

KARL RAHNER AT BELLARMINE AND GETHSEMANI

KARL RAHNER AT BELLARMINE: A Report by Fr. Clyde F. Crews



Father Clyde Crews and Father Karl Rahner

from Bellarmine, Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Spalding College, the University of Louisville and St. Meinrad Seminary. Dr. Rahner was presented with a captaincy of the Belle of Louisville and was named a Kentucky Colonel by proclamation of Kentucky's Governor Julian Carroll. Rahner's faithful and friendly companion and translator, Fr. Paul Imhof was also introduced to the theological gathering. In the afternoon, Fr. Rahner toured the historical sites of Bardstown and concluded with a visit to the Abbey of Gethsemani. There he spoke to the monks in chapter, attending vespers in the Abbey Church, and was feted at a dinner by Gethsemani's abbot, Fr. Timothy Kelly.

Fr. Rahner flew out of Louisville the morning of April 5th. He left behind him a set of vivid memories for those who visited and travelled with him.

Famous theological visitors have often found their way to the Louisville area: Brigham Young, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Walter Rauschenbusch in the 19th century; and in the 20th, Reinhold Niebuhr, Maritain, Marcel, Heschel, Lonergan, Kung, Pannenberg, and Merton. Still, the visit of German Jesuit Father Karl Rahner to Bellarmine College from April 2-5, 1979, marks a bit of a theological milestone in this old city with so many varied and venerable religious roots.

Most theological historians of our time nominate Barth, Tillich, and Rahner to the roster of the most influential Christian theologians of the twentieth century. Rahner's impact on the Second Vatican Council was enormous and his **Theological Investigations** fill some fifteen volumes. His **Foundations of Christian Faith**, published in English in 1978, is considered to be one of the landmarks of the decade in the theological world.

Rahner, now 75 years of age and residing in Munich, was invited by the members of the theology department of Bellarmine to spend several days of the early spring in Kentucky with them. He readily accepted, making Louisville one of only five stops on his American tour.

The last full day of Fr. Rahner's stay in Kentucky, April 4, began with a reception at the Bellarmine Merton Center for philosophers and theologians

Fr. Rahner's Remarks At Gethsemani

(Note: Fr. Rahner's remarks to the monks were, for the most part, delivered in English. His remarks in German (and translated by members of his party) are enclosed in parentheses.)

Introduction by Fr. Timothy Kelly, Abbot

It's a great honor to have Fr. Rahner in our midst. Although he's been avoiding speaking to audiences, he very willingly, happily, agreed to speak to us. So, we are very grateful to him; and we really don't have to say who Fr. Rahner is... you've all heard him from this chair (Abbatial chair in Chapter room), in case you didn't know.

(Fr. Rahner in English)

You must hear my excuses, for I cannot speak English. It is very difficult — the lack of capacity to speak in English. Secondly, it is very difficult for me... for what can I say to you?

Fr. Rahner in German

(Father says he has two difficulties: one the language, and secondly, the content of what he should say to people like you. He says you are people who live in the silence with God and he is a more wordly person, although he is a priest and a Jesuit. It is still difficult for him to say what he should bring you. In the present day world there is a great difficulty even among those people who do not deny the existence of God. There are people who attempt to say that God is there for them and not they for God. You must show the people who are living in the world that man is for God, to live for God, and to pray to Him, and not the other way.)

(If you have any questions for Fr. Rahner —)

Br. Michael:

It's been important in your own life, the relation between spirituality and theology. I was wondering if you would have some comment on the relation between spirituality and theology.

Fr. Rahner:

Spirituality has a heavy or great intellectual content. One element of spirituality herself is a knowledge, for we are called to see God. We are called to see God face to face; but theology is a secondary reflection about this knowledge which is an inner element of spirituality. Therefore theology must serve spirituality: to adore God, to love him. Theology is no "l'art pour l'art" (art for art's sake). Theology is very secondary — *(Theology is secondary; spirituality is first. The first level is theology and the second level is theology, that is, a reflection about spirituality.)*

Fr. Felix:

One of the brothers wanted to know if you could say something about Guardini? He had the impression you were close to Romano Guardini.

Fr. Rahner:

It is very difficult to say. The first time I knew Romano Guardini was at the age of 21. During my studies in Jesuit theology I had no connection. Guardini belonged to those people in the theology of Germany who transcended the narrow circle of Neo-Scholasticism. Guardini was a man who broke the limits of Neo-Scholastic theology. Guardini would never become a scientific theologian. He told me one day that in the time of modernism he had received such a trauma, a theological trauma, that he would never involve himself in scientific theology. Therefore, he more described the attitude of the spiritual man: in faith, in love, and in secular world. That he has done in a marvelous way. In such manner he avoided, a priori, all danger of conflict with the Magisterium. I can understand it, but I cannot do this always. *(He was a very*

pious man.)

Br. Raphael:

Can you comment on the theology of Hans Kung?

Fr. Rahner:

First, Hans Kung wills entirely to serve the Church and the Christian faith. On the other hand, he believes that he will speak to the limit, i.e., the living contact with the man of today cannot be without a certain change of the faith; some dogmas of the Church cannot be retained. In the future the... So he denied the infallibility of the pope and he expresses the mystery of the Incarnation in such a way that it is not absolutely clear that he retains the dogma of Chalcedon. Today there can perhaps be observed a certain decline in the reputation of Kung in Germany, as his new book about the existence of God did not have the same success as the book **Christ Sein (On Being A Christian)**. It seems that he had not half the sales as in **Christ Sein**. (*So, the new book sold only half as many copies as the former book.*) But it seems to me that the attitude of the German bishops— first the attitude of Cardinal Döpfner with his carefulness— was right.

Br. Daniel:

Could you reply in some measure to Hans Urs von Balthasar and Martin Kasper's reservations about your transcendental theological approach to Christology?

Fr. Rahner:

Oh my! I can't give a clear answer. My... I believe that the Christology of Hans Urs von Balthasar is merely ... he doesn't have a transcendent Christology. I believe that the man of today desires a Christology which reaches from the dogma of the Church about Christ, but begins where we "exist". Then perhaps there is a deep difference, because for me Balthasar has a doctrine of the trinity which I can never accept. Certainly Balthasar will be an absolutely orthodox theologian— but there is really doubt if I am also. But on the other hand, for me his doctrine of the Trinity is a "tristesse" (Of sadness, bleakness) doctrine. If he, for example, speaks about the "cadaver" obedience of St. Ignatius, he means the Son as the 2nd Person in the Trinity, and not merely in His humanity. I cannot understand Balthasar when he speaks of that kind of obedience in the 2nd Person of the Trinity as God in relation to the Father. He or she (Adrienne von Speyr) or both developed a speculative doctrine of the Trinity which is not for me admissible; but I have never written anything against Balthasar— but he in **Cordula (Cordula oder der Ernstfall)** strongly attacked me. It is perhaps that I don't acknowledge a profound and deep difference between the religious and secular institutes. He left the Jesuits only because he was convinced that he must by "order of God" found such a secular institute. That only has meaning if the secular institute is itself different from our religious order. That I denied. This was the first reason for the difference between him and me. But the normal evolution of the secular institutes tends to that of becoming... (*The secular institute tends to become a separate religious order. Balthasar denies that. He (Fr. Rahner) says that he believes that Balthasar is one of the deepest and many-sided, outstanding theologians of Germany. He has a very close contact with (Karl) Barth, with (Paul) Claudel, and with the whole French school of theology and spirituality. He writes as well in French as he does in German. He plays Mozart very well— that's one of the reasons there is a friendship with Karl Barth. They both lived in Basel. He has many, many talents: he is a philosopher, a poet, a theologian— he plays music well— he can deduce very well the theory of Evagrius Ponticus, Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Fathers. He never had close contact with Scholasticism. He made his studies in Lyons, where in this time lived (Henri de) Lubac and other French theologians who were concerned with patristicism— but he always avoided the Neo-Scholastics. He has written a very good and profound commentary about some articles in the German version of St. Thomas Aquinas. It goes on and it is marvelous how the thing is done by Balthasar. Nevertheless, he hasn't the clearness and the sobriety of Scholastic theology and therefore his deep theology never was received by the general consciousness of the Church in Germany.*) I believe that one can only avoid the medical (medicinal) impression of the doctrine of grace if we... the point of connection between man and grace is seen in his transcendentality. Grace is the radicalization of the transcendentality of man, and in such a way the gratuitousness of grace can be reconciled. This reconciliation is impossible without grace being seen as the radicalization of the transcendentality of man.