

RAHNER—CONSULTATION

Convener: Peter Joseph Fritz, College of the Holy Cross
Moderator: Richard Penaskovic, Auburn University
Presenters: Mark F. Fischer, St. John's Seminary, Camarillo
Nancy Dallavalle, Fairfield University
Annemarie S. Kidder, Central School of Theology

The Karl Rahner breakfast preceded this year's Rahner Consultation. Thomas O'Meara offered a prayer in Rahner's words. O'Meara and Leo O'Donovan, S.J., told stories about personal encounters with Rahner. Mark F. Fischer reported on the *Sämtliche Werke*: vol. 7, *Der betende Christ*, which appeared in 2012; the much-anticipated vol. 21 on Vatican II should appear later in 2013; two others (1 and 22.1) will closely follow. Richard Penaskovic facilitated an animated discussion on R. R. Reno's article "Rahner the Restorationist." Many participants expressed the continued need to respond intelligently to critiques of Rahner. Nancy Dallavalle and Richard Lennan were elected as new members of the Karl Rahner Society (KRS) Steering Committee. Mark F. Fischer was named the new coordinator. The KRS formally thanked Heidi Russell for her generous years of service as coordinator. In addition, the society acknowledged outgoing Steering Committee member Melvin Michalski for his contributions to the society and Rahner scholarship.

The Saturday afternoon session featured three rich and varied papers. Mark F. Fischer's "Rahner's Transcendental Christology and Conversion to God" examined Rahner's 1972 Christology in *Christologie—systematisch und exegetisch* (coauthored with W. Thüsing). Fischer argued that Rahner's transcendental Christology has the chief merit of helping theologians to articulate a theologically rigorous and genuinely ecclesial Christianity.

Fischer chose five mainly critical interlocutors to unpack five aspects of Rahner's Christology. Michel Henry's phenomenology, with its focus on God's eternal self-manifestation, highlights Rahner's phenomenology of the human longing to encounter the self-revealing God. Roger Haight's objection that Rahner's Logos Christology is too "high" nevertheless shows Rahner's seriousness about Christ's revelation of the Father's will. Patrick Burke's criticism of Rahner's unclarity regarding the one person of Christ underscores Rahner's respect for the mystery of the Incarnation. John McDermott's discomfort with the neologism "quasi-formal causality" stems from Rahner's account of God's "intrinsic" salvific operation in humanity. Donald Gelpi's charge that Rahner's Christology is beholden to outdated Greek metaphysics shows Rahner's commitment to dogmatic tradition. Though it may invite objections, Rahner's Christology creatively witnesses to God's invitation for human persons to turn toward God's will.

Nancy Dallavalle's "Conversion on Gender Issues for Catholic Theology?: Resources from Rahner" gathered insights from Rahner's writings on symbol, the church, and the fundamental option to apply to gender issues. Dallavalle contended that, despite Rahner's almost complete silence on gender, resources exist within his theology to fortify Catholic theological reflection on conversion away from sexism.

Dallavalle proposed that one could extend the project of Rahner's 1959 essay, "The Theology of the Symbol," and could reflect on "woman" to see how this

symbol functions in theological anthropology. Such reflection would also apply to ecclesiology, given the varied use of feminine language in ecclesiology during and after Vatican II: the absence of “woman” in *Sacrosanctum concilium*, the presence of feminine metaphors for the Church in *Lumen gentium*, the prominence of feminine (especially Marian) images in the postconciliar ecclesiologies of Joseph Ratzinger and Karl Wojtyła, and the absence of feminine language in Rahner’s ecclesiological writings. Finally, Rahner’s moral-theological idea of the fundamental option could prompt an exploration of the “intimacy” or depth dimension of sexism. Conversion from sexism entails a turning of the whole person away from sexism. Rahner’s theology, then, could contribute to a deeper theological response to sexism than, for example, “strategic essentialisms.”

Annemarie Kidder’s “Karl Rahner’s ‘Last Will’” drew from her recent translation of Rahner’s 1978 lecture “*Rede des Ignatius von Loyola an einen Jesuiten von heute*,” in which Rahner assumes the persona of Ignatius to speak to twentieth-century Jesuits. Conversion is his foremost theme. Kidder maintained that the Ignatius lecture, Rahner’s “last will and testament,” sets forth a theology of conversion centered on an immediate encounter with God, a view of the church as “channel of salvation,” and a life patterned on Jesus Christ’s saving work.

For Kidder, Ignatius’s immediate encounter with God establishes the context for anything Rahner says about conversion, whether in the Ignatius speech or in his theology more generally. Conversion for Rahner is primarily a turn *toward* God. For Ignatius/Rahner, the mission of the Jesuits (and by extension, all Christians) has its axis in the personal experience of God. This personal experience is at once direct and mystical, hence the adjective “immediate,” but, paradoxically, it is always mediated through Christ and his Church. Ignatius/Rahner tells the Jesuits that their charge is to be mystagogues: to help others to experience—and thus to convert toward—the God who offers God’s self to us in immediate nearness.

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