

**Karl Rahner's »Sämtliche Werke«: what is their aim?**

Good morning everybody,

First of all, let me express my profound gratitude to the Steering Committee of the Karl Rahner Society for giving me this opportunity to say a few words about the longterm-project »Sämtliche Werke« of Karl Rahner here at the Karl Rahner Breakfast during the CTSA Convention 2006. I am honoured and I do appreciate this occasion to provide an update on Rahner's »Sämtliche Werke« very much. As a non native speaker you always feel like a »school boy«; but since I have spent almost 11 months in the United States in 2004 and 2005, completing my Jesuit formation in Weston, Massachusetts, and at the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, I got a lot of encouragement from Leo J. O'Donovan, SJ, as well as of Rev. Melvin E. Michalski, who both taught me not to be too anxious about my German-Austrian scruples. I am grateful for their companionship and friendship. Thank you so much, Leo. Thank you, Mel!

*I.*

As you all know, in 1989 – five years after Karl Rahner had passed away – the Karl-Rahner-Stiftung München (Karl Rahner Foundation Munich) which is responsible for the legacy of his huge contribution to theology decided to edit the complete works of Karl Rahner »Sämtliche Werke«. On behalf of the Foundation the editorial board is doing so since 1995 when the first volume – it was volume 19 – was published. The editorial board consists (in alphabetical order) of Karl Cardinal Lehmann and professors Johann Baptist Metz (Münster), Karl Heinz Neufeld, SJ (Innsbruck), Albert Raffelt (Freiburg) and Herbert Vorgrimler (Münster). This is beyond doubt a prominent group of persons who have been close assistants, co-workers or friends of Rahner in different stages of his life as a professor. We should not underestimate that Cardinal Lehmann's presence as a co-editor is also of some political importance as he is the president of the German Bishop's Conference since 1987. The director of the Karl Rahner archives in Innsbruck (Austria), Jesuit professor Karl Heinz Neufeld, SJ, retired last year, and so the German provincial asked the Foundation to accept me to follow him as a co-editor. In September 2005, they welcomed me as the only Jesuit on the editorial board.

So here I am as the Benjamin of the family drawing your attention to a major project which is of great meaning not only for the publishing company Herder, Freiburg, but also for research scholars. Nobody should ignore this edition as it brings a lot of new insights. In addition it publishes some until now unknown or unpublished manuscripts of Karl Rahner.

*II.*

In his article »Has Rahnerian theology a future?«, published in »The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner«, edited by Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines last year, the British Jesuit Philip Endean, editor-in-chief of »The Way«, starts his wonderful reflection with a simple notion: »The reputation of great figures is often eclipsed in the generation after their death, and there is no lack of commentators who regard Rahner's achievement as *passé*.«<sup>1</sup> If we were to belong to those voices which have already written obituaries of Rahner's theology, we wouldn't be here, we wouldn't read Rahner, we wouldn't teach Rahner, we wouldn't try to get students excited about him, we wouldn't believe that it is worthwhile to read him for a lifetime, to study him, to pray with his words to God whom he dedicated his whole life to as a Jesuit, as a priest and as »a normal Christian« as he himself would say in his unique humble way. Any Karl Rahner Society wherever it gathered would

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<sup>1</sup> ENDEAN, Philipp: Has Rahnerian theology a future? In: *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. by MARMION, Declan / HINES, Mary E., Cambridge 2005, 281-310, here 281.

be meaningless. I think, I do not risk exaggeration when I emphasize that we all do appreciate Rahner's work which can give answers even to questions of our present times. He has made an inestimable contribution to Catholic theology in the twentieth century.

The real question is: Will this last? The question whether Rahner is indispensable or not is rather sophisticated and an academic one. I am not a prophet. But I think that the »Rahner year 2004« when we celebrated the centennial of his birth and the 20th anniversary of his death have shown that there is still an ongoing interest in his theology.

This means that we have to ensure that Rahner is made available for all. You may forgive me that our first concern as an editorial board is that he is available in the original language, that means in German. But I can tell you in advance that we also consider publishing a selection of »Sämtliche Werke« in English, if possible. At this time, however, this is what we call »Zukunftsmelodie« in German, our dream for the future.

So there is no doubt that Karl Rahner is needed in our time which is, at least in Germany where the church faces a lot of financial problems, and theology is not always appreciated (in German: »theologiearme Zeit«) and where the church is often focused exclusively on saving money (»Sparmaßnahmen«) and downsizing parishes as well as diocesan offices à la McKinsey, a difficult time. It's a wintry time (»winterliche Zeit«) in a Rahnerian sense in the church.

### III.

Is an edition of the complete works of Rahner necessary? Nobody would call into question the publication of the complete works of Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Paul Tillich or the historic-critical edition of Friedrich Schleiermacher, or, on the catholic side, of Henri de Lubac, SJ, Bernard F. Lonergan, SJ, or of the German theologians Matthias Joseph Scheeben or Romano Guardini<sup>2</sup>. But we do with Karl Rahner. There are still many who raise the question: Do we need the complete works at all as there are 16 volumes of »Schriften zur Theologie«, published from 1954 to 1984, which correspond to the English edition of »Theological investigations« with its 23 volumes? Given the number of Rahner's publications of more than 4 000 bibliographical items, articles and books – translations and reprints subtracted, there are still 1 700 numbers – we have to ensure that Rahner is available. It is not that easy to access. Availability means that you can buy him: all of his writings and not only the famous books such as »Grundkurs des Glaubens«, »Hörer des Wortes« or »Geist in Welt«. The 16 volumes of »Schriften zur Theologie« are just one third of the whole work of Rahner.

Rahner is different from other authors such as Henri de Lubac or Hans Urs von Balthasar. He was not a monographic writer, but somebody who published essays for specific occasions. We use the term »Anlaßtheologie« in German which means that he responded to a lot of questions. That characterizes the structure of his oeuvre. Not to forget his professional contributions editing the »Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche«, »Quaestiones disputatae«, »Handbuch für Pastoraltheologie«, »Sacramentum mundi«, »Kleines Theologisches Wörterbuch« and so on. There is a widespread oeuvre whether we recognize it or not. But there are also articles and even books that have never been published before for different reasons, and we do so in »Sämtliche Werke«, for instance lectures about penance, evolution and grace or his theological dissertation »E latere Christi« about the origin of the church from the side of the crucified Lord<sup>3</sup>. Many of Rahner's articles had their origin in special contexts or in specific historical occasions such as the definition of the »Assumptio« or the Second Vatican Council.

These writings and the importance of Rahner's work for catholic theology of the 20th century

<sup>2</sup> See RAFFELT, Albert: Was will die Karl-Rahner-Gesamtausgabe?, in: *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 121 (1999) 413-430; RAFFELT, Albert: Die Karl Rahner-Gesamtausgabe. Zum Stand vor dem hundertsten Geburtstag des modernen Kirchenvaters. Gesamtausgaben von Theologen, in: *Kirchliches Buch- und Bibliothekswesen. Jahrbuch* 3 (2002), 11-27; see also BATLOGG, Andreas R. / ZAHLAUER, Arno: Rahner in 32 Bänden. Anmerkungen zum Start der Karl-Rahner-Gesamtausgabe, in: *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 118 (1996) 379-386.

<sup>3</sup> See RAHNER, Karl: E latere Christi. Der Ursprung der Kirche als zweiter Eva aus der Seite Christi des zweiten Adam. Eine Untersuchung über den typologischen Sinn von Joh 19,34, in: In: RAHNER, Karl: *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol. 3: *Spiritualität und Theologie der Kirchenväter*. Arranged by BATLOGG, Andreas R. / FARRUGIA, Edward / NEUFELD, Karl Heinz, Freiburg 1999, 1-84 and 428-435.

and beyond are sufficient reasons for a new edition. The arrangement is chronological, but within the periods of the work the thematic units are combined and collected. 16 out of 32 volumes have been published up to now since 1995. All published versions of the works of Karl Rahner will also be available in electronic form at the Karl Rahner archives Innsbruck (as pdf-files) as an addition to the book edition and as a first step to a future complete Karl Rahner database. The combination of the traditional and the digital edition is meant as a critical-historical edition for the time being.

#### IV.

If you take a look on the sheet of paper in front of you which I have compiled to give you a brief overview over what has been edited so far, you will recognize that we are more or less at the halfway-point: Between 1995 and the end of 2006 19 volumes out of 32 will have been published; three of them are still expected for this year, among them volume 6 in two parts from Dorothea Sattler (Münster) who will publish the second tractatus »De paenitentia« after Fr. Neufeld's edition of volume 8 »Der Mensch in der Schöpfung« (1998) which brought the latin-German version of »De Deo creante et elevante«.

In 1997, Albert Raffelt published »Geist in Welt«, one year later »Hörer des Wortes«. Both books are better known because of their titles than because of their contents. Behind these titles, however, there are not only the books from 1939 (Rahner's philosophical study which was supposed to be his dissertation in Freiburg with Martin Honecker) and from 1941 (lectures from the last Salzburger Hochschulwochen before the Nazis closed them down), but also, as the subtitles say, all the »Philosophische Schriften« (SW 2) and »Schriften zur Religionsphilosophie und zur Grundlegung der Theologie«. Both volumes not only present the first edition (from 1939, 1941), but also the revised ones from Johann Baptist Metz from the 1950s in synchronic parallel order which gives the reader the opportunity to see what has been deleted or added by Metz. There is also a lot of other material such as notes of Rahner during his studies in Freiburg when he attended lectures of Martin Heidegger or about Joseph Maréchal, SJ, and his Cahier 5 of »Le point de départ de la métaphysique« which you wouldn't find elsewhere. This is just one small simple example. You can see: Nowhere else can you find this important information. In volume 3 »Spiritualität und Theologie der Kirchenväter« you can find Rahner's never before published theological dissertation »E latere Christi«, a short patristic study of 136 pages in the manuscript submitted at the University of Innsbruck in July 1936<sup>4</sup>.

As I already told you, the arrangement of the edition is chronological. This principle could not always be followed. There were some conflicts among the editors about that. Rahner's famous essay of 1956 »Die ignatianische Logik der existentiellen Erkenntnis bei Ignatius von Loyola« could have been placed with good reason in volume 13 »Ignatianischer Geist. Schriften zu den Exerzitien und zur Spiritualität des Ordensgründers« (2006). But there were also good reasons to put it into volume 10 »Kirche in den Herausforderungen der Zeit. Beiträge zur Ekklesiologie der Zeit und zur kirchlichen Existenz« (2003), what would finally happen.

This shows that sometimes quite pragmatic aspects come into play. Similar decisions that come to light only in the process of doing, that is editing it, will perhaps be reported in an additional volume 33 which Albert Raffelt and I plan to do, just as there was also an additional volume for the mammoth project »Mysterium Salutis« in 1981 which was published between 1965 and 1976.

As I mentioned in the beginning, the members of the editorial board are a prominent group apart from me, the newcomer to the group. But those glittering names are not only »titoli colorati« though Metz never worked on a single volume so far. Cardinal Lehmann has edited volume 27 about Rahner's ecumenical efforts. Vorgrimler already completed volumes 17, 12 and 14 and is going to work on another volume. We hope that Fr. Neufeld who has already arranged volumes 19 and 8 will edit volume 1, probably together with me, as he is the best expert in Rahner's early writings. More or less the volumes are already scheduled to be completed by other colleagues. Given ideal circumstances the edition could

<sup>4</sup> See BATLOGG, Andreas R.: Karl Rahners theologische Dissertation „E latere Christi“. Zur Genese eines patristischen Projekts (1936), in: *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 126 (2004) 111-130.

be completed in about six or seven years. But editing major projects for which you need a lot of accuracy is always a risky undertaking, even an adventure, and you never know what happens: with the individual colleagues, with the coordinators, with the editors. So, to be realistic, I suppose that we would be done in about ten years. Problems can always appear along the way.

#### V. Final remarks

The quality of the complete works of Karl Rahner »Sämtliche Werke« apparently would transcend the lifetime of some co-editors. Cardinal Lehmann just celebrated the 70th anniversary of his birth in mid May, Metz and Vorgrimler are in their late seventies. Raffelt is 62 and I was born in 1962. Raffelt has become the mastermind, assisted by a staff which consists of Raffelt himself, Peter Suchla from Herder and Roman A. Siebenrock from the Karl Rahner archives Innsbruck. Together with Mr. Raffelt it is up to me to plan the next volumes. The big issues are discussed in an annual meeting of the editors, mostly in Mainz at the Bishop's residence of Cardinal Lehmann. Daily work, however, is done by the two of us, Mr. Raffelt and me: contact with colleagues, questions of arrangements and so on. There is plenty to do, it is an never-ending job.

It is not my intention to praise an edition or to speak glowingly about it. Hopefully I would have convinced you that serious Rahner research is not possible anymore without paying attention to the complete works. A complete overview of Rahner's work was not possible so far. Karl Rahner's »Sämtliche Werke« make his work accessible in a uniform way for the first time. That makes it easier to access his thought and enables for the first time an adequate understanding of his individual statements. And in addition: There are several variations of many texts. And these variations are noted and documented and comparing them often bring amazing insights. They also show that many interpretations of Rahner overlooked the complete body of his work as they were fixated on individual themes. The final interpretation has not reached completion. Perhaps this is not the hour of great theologians in church politics today. Nevertheless, the new Pope Benedict XVI. does appreciate the intellectual life in the church, and he acknowledged Karl Rahner's contribution to theology in 2004 as the prefect of the CDF. Rahner certainly is, what Cardinal Lehmann called him in 1994: »ein Mann für übermorgen« – a man of the future<sup>5</sup>.

Finally, it's about Karl Rahner, naturally, but only in one sense. There is no use for and no need of a Rahner-cult. But the way he thought about God and man is unique, and it is worthwhile to guarantee that future generations have a good or even an excellent access to him. You have to read Rahner, not only to watch Rahner-DVDs where you can easily find nice quotations. I want to finish with a notion of Paul D. Murray: »In no small part, I suggest, Rahner's true lasting significance for contemporary Catholic theology comes down to the way in which he showed in his life what it means for theologians to commit themselves to the radical risk of having faith in the wintry seasons of the Church.«<sup>6</sup> There is a German saying: »Gelehrte haben keine Biographie, sondern eine Bibliographie.« Scholars don't have a biography, they just have a bibliography. We all know that even Rahner was a human being with dreams, emotions, anger and so on. And eventually we can find some of him in the complete works. Karl Rahner's »Sämtliche Werke« will go down in history as the final edition.

Thank you for your attention!

<sup>5</sup> LEHMANN, Karl: Karl Rahner zum Gedächtnis. Neunzigster Geburtstag – Zehnter Todestag, in: *Stimmen der Zeit* 212 (1994) 147-150, here 150.

<sup>6</sup> MURRAY, Paul D.: The Lasting Significance of Karl Rahner for Contemporary Catholic Theology, in: *Louvain Studies* 29 (2004) 8-27, here 27.