

## KARL RAHNER SOCIETY

- Convener: Paulette Skiba, Clarke University  
Moderator: Jessica Murdoch, Villanova University  
Presenters: Andreas R. Batlogg, Karl Rahner-Archiv, München  
Peter Joseph Fritz, University of Notre Dame  
Leo O'Donovan, Georgetown University

Andreas Batlogg in his paper, "How Subversive are Saints Allowed to Be: Saints as Trend Setters in Karl Rahner's Theology," built on Rahner's description of the canonized saints as masterpieces (*Kunstwerke*) and role models (*Vorbilder*), that is to say, exemplars of humanity. Having been canonized by the church, they are successful and accomplished, in short, they have arrived (*Angekommene*) and so they point with their individual biographies beyond themselves as ambassadors of God's triumphant grace. For Rahner, the canonized saints have a specific task; they set a new style and are trend-setting, as they give an authentic witness to a new type of Christian life. Therein lay a hidden tension. How subversive are saints allowed to be? How well-behaved do they have to be to get canonized? Batlogg pointed to sermon given in 1953 on the eve of the Feast of Aloysius Gonzaga, (just published in the volume 13 of the *Sämliche Werke*), as an example of Rahner's expressed concern about the way in which young saints with excessively hagiographic biographies could function as support for a "domesticated" and narrow Christian life satisfied with a bourgeois existence. At the conclusion of his paper, Batlogg asked if the seeming reluctance to move such men and women as Archbishop Oscar Romero towards canonization is not a symptom of this preference for "safer" and less challenging models of holiness in the church.

In his paper, "Between Center and Periphery: Mary and the Saints in Rahner," Peter Joseph Fritz argued that, because of his robust Catholicism, Rahner places the saints not at his theology's center, but in a liminal space between its center and its periphery. A close reading of Rahner's Marian writings reveals that Mary, if she does not reside at the center of Rahner's theology, allows us access to this center. Rahner contends that one should recognize Mary as the first among the communion of saints, the historical predecessors of human fulfillment. The saints occupy a liminal space on the edge of his theology's center, i.e., human fulfillment. By resisting the temptation to make Mary or the saints the determinate center of his theology, Rahner enacts the ethos that makes Catholicism so unique. It consists in letting a multiplicity of things hang together without scrambling to fix them or reduce them to an isolable and stable core. Human fulfillment is the *moving* center of Rahner's theology.

Leo O'Donovan in his paper, "In All Seasons: Karl Rahner on All the Saints," began with an analysis of "Why and How Can We Venerate the Saints?" which Rahner wrote in 1964 on the theological foundations for Chapter VII of the Second Vatican Council's "Constitution on the Church." In this essay, Rahner grounds a theology of veneration of the saints in the unity of love of God and neighbor and the unity of love for Creator and creature. Since each life in Christ has significance

for all, the invocation of an “official saint” or of any person among the redeemed is always an invocation inclusive of the whole community of saints in God. O’Donovan then considered earlier essays that foreshadowed Rahner’s mature position, especially “The Church of the Saints” (1955), “The Church of Sinners” (1947), aspects of *Encounters with Silence* (1938) and *On Prayer* (1949) and the previously unpublished “Assumptio-Arbeit” (1951) (*Sämtliche Werke* 9, Freiburg: Herder, 2004). Here, Rahner was developing his understanding that the “official” saints indicate that beyond death, every life in Christ shares in the silence of God’s unspeakable love. In the third section, O’Donovan focused on later developments, particularly Rahner’s emphasis on solidarity as not only a moral, but also an ontological category for the human condition. For Rahner, Mary is decisive as a sign of hope that the promise of salvation has been fulfilled and this evidence of salvation is seen in the world, even now in the lives of the living. O’Donovan drew upon Elizabeth Johnson’s theology establishing solidarity as mutual responsibility to illustrate Rahner’s description of our relationship to Mary, the saints and to one another. In the final section, O’Donovan evaluated the continuing relevance of Rahner’s diagnosis of the religious situation of his time. Rahner saw a diminished role for the saints emerging but there are signs this has not been borne out. His presentation concluded with the question whether Rahner himself could be considered a saint. In response, O’Donovan offered an adaptation of a passage found in *Encounters with Silence*: he lives for us in a silence that echoes God’s silence and his voice now speaks in unison with God.

At our Friday morning breakfast, Andreas R. Batlogg gave an update on the progression of the *Sämtliche Werke* (SW). Since 2010, three volumes have been published, SW 28: *Christentum in Gesellschaft. Schriften zur Pastoral, zur Jugend und zur christlichen Weltgestaltung*, edited by Andreas Batlogg and Walter Schmolly and SW 24 (part 1 and 2): *Das Konzil in der Ortskirche. Schriften zu Struktur und gesellschaftlichem Auftrag der Kirche*, edited by Albert Raffelt and Ulrich Ruh. Twenty-seven of the projected thirty-two volumes are thus completed. Further information about upcoming volumes and the annual Rahner lectures are on the *Rahner-Archiv* website. Batlogg’s full update is posted on the Karl Rahner Society website.

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