James J. Bacik

Humble Confidence: Spiritual and Pastoral Guidance from Karl Rahner. Collegeville, MN. Liturgical Press, 2014. Pp. 198. Pb, \$19.95.

Martin Kolozs

Karl Rahner: Innsbrucker Jahre. Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner, 2014. Pp. 124. Pb, 21.90 euros.

Karl Rahner's theology worked by focusing on the subject who heard the Christian message. Nevertheless, Rahner kept the details of his own biography firmly out of his theological writings. Rahner's "hearer of the word" appears in dry abstraction from specific events and relationships. Here and there—particularly in *Foundations of Christian Faith*—Rahner makes important allusions to the varied and meandering processes of Christian discipleship. But the argument focuses on principle and structure. It is left to the readers to explore the mystery of grace in the particularities of their lives.

By contrast, *Karl Rahner: Innsbrucker Jahre* and *Faithful Discipleship* are personal works in ways that Rahner's theological writings never were. Clearly, these two recent books about Rahner exhibit obvious differences. One is a short biography by an Austrian lay journalist born in 1978; the other, by a distinguished US priest retired from a career as a professor and campus minister, offers "spiritual and pastoral guidance" based on theological motifs taken from Rahner. But both books are shaped, quite explicitly, by the ways in which Rahner has enriched their authors. Both renounce any pretension to comprehensiveness; in their different ways, both present what Kolozs in his foreword refers to as "my Karl Rahner." Moreover, despite the many differences between Austrian and US Catholicism, both Kolozs's and Bacik's Rahner serves primarily as a mediating figure in churches all too prone to conflict. Writing in this personal way, the authors are certainly continuing along paths that Rahner opened up, and in one sense radicalizing his procedures. But they are also selling Rahner's achievement short.

Kolozs's work is a biographical treatment of the whole of Rahner's life, one that a German-speaking broader public will find helpful if they can overcome the austere academic typography. The book's international importance for scholars, however, is limited. Kolozs's chief primary sources are the interviews—nearly all of which are available in English—that Rahner took to giving in the last decade of his life. Kolozs synthesizes this material well, but does not offer anything by way of interpretation or additional information to supplement it. Readers negotiating a language barrier will find nearly all the information Kolozs gives us more easily from the interviews themselves. Moreover,

specialists will find very little biographical material in Kolozs not already available from Karl H. Neufeld's 1994 *Die Brüder Rahner*, though Kolozs gives fuller source references than Neufeld. The subtitle, *Innsbrucker Jahre*, suggesting a particular focus on Rahner's three periods living in Innsbruck, is misleading: it may arise from Kolozs's evident affection for the Innsbruck theology faculty where he studied; then again, it may have been chosen because the book was published in Innsbruck with subsidies from the city council and the regional government.

Kolozs also discusses some Rahnerian texts, with extensive quotations. It is here that the partiality of his perspective comes out. There is some discussion of spiritual texts: *Encounters with Silence*, *On the Need and the Blessing of Prayer*, and the 1978 piece in which Rahner imagined Ignatius Loyola speaking to a contemporary Jesuit. But Kolozs's major interest lies with what Rahner wrote on the ecclesiological and pastoral issues raised by Vatican II, and with Rahner's first exploration of these issues in a text written for Cardinal Innitzer in Vienna during World War II. Like many other commentators, Kolozs rather skips over the two major speculative texts at the beginning of Rahner's career: *Spirit in (the) World* and *Hearer of the Word*. More oddly, Kolozs presents Rahner's theology of grace not in its own right, but simply in the context of church conflict: we have a two-page quotation from Pius XI's denunciations in *Humani generis*, but not a mention of the supernatural existential. Similarly, the pages dealing with the 1970s tell us much more about Rahner's argument with Hans Küng on papal infallibility than they do about his important late text, *Foundations of Christian Faith*.

James J. Bacik's *Humble Confidence* falls into two halves. The first contains four chapters, offering accounts of Rahner's positions on the "dialectical virtues" required for Christian life today, on prayer, on Christology, and on ecclesiology. The second is taken up with one long chapter in which Bacik presents fifteen of his own homilies, interspersed with commentaries on how each of these admirably pastoral texts has been informed by his personal reading of Rahner. Bacik is clearly a wise, moderating and irenic pastor, able to see good on both sides of a conflict. Some of the homilies are effective, indeed moving. But one wonders, even in the first half of the book, whether one can trace a genuine intellectual link between Rahner and Bacik. The chapters purporting to expound Rahner's positions start with problems of contemporary believers in the USA. The ecclesiology chapter, to take an example, begins with the phenomenon of people being "spiritual but not religious," and continues with the lapsation rates among contemporary US Catholics. It then evokes the different ways people interpret Vatican II, before offering some edifying reflections on the contemporary parish. It is easy to lard such a text with Rahnerian quotations—Rahner

wrote prolifically, in many genres, and on almost all religious subjects. But what we miss is a sense of how a properly Rahnerian ecclesiology must be connected structurally to a coherent Christian theological epistemology—a task that Rahner himself arguably left undone. Rahner's ecclesiology is of a piece with his overall account of how finite creatures truly know—in a carefully qualified sense of the word—the infinite God, with his articulation of the connections and distinctions between reason and revelation, and with his conviction that all the mysteries of faith reduce to one mystery: that of the divine self-communication.

Journalist that he is, Kolozs breaks off his narrative at two points for interviews. The first is with the ecclesiologist at the Linz faculty, Günther Wassilowsky; the second is with the retired Innsbruck Jesuit philosopher, Otto Muck, a student and colleague of Rahner. Muck is characteristically understated and dry, but the content is gold, both for its intrinsic insight, and for how it situates Rahner's achievement in intellectual history. Muck speaks of the interplay in Rahner between three kinds of intellectual activity: the retrieval, influenced by Maréchal, of a Scholasticism not vulnerable to Kantian critique; existential philosophy of the kind developed by Heidegger; and a hermeneutical approach to Christian tradition. Much criticism of Rahner, argues Muck, is misplaced: it comes from "vehement critics of one or other of these approaches" who fail to recognize that Rahner's simultaneous commitment to all three activities led him, again in all three, to make major methodological innovations. Rahner was not just any Scholastic theologian, or transcendental philosopher, or historian of doctrine; rather, his competence as all three led him to move beyond the conventions standard to each of those fields, and both to correct and compensate for their structural weaknesses.

Muck is far too polite to say so, but the criticism applies also to many advocates of Rahner, including Kolozs and Bacik. The latter are content to present Rahner's moving of Catholicism beyond the authoritarianism of what he called "the Pian epoch," while missing what is essentially Rahnerian: his placing of Christianity's doctrinal claims within an overall account of truth, revelation, grace, and experience. They are thus unable to present Rahner's thought in a way that seriously engages the concerns of his critics, who are often far closer to Rahner than they think, even as they write his insights off as trendy aberrations.

The interdisciplinary competence required here has become all the more difficult given the ever-increasing specialization of intellectual life; the social conditions generating the kind of faith that motivated Rahner's own achievement have passed. It will not do simply to repeat Rahner's own language; the whole project with its interconnections needs to be restated afresh in keeping

with today's questions and needs. Perhaps this task has become impossible; perhaps we can read Kolozs and Bacik as illustrating how Rahner's creative appropriation of Jesuit intellectual and spiritual traditions was in the end a merely historical achievement, one that could not be transmitted effectively across the generations. But let us hope this is not the case.

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