

God is active and transforming of the human spirit. This in turn shapes the world in which the human spirit is actualized. The Spirit of God can be said to direct a part of history which bears a special revelation by the way it transforms particular human spirits. Therefore, Rahner's theology of revelation involves more than having a particularly good idea in a world whose existence is God's self-communication, as Barnes describes it. The Spirit of God transforms and shapes a particular human consciousness which then affects the course of human knowledge, human history, and ultimately the destiny of the cosmos. God is active within creation in Rahner's thought, but his understanding of this divine activity does not place God in a role similar to that of other finite historical beings.

To understand Rahner's notion of the activity of God within the world one must appreciate the ways in which Neoplatonism is still alive in his thought. One realm of reality contains and can influence those below it in the hierarchy of being without acting in the mode that is particular to the lower form of being. Thus God can influence and reshape the human spirit from deep within its transcendental structures and unthematic experience. The human spirit shapes history and the material world. Rahner is not seeking to demythologize the world and Christian doctrines. Rather, facing a world which is already highly demythologized and secularized, he is trying to uncover how the presence and power of God move deeply within our world without falling back into mythological forms of thought. Miracles are possible not through some outside force acting within history, but by the transcendent reality of God shaping the spiritual reality of the human spirit, and then by these inner transcendental elements of the human spirit shaping the physical world.

Barnes is correct when he places the issue of secularization at the heart of Rahner's theology. But Rahner is not seeking to justify that secularization through a hidden agenda of demythologization. He is seeking on the one hand, to respect the proper autonomy of the created world by not describing God as another secondary, finite cause and, on the other hand, to show how God is present and active within creation through his presence to the human spirit on the transcendental level. This is the heart of Rahner's theological gift to the Church. It is here that debate about the value of that gift must center.

Seattle University

MICHAEL B. RASCHKO

A REPLY TO MICHAEL B. RASCHKO

Michael Raschko's final claim is that Rahner's goal is "to show how God is present and active within creation" without "describing God as another secondary, finite cause."¹ Raschko is quite right about this.

¹ Michael B. Raschko, "Karl Rahner and Demythologization: A Response to Michael H. Barnes," *TS* 56 (1995) 557-61, at 561.

Where he and I differ is about how to conceive and articulate the way Rahner affirms the active presence of God in creation. My explanation will make best sense if I reverse the order of Raschko's four points.

The fourth of Raschko's challenges is to my main topic. He asks early on whether demythologizing is "a central interpretive framework for dealing with the content and motivation of Rahner's theology."² At the end he seems also to imply that demythologization is of less importance in Rahner's theology than I claimed. As is always the case with Rahner, his thought is complex. On the one hand, he rejects a demythologizing which abandons essential Christian doctrines in part or in whole.³ That is how he differs not only from a Feuerbach but also from a Schleiermacher, as I said in the original article.⁴ But Rahner also insists on demythologizing, using the word himself regularly, to preserve recognition of God as infinite and changeless Mystery. Thus what Rahner repeatedly characterizes in his own words as mythological and thereby opposes are any of the many ways of portraying God as a cause that intervenes in the chain of secondary causality. I tried not just to offer a general claim to this effect but to illustrate the claim concretely by identifying a good number of the major doctrines which Rahner demythologized in this way.

The precise motives Rahner gives for doing this may vary with the context. He sometimes denies that his demythologizing is an accommodation to the modern spirit.⁵ But in other places he says it is necessary to avoid mythological interpretations that are unrealistic to a modern person.⁶ He most often justifies his demythologizing on theological grounds, to preserve both the infinite changeless Godness of God and God's constant and intimate presence to all of creation. He does it in such a way as to integrate transcendental experience, traditional doctrine, philosophy, and science. For all this, to answer Raschko's implied question, I do intend to praise Rahner heartily, not to detract from what he has done.

The third charge by Raschko concerns Rahner's notion of matter. Contrary to what Raschko says, matter is not called "frozen spirit" only by analogy, as "the arena for the realization of the human spirit."⁷ It is true that Rahner interprets matter from the perspective of spirit, and spirit from the perspective of human transcendental experience. He even says, "Without that materiality which is the expression and medium of the self-fulfillment of the finite spirit, spiritual creaturehood at the finite level is totally inconceivable."⁸ This statement be-

² Ibid. 557.

³ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* 14 (New York: Seabury, 1976) 298-300.

⁴ Michael H. Barnes, "Demythologization in the Theology of Karl Rahner," *TS* 55 (1994) 24-25.

⁵ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* 11 (New York: Seabury, 1974) 208.

⁶ *Investigations* 11.96.

⁷ Raschko, "A Response" 559.

⁸ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* 10 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1973) 285.

gins with what seems to be support for Raschko's reading: matter is the arena for the realization of spirit. But the end of the sentence adds a general theme that appears in many other places, including Rahner's marvelous article on angels: that it is inconceivable that any creature exist, even a spiritual one, that does not share in the general condition of creation which is to be finite and thus located spatially and temporally. Even angels are spatio-temporal beings (if they already exist).⁹ This rather unplatonic and even unthomistic understanding of spiritual beings is part of Rahner's complete view of matter (at least since his analysis of evolution in the 1950s).

For Rahner matter is not utterly unspiritual, because it comes from the creativity of the divine Spirit, which "cannot create something that is absolutely disparate from itself."¹⁰ Moreover, in Rahner's evolutionary universe spirit (human transcendental consciousness) emerges from the history of matter.¹¹ Matter as it actually exists has always therefore been more than mere matter. Because the evolutionary history of matter has produced first life and then spirit, we are able to recognize that matter from the first has had an inner dynamism from its transcendent ground, God, who is a factor "linked to it and belonging to it."¹² The history of matter-becoming-spirit is part of the larger history of the movement of the entire universe towards the beatific vision, i.e., towards a union with God in which the union is an indwelling of God in created spirits as a quasi-formal cause (rather than affecting them as an extrinsic efficient cause). This eschatological state is one by which embodied spirit (humans, angels, and any other transcendentially conscious beings which have emerged from the evolution of matter) brings to union with God the whole of creation including its materiality. For Rahner the material world is redeemed and destined to be part of the eschaton through the human spirit. It is taken up into eternity in the Incarnation and Resurrection.¹³

The second of Raschko's charges concerns the notion of the transcendental and the categorical. I agree generally with his formulations here. As Raschko notes, I misquoted a line from *Foundations*, a sub-heading entitled "The Transcendental Aspect of Revelation," by changing the last word inadvertently to "creation."¹⁴ The context in my article was on the nature of revelation and the way in which on this topic also Rahner rejects images of God "as a causal link in a chain of events" or "a miraculous intervention."¹⁵ Here are Rahner's own words

⁹ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* 19 (New York: Crossroad, 1974) 235-74.

¹⁰ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* 21 (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 34.

¹¹ I have explored this in "The Evolution of the Soul from Matter and the Role of Science in the Theology of Karl Rahner," *Horizons* 21 (1994) 85-104.

¹² Karl Rahner, *Hominisation: The Evolutionary Origin of Man as a Theological Problem*, trans. W. T. O'Hare (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965) 75, 78.

¹³ *Investigations* 10.266-72.

¹⁴ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Crossroad, 1982) 171.

¹⁵ "Demythologization" 33.

concerning revelation: "A special 'intervention' of God, therefore, can only be understood as the historical concreteness of the transcendental self-communication of God which is already intrinsic to the concrete world."¹⁶ There may be a difference in how Raschko and Rahner conceive of this "intervention," a difference I will try to identify later.

This takes us to the first of Raschko's charges, that I incorrectly expand the notion of God's self-gift from the categories of grace and the Incarnation and apply it to all of creation, even to its material history. Rahner's language on this is always quite cautious. He is concerned to avoid any sign of pantheism, which would say that God is somehow part of the essential makeup of anything created. Yet he speaks explicitly of God's self-gift to the entire universe. He refers to the impetus God gives to the material world to enable it to transcend itself through the process of evolution: "This impetus can be conceived of from the outset as the impetus of the divine self-bestowal which of itself implies, as a necessary factor, the impetus to create a material and spiritual world as the subject to which this self-bestowal is addressed."¹⁷ Rahner speaks of "God, whose basic act (an act which also includes God's creativity) is the self-bestowal of God upon that which is not divine. The whole history of the becoming of the world, therefore, proceeds in even higher stages of self-transcendence towards that point at which this self-bestowal of God can be and is *accepted* as such."¹⁸ "The entire supernatural reality constituted by grace and Incarnation (taking both of these as mutually conditioning elements in a single act of self-bestowal on God's part) no longer appears as a subsequent addition to a world that is considered merely as having being created by God."¹⁹

Rahner's unitary approach to understanding God's creativity and self-bestowal is the basis of his demythologizing. The infinite and changeless divine Mystery does not act in discrete moments or stages. God 'does' one ongoing creative-self-bestowing-elevating-redemptive act, which empowers a material world to exist, to transcend itself by becoming life and then spirit, to accept in freedom the self-bestowal of God as grace and as part of the movement of the whole universe to a unity with God that is the eschaton. The Incarnation is the sum and substance of this, so to speak, the definitive, irreversible, and redemptive instantiation in human history of this single goal and truth of the history of the universe. The Incarnation is thus continuous with the history of the universe, part of its overall purpose and process from the first, neither a separate nor an extrinsic act of God. As Rahner puts it:

We are entirely justified in understanding creation and Incarnation not as two disparate and juxtaposed acts of God "outwards" which have their origins in

¹⁶ *Foundations* 87.

¹⁸ *Investigations* 11.226 (emphasis added).

¹⁷ *Investigations* 10.288.

¹⁹ *Investigations* 11.220.

two separate initiatives of God. Rather in the world as it actually is we can understand creation and Incarnation as two moments and two phases of the one process of God's self-giving and self-expression, although it is an intrinsically differentiated process.²⁰

Raschko proposes what he calls a Neoplatonist approach to understanding Rahner. It is a universe described as a top-down hierarchy of influence, in which "God is active and transforming of the human spirit" which then "in turn shapes the world" of matter. It is a world in which "the Spirit of God can be said to direct a part of history which bears a special revelation by the way it transforms particular human spirits."²¹ Though Rahner often uses language like this, in the context of this present discussion this Neoplatonist account is not truly Rahner's, because it diminishes the significance of the general active immanence of God in the single redemptive evolutionary history of material creation.

Raschko's choice of words also leaves open a small door to the kind of intermittent "intervention" on the part of God that Rahner works hard to reject. Raschko says that God's self-gift/revelation transforms the structures of human experience so that God is no longer a distant horizon.²² True enough, but I believe Rahner would say more precisely that the human spirit is always already graced. Transformation is achieved through human freedom responding to the grace already there. Similarly, Raschko says that "God can influence and reshape the human spirit from deep within."²³ Rahner would say, I believe, that the shaping action by God is always already done by the self-gift of God. It is the human appropriation (or the lack of appropriation) of this gift in freedom that constitutes the history of the world.

Raschko's way of speaking of God's role directing a part of history is certainly legitimate.²⁴ But when used to interpret Rahner's thought as it is here, it can pull Rahner's theology away from a recognition of the always-already-there active dynamism of God's gift of self to which the person is called to respond, and replace it with what sounds like "more" activity by God upon the human spirit. It then diminishes the place of matter to be merely an arena for the expression of spirit, rather than that which possesses and is driven by God's self-gift and which is redeemed in the union of embodied spirit with God. It would seem thus also to reduce the role of human response in freedom as the element which then determines the future. This freedom is increased dependence on and relation to God precisely in so far as it is increased freedom, made possible by God's always-already-there empowering presence.

University of Dayton

MICHAEL H. BARNES

²⁰ *Foundations* 197.

²² *Ibid.* 559.

²¹ Raschko, "A Response" 561.

²³ *Ibid.* 561.

²⁴ "The Spirit of God can be said to direct a part of history which bears a special revelation by the way it transforms particular human spirits" (*ibid.*).