor, and Luise Trescher, Karl Rahner entered the Society of Jesus in 1922, three years after his brother Hugo. During his philosophical studies (1924–1927), he was influenced especially by Joseph Maréchal's Thomistic response to the thought of Immanuel Kant. After teaching Latin at the Feldkirch Novitiate in Austria, he studied theology at Valkenburg in the Netherlands (1929–1933), where he was ordained a priest in 1932. Preparing to be a professor in the history of philosophy, Rahner went to the University of Freiburg im Breisgau and attended Martin Heidegger's seminars. When his thesis interpreting Saint Thomas's epistemology was rejected, he returned to Innsbruck and was able to satisfy the doctoral and postdoctoral requirements for teaching in the University's faculty of theology. After World

War II, he taught dogmatic theology, first at Berchmanskolleg in Pullach (1945–1948), then again in Innsbruck (1948–1964), and subsequently in Munich (1964–1967, in the Romano Guardini Chair), and finally in Münster (1967–1971).

In the foundational years of his theological career, Rahner's publications included the primary philosophical studies elaborated in his doctoral dissertation (published as *Geist in Welt*, 1939) and his Salzburg lectures on the philosophy of religion (*Hörer des Wortes*, 1941), classic essays on prayer, and highly technical reexaminations of questions long considered settled at the time. His probing analyses of human existence in a world permeated by divine grace gave his early writings an explosive force, and when his early essays were gathered in the first three volumes of the *Schriften zur Theologie* in 1954, 1955, and 1956 (later to be followed by thirteen further volumes), it was clear that a wholly original dialectical mind had appeared on the Catholic scene. During this period his prodigious editorial labors began as well.

A second, programmatic phase coincided roughly with Rahner's work as coeditor for the second edition of the *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (1957–1965) and his contributions as a *peritus* at Vatican II. Arguing that responsible theology must conduct a continuing transcendental reflection on the structural conditions of possibility for salvation, he wrote seminal essays on mystery, the Incarnation, the theology of symbol, and the hermeneutics of eschatological assertions. He also published major papers in pastoral theology, helped to plan the *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie* (5 vols., 1964–1972), was coeditor of the new series *Quaestiones Disputatae* (1958 ff.), and was a founder of *Concilium*. His bibliography numbers more than 4,000 items.

During his Münster years and his early retirement in Munich, he reflected further on the historical concreteness of Christianity and its social responsibility and in 1976 published his *Grundkurs or Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (ET *Foundations of Christian Faith* 1978).

Ginter: [In introducing Rahner to the banquet attendees, Ginter continued:] "Fourth, we commemorate the life of Rahner. For many years, Rahner's voluminous work has influenced this Society significantly. As you all know, the Karl Rahner Society Breakfast and Program Group Sessions are a regular occurrence at this annual meeting and have been so for the last thirteen years."

O'Donovan: "In 1954, at the age of fifty and at the height of his creative powers, Karl Rahner wrote a deceptively simple essay 'On the Experience of Grace,' which reads today as if it were written last night. Going back to the four and a half lucid pages recently for a graduate seminar I was teaching at Fordham, I found myself repeatedly reduced to tears. Could the mystery of God really be that deeply present within our troubled lives? Is it truly the Spirit prompting us to those occasional acts of generosity or patience during which we feel most truly ourselves?"

"Wondering where the tears had come from, I recalled Fr. Alfons Klein, Rahner's former student and then Jesuit Provincial Superior, reporting that during and at the end of his lectures in Innsbruck, Karl not infrequently had to struggle

to compose himself and rein in tears. Might ours today be a share in his? And might it not be even truer that his came from . . . where else? Such sympathy, I sense, can only be a share in God's own tears, the tender care for us of 'the companion and fellow sufferer who understands,' as Whitehead said. With those tears, and through those tears, let us try to remember a man who meant so much to so many of us, and whom so many of us in fact actually loved.

" . . . *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*. . . . That is where I first met Karl Rahner, in searching to live for the greater glory of God, although I did not know it at the time. At the Jesuit Novitiate in Wernersville, Pennsylvania, a sovereignly sensible Novice Master recommended to me a slender, lovely book, *The Spirituality of St. Ignatius Loyola*, by Hugo Rahner. Gradually, thereafter, I came to read and then know the author's brother.

"Do you remember what you first read by him? Or when you first heard of him? For me, it was *Encounters with Silence* that our late beloved Bill Dych first suggested, although I subsequently recalled coming on lengthy excerpts from Rahner in Hans Urs von Balthasar's *The Question of God and Modern Man*.⁴ Then I worked gradually into the *Schriften*, read Martin Heidegger with Bill Richardson for better background and began to realize my faith was being saved.

"I knew nothing yet of his family life and early years, about which in any case he spoke only reluctantly. Later I learned of the gratitude he and his brother Hugo had towards their father, for whose sixtieth birthday in 1928 the two young Jesuits compiled a private Festschrift, *Sacra Historia*, of some 375 typewritten pages. Hugo contributed six essays, and Karl five. If he learned a certain ease and sure-footedness in life from his father, later I realized, when he gave me a memorial card for his mother Luise's death, for example, where much of his deep devotion came from. And as we know, the bond with Hugo was profound, which made it still more difficult later for Karl later to speak of his brother's Parkinson's disease.⁵

"It was a searching, serving theology we all discovered. And it freed us to question and explore on our own. Like Ignatius, Karl wanted 'to help souls.' He taught required courses, introduced new courses, but also did much of his writing simply in response to needs of the Church or the time. He also preached, held religious conferences, and of course gave retreats (the Spiritual Exercises very often). In the programmatic years before the Council, he began the phenomenal editorial work.

⁴Cf. Leo J. O'Donovan, S.J., "Two Sons of Ignatius: Drama and Dialectic," *Philosophy & Theology* 11/1 (1998): 105-24; slightly revised as "Zwei Söhne des Ignatius—Drama und Dialektik," in *Weg und Weite: Festschrift für Karl Lehmann*, ed. Albert Raffelt (Freiburg: Herder, 2001) 371-85.

⁵On Rahner's family and early years, see Karl H. Neufeld, *Die Brüder Rahner: Eine Biographie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1994) 30-64.

"It was surely, in external profile, an eventful life. You know the dates and the *Lebenslauf*. And yet when I asked him, on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday, what the major turning points in his life had been, he calmly responded:

I don't know whether I've had major turning pints in my life, or whether the brook or river of my life has always gone more or less in the same direction, so that now the time has gradually come for this river of time to flow into the sea of eternity... I would say that my life was characterized rather by a certain monotony, a regularity, a homogeneity that comes from a person's turning toward the final theme of theology, of religious life, and also of human life in general—which comes from the one, silent, absolute but always present reality of God.⁶

"I remember vividly seeing him first in 1964 at Georgetown's 175th Anniversary Celebration. A major symposium had been prepared, during which Karl delivered—that is to say, Bill Dych read for him—the great lecture on the theology of freedom. Awestruck, I sat in the massive, homely gym and watched him praying the rosary as Bill spoke his words. Perhaps this was the way, or at least an honorable, graced way, I thought, to serve: parsing out with poetry and profundity alike the precarious possibility that we poor children of earth and God might be invited to become . . . our selves . . . together, through shared suffering and hope . . . for ever . . . in God's own life transcending all time . . . in eternity.

"Over the next twenty years I came to know him increasingly well, first as his student, then commenting on his theology and lecturing on it regularly, then simply as a visitor and friend, walking the streets of Munich or Innsbruck, Prague or Boston, talking theology, swapping stories, ordering ice cream and the occasional Manhattan—he loved the cherries.

"What was he like?

"Well, certainly he was *curious*, the man of endless questioning. He loved escalators and roller coasters, their adventure and excitement. When once he tried a blood pressure test in a department store and, malfunctioning, it set off an alarm, there was instant panic: the great man, it was thought, was having a heart attack.

"Even more, he was *creative*. In bridging the worlds of neoscholasticism and the new Church of the Council and the late twentieth century, for example. Or in recovering the unity behind the different branches of theology. But also in appropriating radical ideas, on mystery or evolution or the future. (Of Martin Heidegger's notion of mystery, while I was a student with him, he remembered

⁶An audiotape of Rahner speaking in German was heard by the entire banquet, this being of course an English translation. An English translation of the entire tape is available in "Karl Rahner at 75 Years of Age," in *Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews 1965–1982*, ed. Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons, trans./ed. Harvey D. Egan (New York: Crossroad, 1986) 189, 190.

not even that there *was* one, but of course made the Holy Mystery of God a centerpiece of his thought.)

"And so he never stopped thinking, probing, wondering, teaching, learning. At Weston in 1979, when at a student forum someone asked him what role imagination played in his thought, I translated his answer as: 'All knowledge begins with sensation,' and he quickly, vigorously corrected me, thundering: 'No, no, all knowledge remains bound to sensation.' When a Jesuit scholastic then asked him what we could hope for from the new pope (it was 1979), he thundered again: 'You must get over'—it required no translation—'diese monarchische Monomanie!'

"Karl was also in a way *childlike*, with a certain innocence and naiveté about him. When he was awarded an honorary degree at Yale, he told us back in Münster how disappointed he was that they had not let him bring 'das kleine Hütchen (hat)' home with him. . . . When, after cutbacks in the faculty of psychology, student protestors interrupted one of his afternoon lecturers, he kept repeating from the stage until the forty-five minutes were over: 'Let me teach my catechism!' In an innocent way he was also delighted with the window in San Francisco's Grace Cathedral that shows him among the great theological reformers.

"He was also surely, in his own sober way, *caring*. There are countless letters with appeals for help of one kind or another, which he often answered, and until the end of his life, on his own.

"Admiring courage, he was himself *courageous*, as a person and as a theologian. Trying quietly to mediate a reconciliation between Hans Küng and the Vatican, he bore with being treated, as he told me, 'wie ein Hofnar' (like a court jester). Furious that his friend J. B. Metz was denied a chair at the University of Munich after it had been offered to him, he wrote his stinging 'Ich protestiere!' in *Publik Forum*. Again and again at the Würzburger Synode, he rose to plea for greater openness and democratic spirit in the church.

"The memories seem to be endless. And fortunately we have his late essay, 'Ignatius of Loyola Speaks to a Modern Jesuit' (1978), which he referred to as his last will and testament.⁷ But however truly and lovingly we seek to remember him, he is gone now from our earthly vision. All four of the giants we commemorate at this convention, have gone from us, one after another.

"Where are they now, friends, the great theologians we remember and honor here?

"The question can only finally be answered in prayer: 'Where, gracious God, holy mystery of our lives, loving wisdom, where is *ton fils* Yves? Where is your son Bernard? Your son John? *Dein Sohn* Karl?'

"Let us listen for the answer.

⁷Cf. Leo J. O'Donovan, S.J., "A Journey into Time: The Legacy of Karl Rahner's Last Years," *Theological Studies* 46 (1985): 621-46, at 625.

"As for Karl Rahner, I ask myself: 'Is it conceivable that he is not now embraced in the hands of the Holy Mystery of God, united wholly with the Lord who suffered, died, rose and called him, and us all, home to the communion of saints, empowered by the Spirit to become forever more the love to which he surrendered his entire life?'"

"And I kneel now not before his genius and accomplishments, but before his holiness.

"Let us be worthy, good friends, of these great men who have gone before us."

Conclusion

Ginter: "We conclude this centenarian commemoration with a word of thanks, *un merci beaucoup, ein danke schoen*. Thanks to my coworkers in Administrative and Academic Computing at Saint Meinrad School of Theology for their technical assistance. Thanks to those who shared memories and those who linked the present to the past with video and audio connections. Thanks to those other members of the Society and officers who helped to bring about this commemoration. Let me offer now a final word, a prayer really, in verse."

1904–2004 for Four

Congar, Lonergan, Murray, and Rahner:
For theology, giants to ponder.
French, Canadian, 'Merican, German:
Each one contributed his learnin'.

Twentieth-century Catholicism
Would not be what it is without them.
To study, to teach, to suffer, to heal:
All four showed how to remain faithfill'.

Yves, you yearned for unity in the Church.
Bernard, you gave method for the search.
John, you led Vatican II's religious freedom.
Karl, you wrote a phenomenal sum.

With the Church glorious we hope you are.
The Church struggling today we are.
Pray, friends, as we your births commemorate
All may someday God's face contemplate. Amen.

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