

KARL RAHNER ON EXPERIENCE

THE KARL RAHNER SOCIETY

The Karl Rahner Society academic gathering on Friday, June 12, discussed "Nature, Grace, and Experience: Karl Rahner's Theology of Human Transformation," by J. A. DiNoia (Dominican House of Studies), "Rahner on the Human Experience of God: Idealist Tautology or Christian Theology?" by Mary V. Maher (Seminary of the Immaculate Conception), and "The Experience of Grace in Relation to Rahner's Philosophy of the Heart" (a philosophical response to DiNoia and Maher), by Andrew F. Tallon (Marquette University). Prayer was held on behalf of John Carmody, recently diagnosed as having a serious form of cancer, and his wife Denise Lardner Carmody, both members of the Karl Rahner Society. A brief prayer by Rahner himself was also read.

DiNoia's paper amplifies the proposal that Rahner's theology is in basic agreement with Aquinas on the issues of the primacy of uncreated grace and the relation of nature and grace. But with respect to the "transcendental conceptuality" of the experience of grace, DiNoia finds a significant difference between Rahner and Aquinas.

Both Rahner and Aquinas emphasize participation and communion in their explanations of the supernatural order. Against "extrinsicism," Rahner holds that humankind's history is embraced in the Trinity's "overarching intention" to bring persons into communion with the triune God (the supernatural existential). Against the *nouvelle théologie*, Rahner suggested a need to maintain the notion of "pure nature" (for Aquinas, more simply of "nature") at least as a "remainder concept." In this way an "account of the states and capacities" of human creatures could be given, even in this supernatural world. Aquinas, for his part, was correcting Western theological tendencies to stress divine gratuity and transcendence in a juridical manner by rather preferring personalist and ontological categories. His own synthesis of Western and Greek patristic theology was not unlike Rahner's own *ressourcement* in this respect.

Yet DiNoia suggests that Rahner "seems to diverge" from Aquinas even as he (Rahner) claims an appropriately transcendental reading of Aquinas. Although DiNoia knows that Rahner insists to the contrary, still he finds that, for Rahner, the supernatural orientation of humans "somehow requires objects . . . yet seems to bypass them in an odd way." In other words, one gains the impression that Rahner accepts an "unmediated" experience of God "in some sense." DiNoia's arguments for this are subtle and cumulative (a "confusion" between *ens commune* and the "Absolute Being" of German idealism; a confusion between the knowledge of faith and that of vision, etc.). It is not the experience of grace,

but Rahner's "largely transcendental account" of it that seems the problem. As a result it may be inevitable that the experience of grace will be thought of as an "orientation and transformation of consciousness." Or, as put earlier by DiNoia, the supernatural existential is not only an orientation "but a preliminary, preconceptual experience of the divine" in Rahner's thought.

Metz' critique of Rahner, as abbreviated in Metz' rendition of the hare and hedgehog fable, is the lens through which Maher presents Rahner, suggesting that Metz' critique is not unrelated to some of the "postmodern" criticisms of Rahner as well. Maher's paper unfolds in three parts: an exposition of those features of Rahner's anthropology which perhaps render it susceptible to Metz' critique of idealist tautology; an analysis of Metz' critique; and concluding and tentative proposals. Basic features of Rahner's anthropology are noted: the God-human relation as christologically determined ("unmixed" and "undivided"), the elements involved in his view of the conversion to the phantasm (especially the historical nature of the God-human relation), the analogous understanding of the experience of God, etc. Features of Metz' critique are succinctly displayed as well: Rahner has a theory of history, but sacrifices really concrete history to that idealist theory; the "always already" of transcendental philosophy is a sort of "magic circle" which eliminates any difference between beginning and ending, thus emptying history of any reality.

Maier notes both a moderate (transcendental philosophy needs amplification) and extreme (transcendental philosophy simply needs to be left behind) form of the Metzian critique existing simultaneously in Metz. She herself "somewhat" agrees with the legitimacy of the former; i.e., Rahner at times needs to develop more fully the historical dimension of existence. But she also suggests that Rahner is able to give a critical account "of what one *does* when one actually turns to the [historical] data" through his transcendental analysis, and that without this one surrenders to a hopeless pluralism and relativism, denying the universal element in Christianity. The God-human relation is circular (noncompetitively) but not tautologous. It is that circularity which accounts for the "radically experiential" nature of Rahner's theology, thus preserving the "logos" character of theology. What for Rahner is a circle seems transposed into a tautology by Metz.

Tallon's "philosophical" soundings are meant to suggest that the critiques put forward are rather "misunderstandings." "Rahner cannot be accused of knowing too much, like some Hegelian hedgehog, because his answer is not material but formal, i.e., it is a method." And Tallon suggests that we look especially to the ethical and mystical writings of Rahner to grasp how this method is actualized. Rahner's philosophy of the heart (suggestively explored by Tallon), like Aquinas' connaturality, suggests that "discursive reason and deliberate will are not the best we can do but are stages of finite spirit on its way to non-discursive quasi-intuitive knowing and spontaneous love without will acts." Tallon does not want to dodge the notion of an experience of God or grace, but to suggest that we find in Rahner a view of the development of such experience.

Tallon's notion of "development" in experience might prove helpful in thinking through the relation between the transcendental and the historical dimensions of faith experience. Rahner's notion of "mediated [the historical] immediacy [the transcendental]" might also prove fruitful. Discussion was cut short by time constraints, but there was a vigorous sense that the transcendental dimension in Rahner needs thorough airing. Its connections with idealism, the manner in which the latter is modified by Rahner, and its role in theology, going back to the "Platonic" current in Aquinas, to Augustine, and to Plato deserves study.

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