

KARL RAHNER SOCIETY

KARL RAHNER ON TRAGEDY AND *APOKATASTASIS*

Presenters: Paul Crowley, Santa Clara University
Carmel McEnroy, Bristow, Indiana

Although focusing on different topics, the two papers under discussion in this session had clear points of convergence, particularly around the category of hope in Rahner's thought. Crowley made the initial presentation dealing with the treatment of Christian pessimism in Rahner's thought. Rahner is often accused of having an overly optimistic view of life, of not dealing adequately with the evil and suffering which is the common human experience. Crowley pointed out that this hopeful view of reality is contextualized within what Rahner calls a Christian pessimism. This Christian pessimism, rooted in Rahner's understanding of original sin, requires the Christian to approach human existence with a certain sober realism. An historical entanglement in guilt shapes the actualization of freedom by human beings. Accepting reality means that the Christian recognizes human existence as marked by sin, suffering and death. But it is precisely in and through this reality that true hope is revealed. For Rahner, hope neither consists in evading the negative in life through an escapist piety nor merely in human determination not to despair in face of tragedy. Hope in the context of Christian pessimism reveals that only God saves and that ultimate redemption belongs to the future in God. In this context, Crowley deals with the thorny issues of God's involvement in human suffering and the extent to which God can be said to suffer with us. In both cases Rahner finds traditional explanations inadequate. Ultimately, for Rahner, the incomprehensibility of human suffering is caught up in the incomprehensibility of God. Here the theology of the cross becomes central. The suffering and death of Jesus on the cross reveals eschatological hope for all. Christian pessimism is the condition for the possibility of an authentic Christian optimism.

While Crowley moved from pessimism to hope, McEnroy began her paper with hope and moved to contextualize that hope within the reality of the experience of human evil. McEnroy locates Rahner's theology of universal salvation within the dialectic of grace and freedom. Although Rahner's theology may seem weighted toward a positive evaluation of the possibility of universal

salvation or *apokatastasis*, this is tempered by his insistence that freedom is constitutive of human being. God's gift of salvation must be received, and may be rejected, in human freedom. McEnroy focused her paper primarily on those issues she considers most problematic in relation to *apokatastasis*: evil, hell, freedom and hope. She finds the key to Rahner's approach to universal salvation in his theology of hope. We can have a "firm hope" of salvation but not a sure hope. Jesus' eschatological discourses do not negate this hope for universal salvation. Rahner deals with these discourses on hell by pointing out that, whatever conclusions exegetes come to about the origins and contexts of such texts, the possibility of hell does not necessarily imply the actual damnation of individuals. Nevertheless, there remains the *possibility* of human beings, in freedom, persisting in evil and so deserving the punishment of hell. For Rahner, however, this choice would be an absurd and contradictory use of human freedom. One must maintain the hope that evil can be conquered and that human beings will ultimately choose good over evil. This transformation has already begun in the death and resurrection of Jesus. McEnroy concluded her paper with a proposal to develop Rahner's thought beyond an individualistic approach to salvation by entering into dialogue with contemporary systemic models. The traditional categories of salvation and redemption, sin and evil need to be reimagined in the light of present experience. Systemic theories help unmask the evil imbedded in unexamined systems and point to the interconnectedness among human beings, which suggests that the salvation of one is implicated in the salvation of all. The two papers precipitated lively discussion.

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RENAISSANCE/MODERN THEOLOGY

DEVELOPMENT OF CATHOLIC THEOLOGY IN NORTH AMERICA IN THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Presenter: Gerald Fogarty, University of Virginia

The presentation opened with a statement of theological themes that were present and influential in the early nineteenth century and which later became