

A Theology of Glory

HAMISH SWANSTON

In the introduction to his admirable translation of Karl Rahner's *Schriften zur Theologie, I*,¹ Fr Cornelius Ernst begins by pointing out that Rahner is a theologian totally competent in the study of the past. Editor of Denzinger's *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, and co-editor of the *Lexicon für Theologie und Kirche*, Rahner has obvious qualifications in the presentation of what has so far been achieved in theology. But he is more than an historian. He works in the present, the studies collected here are concerned with matters of moment, not with past disputes. He works in the present for the future when we shall know all that has already been revealed. In his paper on the Assumption he concludes with a remark that characterises his whole effort:

Perhaps the deepest reason why Protestantism rejects the new dogma is because really it is only aware of a theology of the Cross as a formula for reality here and now, and not a theology of glory; for Protestantism this is ultimately only a promise, and not something which exists 'even now', although it has not embraced everything yet and for us here below has not yet become apparent.

He is a passionate theologian who is convinced of the moral duty to understand the revelation of God as a dynamic power in history, to see what was once given in history as demanding our commitment, as something which 'must ever be acquired anew by us', to see that when God reveals himself we are given an incitement to renew our friendship with him, to make a beginning once more, to see that when we are given a definition by the magisterium of the Church 'we have not only the right but the duty to look at it as end and as beginning'. He makes large demands of his fellow theologians, moral demands, that they should realise that 'what everybody knows and what has long since been cleared up doesn't perhaps count for much' and they have a duty to investigate new questions, to inquire more curiously into their assumptions and to accept the obligation of the intellectual to renew our appreciation of God's revelation and to treat theological questions

¹THEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS, VOL. I, GOD, CHRIST, MARY AND GRACE; by Karl Rahner, translated with an introduction by Cornelius Ernst, O.P.; Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 63s.

with respect and not discuss 'briefly and casually what clearly deserves precise and detailed treatment'. The theologian must be prepared to take risks, to propose a route by which he himself has never travelled and to be patient if there is nothing much at the end. The man who despises preliminary reflexions of this conjectural and tentative kind has already assumed that we have now fully understood revelation and translated it all into theological intelligibility; such a view Rahner characterises as 'strictly blasphemous'.

The typical beginning of a Rahner argument is 'Let us put the question in a different way . . .' He has understood the primary importance of asking the right questions, and of not forgetting the answers that other men have arrived at. Thus history is important not only for the answers it provides but also for the questions which it has shewn to be not properly formulated—history is important for the renewal in the present. Anyone who takes history seriously, particularly the history of theology, must see that neither the abandonment of a formula nor its preservation in a petrified form does justice to human understanding; theology must continually preserve the old by becoming new:

If this were not the case, there would never have been Councils of the Church with their definitions, because a new age would always have been able to live on in old clarity.

And we become new by a vital return to the sources, a return which does not deny history but is the return of men who have been given by God a particular historical context by their inheritance, men who must return to the scriptures acknowledging that all theology is 'primarily Biblical theory'. Here Rahner asks a devastating question:

Is it rash or unjust to say that among Catholic writers, the professional exegetes in this field do not practise Biblical theology, and that the dogmatic theologians know or make use of only those parts of the Scriptures which they require in order to prove . . . theses which have been laid down in advance in a canon already become traditional:

Our theologians are dominated by the questions other men have asked before them; they have forgotten that their predecessors had to work out answers to their questions in a concrete situation, and that other questions have now arisen which must be attempted if theology is to be relevant and central in the Christian community:

One has only to consider how few really living and passionate controversies there are in Catholic Christology today which engage the existential concern of the faithful (is there a single one?).

Theology must become truly kerygmatic—not simply attempt to put the same thing in a different way but make a real effort to proclaim Christ in a way adequate to reality and therefore adequate to its time. Rahner thinks it obvious that the strictest theology in the scientific manner, 'in the sense that it listens with exactness and seriousness, and reflects with exactness on what it hears', theology that is passionately devoted to reality and ever on the alert for new questions 'is itself in the long run the most kerygmatic'. Mere popularising is not kerygma, and mere traditionalism is not kerygma either:

The fact that our textbooks are so little alive, serve proclamation and witness so little, is not due to their superabundance of scholastic and scientific theology but because they offer too little of it, precisely because as relics of the past they are unable even to preserve the past in its purity. For the past can only be preserved in its purity by someone who accepts responsibility for the future, who preserves in so far as he overcomes.

It is evidence of Rahner's alertness to real problems that he should denounce the 'vicious circle of Denzinger Theology'. The editorial problem he presents is that the choice of texts for the *Enchiridion* is largely determined by the current questions and theses in seminary theology. This in turn is much affected by the choice of subjects for inclusion in Denzinger and therefore the seminary professor rarely catches a glimpse of other questions which may be just as important and which are lying obscured in papal letters, bullaria, and other sources. So we are presented with a formalised theology which concentrates on select questions.

Rahner is concerned with the real. He arrives at definitions only by means of descriptions of actual people. He is making an effort to establish a theology of 'the real man as God's real partner' as he writes in an essay on the *Relationship between nature and grace*, which is more professional than most of the pieces in the book—professional in the sense of being written for other theologians and enlivened by skirmishes with de Lubac and Malavez—and is yet severely of the here-and-now. Similarly the carefully wrought sentences of his treatment of the *Theological concept of concupiscentia* present a practical psychology in which real motives are considered and man taken in the concrete wholeness of his attitudes. Rahner shews men suffering from weakness and pain not extrinsically but intrinsically. It is typical of the Pauline emphasis in his work that Rahner should illustrate his thesis from the mysteries of Christ, making his anthropology christocentric:

We may consider, for example, Christ's fear and trembling on the Mount of Olives, which could be endured and experienced (in a truly human, passive way) in spite of the gift of integrity he continued to possess: this fear did not persist in Christ as a remainder, not yet in his power, of a resistance to his personal willingness to suffer and hence as a threat to this personal attitude; it was there in Christ as an intrinsic, necessary factor, wholly within his power, of this personal decision itself.

We are to take ourselves as we are and see that we are to be like the human real Christ. Every theological statement is designed to further the coming to maturity of the life of Christ in the individual man and in the community of God's people. The essay on *Theos in the New Testament*, done somewhat in the manner of Kittel's *Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, is a piece of highly technical theologising whose relevance to Christian life is manifest in the result. Rahner concludes that nowhere in the New Testament does the expression $\delta\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ refer undoubtedly to the Trinitarian God as one existing in three Persons, and that by far the larger number of times it refers to the Father as a Person of the Trinity. From this he argues that we can have a new understanding of what it means to be 'children of God', we are clearly seen to be 'children of the Father of Christ by participation in the eternal sonship of the only begotten Son'. The same fundamental interest in the way of Christian life shines through even the most opaque of Rahner's theological remarks:

For that nature should remain nature for the sake of grace and yet always be grasped by the Christian as an intrinsic element in the single object willed by God when he willed man as his beloved in his Son—to bring this about is the task of the Christian life, and so a serious question for theology.

The trivial questions are those which move into a sphere dominated by the theologian instead of the world of Christ. We can only understand this world about us if we view it by the light of Christ. The whole of the essay on *Concupiscentia* is devoted to making a theological formulation of the ordinary man's sense that he is not in order. Newman, from whom Rahner seems to have learnt at least an attitude of mind, put such a feeling in these words:

I argue about the world—if there be a God, *since* there is a God, the human race is implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity. It is out of joint with the purposes of its Creator. This is a fact, a fact as true as the fact of its existence.

Rahner develops this and shews how this unjointed time is part of the present scheme of Christ and can be employed for our sanctification:

Concupiscentia and death too, is not just the manifestation of sin, in Christ's order it is not just what is left over in the justified, something to be overcome eschatologically because it is in contradiction with human nature in this concrete order; it is also the form *in* which the Christian experiences Christ's sufferings and suffers them himself to the end.

Such a stirring idea is not rare in this book. Rahner makes it possible for a theologian to be a Christian through his theology. The reading of this book discloses a writer who is thinking in Christ.

Twice in this book Rahner expresses dismay at the complete indifference manifested by modern textbooks to the saving events of Christ's life. This he thinks to be one of the worst aspects of modern theological decadence. It is not, as he points out, true of St Thomas or even Suarez that the mysteries of Christ's human life are thought to be of mere pious interest. He catches the heel of one distressing line of thought when he writes:

The Passion is treated of from an exceedingly formal viewpoint in soteriology which seems very little interested in the concreteness of the passion on the ground that some other moral deed of Christ's would have redeemed us 'just as well' if God has so pleased.

We have lost the sense of history, of the immediacy of events which are once-for-all, unique, and willed by God as unique. Instead of events we discover 'illustrations' and 'instances' of general moral laws which could be presented quite apart from Christ's actual life. By this we lose the relevance of Christ's human life to our human life here and now and forever. We have reached the position in which a thick 'theological' volume in French and Spanish on the Ascension pays no attention to matters other than textual criticism and the apologetic defence of the Ascension as having happened, and in which the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* has simply forgotten to have an article about it at all. We leave to Lives of Christ and pious tracts the consideration of Christ's life and chase the chimera of rival schools on irrelevant minutiae. In his own *Scheme for a treatise of Dogmatic theology*, in this book, Rahner has the outline for a course on *the Redeemer*:

- I. The theology of the history of humanity up to the time of the Redeemer;
- II. The Incarnation as redemption;
- III. The theology of the human life of our Lord;

IV. The theology of the Cross;

V. The theology of the glorified Lord.

Section III is laid out thus:

1. The general theology of the life of Jesus

a. The events of Jesus' life as 'model'.

b. The events of Jesus' life as 'mysteries'.

2. The theology of individual events in the life of Jesus.

Obviously we cannot look elsewhere than in Rahner's own work to see how such a pattern might work; no one else now writing has the equipment to rewrite the treatise on christology. Something of what it would be like is shewn in one of the papers in this book.

It is characteristic of Rahner's method that he normally begins by setting limits and edges to the subject of a discussion, referring in at least a general way to what he is not going to do. The study of *Current problems in Christology* is as nearly a rounded piece of work as the book affords, and it is noteworthy that several other of the papers are tangential to this central consideration. Rahner begins with the formula of Chalcedon (the paper was occasioned by the anniversary of that Council) and then asks a series of questions to find out whether or no the formula is Catholic enough to answer all christological questions. He decides that while much may be understood about Christ's humanity and our humanity from a study of the implications of Chalcedon a great deal more remains untackled if we neglect the further christological statements of scripture. Theologians must be prepared to re-think in order to understand the truth of Chalcedon, and the problems which the formula presents them—if they continue to fall back on the formula it is a sure sign that it is not understood by them. Theologians must look at events and see them in their individuality. Thus the question to which he returns in this paper about the redemption being possible 'through any act of Christ' is not a real question when confronted with the actual death of Christ. If scripture means what it says then certainly any other redemption would not have been 'the same':

When Scripture says, 'We have been redeemed by Christ's death (with all that death and death alone, implies) and by his obedience (his concrete obedience, realised precisely in death, and capable of being realised only in death)', we must assume, until the contrary is proved, that *this* is what characterises the redemptive action *in so far as* it is cause . . . *this* cause has not brought about exactly the same Redemption as would have been achieved if we had been redeemed in some other way.

We must concentrate on what actually happened. If we do this then we see in a life and a history the meaning of our life which is first and last the life of God:

It is because we need this ultimate interpretation of our lives, one which is not to be had elsewhere, that we must study the theology of Christ's life and death. Why does this happen so seldom in current Christology?

One thing at least is plain, the departure from the biblical witness has led to chaos. To Rahner it is evident that the average Christian or non-Christian has an idea of Christ which by no means coincides with the reality, and that this has come about through incomplete formulations of the dogma in solemn pronouncements and, much more influentially, in the normal catechesis and preaching. Theologians should take their task more seriously (again this conclusion, Rahner is always a passionate moralist in the best sense) and realise that 'what are apparently very ticklish questions of theology could be of the highest missionary significance, provided they are properly put and answered'. Put and answered in terms of the actual Christ in history. The Logos assumed the 'flesh of sin'. We must take this phrase seriously and not concentrate merely on terms like 'one with us in nature'. Christ is our brother according to the flesh and lived at a particular time and place in our history. At this point too we understand that the 'satisfaction theory' of a juridical kind does not take into account all the biblical truth of redemption. In such a theory it would have been possible for Christ to redeem us without the connection of race and history, or single origin and human life.

Rahner goes a long way to providing us with the outlines of a theology of history which is christocentric. There is nothing static in the Incarnation; Christ assumed a human history, he involved himself in our affairs. His history is part of our history and it is the fullness of our history, that to which history points. Time and history and the evolution of humanity lead to Christ and we can discover something of him from this knowledge of this direction towards Christ, we can see who he must be. And in this revelation of the definitive reality in history we are led to understand many other problems. It may be of interest to sketch in the subject matter of three papers not so far touched in order to shew how the Christ in history is the centre of all Rahner's theological inquiry.

First, the paper on *Development of Dogma*. This is a fine study, dependent for some of its insight on the pioneering work of Newman but in itself a development of the kind that Newman wanted in a living theology. Revelation, Rahner suggests, must be understood as event,

'an historical dialogue between God and man in which something happens'. Revelation is not the communication of a definite number of propositions for our acceptance, not a list of beliefs to which others can be added, but a 'continuous Happening of saving history'. The climax of history has now been reached in Christ Jesus, God has given himself to the world. In times before Christ there might be speculation about the purpose of history, now there is no more to come. Revelation is closed and all things are included in the event of Christ. The closing of Revelation is a 'pure Amen'. The living Church possesses what she believes. It must now be made known, must be grasped in the light of faith by the power of the Spirit by all men. The Church reflects upon her history and understands herself. This is not done by mere logic; the explanation of development is not mere explication, exegesis and rationalities there must be, there must also be the Church's awareness in faith that the people of God have always been in possession of the particular truth. Investigation and reflexion upon the truth allow us to widen our overt knowledge of the truth. And both these are historical in basis. What has happened? What does the past event mean to me? These are the theological questions. The answer is given in terms of the Christ of history, seen in a new perspective.²

Secondly, the *Theological Reflexions on Monogenism*. Given the concern of Rahner to stress the oneness of Christ with all men 'in the flesh' which is evident both in his paper on the development of dogma and in the one on christology, it is obvious that he will have something to say about the origin in saving history of the human race and the unity of all men 'in the flesh' from which our unity with Christ 'in the flesh' derives. This paper is a very good example of a skilled theologian dealing with the evidence before him and then constructing his answer to the problem that the modern age has presented to him for solution. One does not have to agree with his conclusions³ to recognise the

²In another of the papers in this book, *Theos in the New Testament*, Rahner shews how the Revelation of God is inextricably involved in human history in two senses: in the sense of *divine* historicity since God chooses a moment to reveal himself to men already in existence, and in the sense of *human* historicity since there is a real history of revelation. God has not chosen to deliver his revelation to men all at one time.

³Nor indeed with his methods. In this case, while one can well understand the need for a theologian to be content with his peculiar sphere, it seems a little unrealistic to announce that 'no attention will be given to that aspect of the problem concerned with natural sciences' since it is precisely in connection with the natural sciences that the problem becomes one of conscience to many of Rahner's readers.

greatness of the intellect at work and the enthusiastic dedication of the man to the things that are God's. There is a masterly analysis of the documents of the *magisterium*, especially of Pius XII's *Humani Generis*, which gives a perfect example of a theologian trying to be faithful to the text before him even to the extent of stressing the evidence against the conclusion he has speculatively reached.⁴ This is followed by an expansive review of every scriptural passage that seems relevant to the problem⁵ in a manner calculated to destroy the notion that every Catholic theologian knows and uses only a few 'proof texts' when dealing with a difficulty. Rahner concludes this review with the statement:

Scripture knows of such a common situation of salvation and ruin only in so far as men are of one stock.

This leads into a section in which Rahner proposes that the institution of the community of salvation and damnation must be by the act of an individual, and finally to the conclusion of the question in terms of 'a moderate theory of anthropological evolution, maintained simultaneously with monogenism'. This is, of course, thoroughly in keeping with his stressing of individual responsibility and racial unity. It gives a serious meaning to history and a plausible linkage of original sin theology with christology. It is remarkable that nowhere in the synoptic gospels is Christ reported as suggesting that he had come to remake the history of man and undo the work of Adam in sin, but certainly Rahner gives a speculative structure to the remarks of St Paul on this subject. Not everyone will agree that Paul sets 'the one Adam and the one Christ in strict parallel to each other'⁶ but Rahner makes a perfectly coherent case, and he does so all more convincingly because his work is centred on Christ and has a unity grounded in revelation.

The unity of truth is an idea borne in upon us from reading Rahner's work as much as from reading Newman's. Rahner is always trying to shew how it is that a particular dogma finds its proper place only when considered in relation to the rest of revealed truth. This comes out particularly when he is writing about Mary. In the two papers con-

⁴For example, he gives full weight to the revision of the draft concerning the connection of original sin and polygenism in *Humani Generis* from 'cum appareat nequaquam componi posse . . .' to 'nequaquam appareat quomodo . . . componi queat' which appears to many to leave the question unsettled.

⁵Jean de Fraine, S.J. in *Adam et son Lignage: Etudes sur la notion de 'personnalité corporative' dans la Bible* (Bruges 1959) opens up a great many further texts on this question. I find him convincing.

⁶cf Karl Barth, *Romans 5* (*Scottish Journal of Theology*, Occasional Paper 6)

cerned with her in this book, *The Immaculate Conception and The Interpretation of the Dogma of the Assumption*, he is at pains to disabuse those Catholics and non-Catholics who think that mariology has a separate entity:

Mary is only intelligible in terms of Christ. If someone does not hold with the Catholic faith that the Word of God became man in Adam's flesh so that the world might be taken up redemptively into the life of God, he can have no understanding of Catholic dogma about Mary either.

If we take mariology seriously then we can suppose that christology is being taken seriously. The history of the Church shews this from the Council of Ephesus onward. Rahner's paper on the Assumption is designed to shew that mariology is intimately connected with other facets of our thought on the revealed truth. He ends this exposition, after a demonstration of the dogma's place in the general view of christology, with the opinion that it has significance 'also for ecclesiology and general eschatology' since Mary as one of the redeemed community enjoys what all shall enjoy on the Day of the Lord.

Rahner's theological programme is thus similar to that outlined at the beginning of St John's first epistle; he sets out from the events, 'what we have heard', 'what we have seen', 'what we have touched', and the events as mysteries, 'our message concerns the Word, who is life', in order that men may come to know and live in the community of the friends of God, 'so that you too may share in our fellowship . . . with the Father'. This is the only way for a theologian to conceive his task. The only way with any relevance to our present situation in the history of salvation. It is noteworthy that one who is so eminently qualified to speculate in more philosophic matters—indeed he appears to many, including Fr Ernst, to be a revitalising agent in speculative theology—should yet produce so historically-minded a view of theology. Rahner has been accused of subordinating theological method to philosophical requirements, but I think it might well be argued that what Rahner has expressed in ways derived from existentialist patterns of thought—the primary importance of actual people and the individual's responsibility for his attitudes and actions, that is, the sense of historical events and moral maturity—are present in the primitive catechesis, while the conceptual categories of some systematic theology are not.

In the first section of his book Rahner complains in a footnote that reviewers seem always uncommitted and to 'have given up any concern

to come to terms with a writer by a close and reasoned examination of his thought'. My excuse must be that even a skeleton outline of some of the things Rahner has to say has occupied a considerable space. If a reasoned examination is demanded then the reader must obtain the book himself. He will find it one of the most stimulating and enlivening studies in post-war theological writing. He will find above all a consistent emphasis on theology as proclamation of the saving mysteries of Christ's life, and a realisation that such a proclamation must be made in as precise and charitable a manner as is possible to man. He will find, that is, that he has been shewn that no venture of the mind of man is so worthwhile as the proper study of God in his word.

Experience and Expression in Christian Education

ROSEMARY HAUGHTON

It is necessary nowadays for Christians to re-think all manner of things that were formerly taken for granted. 'Our world is a world in a continuous state of becoming, a state in which everything is questioned', writes Cardinal Suenens in a book bulging with new insights and ideas.¹ 'We no longer live in an age where daily lives were solidly framed in tradition, and institutions were there to safeguard values that were never called in question'.

In attempting to understand what has happened and what the happenings mean for us, one historical fact takes on importance for all concerned with Christian education. In the disintegration of traditional ideas the way people *lived* Christian ideas and the forms in which these ideas were *expressed* fell apart.

It can happen that a good tradition of living, one basically sound and Christian, may incidentally be expressed in formulae that are much narrower and more rigid than the whole human thing that produced

¹*The Nun in the World*—to be reviewed in our next issue.