

## **RAHNER CONSULTATION**

Convener:	Mark F. Fischer, St. John's Seminary, Camarillo
Moderator:	Paulette Skiba, B.V.M., Clarke University
Presenter:	Robert Lassalle-Klein, Holy Names University
Respondent:	Ann Riggs, Rivier College
Presenter:	Richard Lennan, Boston College
Respondent:	Shannon Craigo-Snell, Louisville Seminary

More than twenty participants heard Robert Lassalle-Klein summarize his paper, "Elements of an Intercultural Rahnerian Approach to Trinitarian and Fundamental Theology for a Global Church." In the first part of the paper, the author sketched Rahner's metaphysics of being. It stands in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition of hylomorphism, the doctrine that all creatures are composed of matter and form. God is the absolute Being who expresses the divine self in historical beings, preeminently in the incarnate Word. Lassalle-Klein criticized hylomorphism in general, and Rahnerian metaphysics in particular, for creating "a dichotomy between sense data and thought."

The second part of the paper described a "reconstruction" of Rahner's thought by the Salvadorian theologian, Ignacio Ellacuría. Although grateful for Rahner's inspiration, Ellacuría departed from his master by abandoning hylomorphism. In its place, Ellacuría substituted the concept of "sentient intelligence" drawn from the Spanish philosopher, Xavier Zubiri, who judged hylomorphism to be "pre-scientific" and "reductionist." Zubiri's sentient intelligence was considered superior because it was "sense-based" and did not treat matter as mere "sense data." Ellacuría's abandonment of hylomorphism implied a rejection of Rahner's "metaphysics of being" in favor of a "metaphysics of historical reality." In it, reality is no longer an abstraction called being (said Lassalle-Klein) but rather the actualization of things "in their own right."

The final part of the paper unfolded Ellacuría's critique of Rahner for global theologies. Rahner's theology of the symbol—specifically his view that the Church is the symbol of Christ—elevates the Church too highly, said Ellacuría. The Church, well represented in the "crucified people of God," ought to view itself more humbly. It is at best a "sign" of Christ, not a symbol of Christ in the full-blown Rahnerian sense.

In her response, Ann Riggs said that Ellacuría and Zubiri did not criticize Rahner's ideas so much as adapt and en flesh them. In her view, "hylomorphism is precisely what Zubiri is himself trying to articulate" in his concept of sentient intelligence. To say that "sensing is a kind of knowing" (Zubiri) is a translation, she said, of the agent intellect "always already" present in the unity of apperception (Rahner).

Richard Lennan presented the second paper, entitled "'Narcissistic Aestheticism': An Assessment of Karl Rahner's Sacramental Ecclesiology." The title referred to Avery Dulles' critique of the concept of the church as sacrament. According to Dulles, a view of the Church as a "sacrament" (in Rahner's sense) can become self-absorbed ("narcissistic") and smugly complacent ("aestheticism").

Lennan offered a three-part defense of Rahner's ecclesiology. In the first part, he summarized six supposed claims by Rahner about the Church. All of them express the insight that the visible Church is not God but reveals God in its proclamation and mission.

In part two, Lennan summarized Rahner's treatment of heresy to illustrate how the Church includes members "whose inner dispositions do not align with the faith of the

community.” Rahner had distinguished between “classical” heresies, explicitly expressed in historical texts, and heresies of the twentieth century. The latter are less explicitly expressed, but nevertheless deserve the title “heresy” because they are not “consonant with authentic ecclesial faith.” (Rahner’s example was “attitudes of resentment toward those in authority.”) How can one be a believer and also maintain such a “heretical” faith? Rahner’s answer, said Lennan, was that such “heresies” are little more than a product of their time. Those who hold them may not even know them to be heretical.

Finally, Lennan responded to the argument that the concept of Church as sacrament leads members “to bask in the church’s privileged status,” failing to see “that the church exists for discipleship and service.” These members are no longer self-critical, said Lennan, but self-criticism is essential to a sacramental Church. Rahner advocated a “practical theology,” a theology of right action, which asks the Church to measure its activity in light of the ideal to which God calls it.

In her response to Lennan, Shannon Craigo-Snell affirmed his position that Rahner’s view of the Church as a sacrament was not a “narcissistic aestheticism.” Rahner’s theology did not fit the “expansionist model” (as Robert Schreiter has defined it, a model dominated by the ideal of planting churches) but better expressed the “solidarity model” of dialogue, inculturation, and liberation. For Rahner, mission was not the effort by Christians to colonize the world, but rather to offer hope for all in a future that belongs to God.

MARK F. FISCHER  
*St. John’s Seminary*  
*Camarillo, California*