



Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity

Karl Rahner, William V. Dych (Translator)

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Karl Rahner is one of Catholicism's most influential, and yet difficult to understand, theologians. This remarkably comprehensive volume gives a page by page explanation of Rahner's great summary *Foundations of Christian Faith*. With an excellent introduction and helpful indices, this book is an indispensable addition to every theological library.

Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity Details

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Alizadeh says

This book had not written for normal people sondern for experts. I Think it is too hard to understand his idea. I have read the german version of this book and found it too hard. I try to read more and more and learn more about his idea. But his central idea in this book is anonymus christian and it is based on "selbsmitteilung Gottes".

Claudio Laferla says

Rahner is also one of my favourite authors. He is deep. As indicated, this is a reference book which should be frequently consulted. A 'must have' in my opinion.

Gene Bales says

Rahner's work is always challenging and this book is no exception. I was helped by having read and digested his early works (Hearers of the Word and Spirit in the World), both of which are much influenced by Heidegger's ontology. I don't think this work is all that "introductory", but it is a fascinating overview of theology.

Joseph Sverker says

I'm sad to say, but this was a real disappointment for me. I'm usually quite okay with there being a fair amount of terminology in theology, but I just had the feeling that there was mostly words and not much progress in this book. Rahner talks much about transcendence, self-interpretation, self-giving of God, presence and freedom. All interesting things, but I don't get interested the way he relates them to each other, or maybe the problem is that I don't quite see how he relates them. It seems that a fundamental problem for Rahner is how he wants to take the experience of transcendence as the basis for his theology, yet I can't see that he ever resolves how such an emphasis on transcendence can square with the Christian belief of a (very much) immanent God. Yet, a few chapters in he simply seems to assume that God for his theology.

The further problem I found is that he links both the story of original sin (aetiological) with the present, as well as eschatology with the present in the way that what we think about the too is a reflection of our present condition. He does, however, argue well against a completely feuerbachian view of religion, but I still don't quite see how he will be able to move away from this complete focus of the present.

Thomas Dimattia says

Marc said it well, though I might add that this is an essential book for any reasonable thinker who wants to understand why Christ is such a mystery.

Tom Phillips says

This was perhaps my hardest read, ever. Fr. Rahner writes like a philosopher, meaning almost unfathomable. But, as with some other of the great works I've read, I read this for the passages of flight out of philosophy and deep theology, into the mystical and the mystical had a great deal to do with living each day.

Andrew says

Wow.

Phil Lawless says

Astonishing

Dwight Davis says

I'm not going to give this book a rating because I don't think I understood it well enough to adequately interact with it on any sort of actual level. This is, hands down, one of the most difficult and unpleasant experiences I've had while reading. Rahner's language is muddled, his sentences regularly run in excess of 100 words, and his thought is so couched in Heidegger and phenomenology that unless you understand those two things you will be lost. Highly abstract with almost no concrete theological reflection. I doubt I'll be revisiting this.

Johnny says

In the mid-20th century, Karl Rahner was one of the most important Catholic theologians and *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* serves as a digest of the themes which were so brilliantly pursued by this scholar. The easiest way to describe this book is to say that it is a transcendental theology in the sense that his primary thesis is that human beings are the only ones who know that they are finite, but that those who know existentially that they are finite have already begun to transcend their finiteness (p. 20). The book is not intended to be an overtly apologetic work. He states from the outset that even though rational arguments cannot *establish* faith, they should be *part* of faith (p. 8).

In building his theology, Rahner comes back again and again to this personal awareness of transcendence. He recognizes theology as reflective thoughts on one's personal transcendence (p. 69) and rejects the idea of a non-personal God as not fitting with our personal experiences of transcendence (p. 75). In other words, if we are longing for an experience beyond the finite in order to be more than we are, it is because we have a

sense of that beyond the finite which beckons us. Naturally, at this point, I felt like Rahner was completely in tune with Anselm's ontological arguments and didn't think Rahner was breaking much new ground. I liked this idea of reflectively thinking about God based on our longing for completeness within and beyond ourselves, but I originally thought this was where it was going to stop.

It wasn't where it stopped. Having established his rationale for a theology "from above," Rahner began building on personal experience and God's role as a guarantor of freedom (p. 105) to establish a theology "from below." Ontological understanding of God is not enough for Rahner and shouldn't be for any human who is honest. Authentic experience is historically based within the experience of time—even though it may point beyond time. Hence, much like my personal theological schema of "Presence in tension with Authority," Rahner shows how imminence and transcendence must work together (p. 119) such that the "cause" (as argued by Aquinas) becomes an intrinsic, constituent part of the effect itself (p. 120). Indeed, during his discussion of Christology, Rahner coins a phrase for this tension of which I speak. His idea of "mutual conditioning" is very similar to my Authority/Presence schema (p. 208).

This is very significant when Rahner speaks about the God-Man relationship within the historical person of Jesus. He says that spirit and matter are essentially different, but the God-Man demonstrates that they are *not* to be understood as essential opposites (p. 184).

As a result, he is able to explore why saving power (soteriological significance) rests in neither Jesus' death nor resurrection separately (p. 266). He is quick to point out that Eternity subsumes time, particularly as it relates to death (p. 270), so that he can argue that resurrection is not to be confused with resuscitation—life is more than existing (p. 267) [I know the page numbering doesn't make sense in terms of a linear argument, but Germans sometimes give you the punch line before they give you the body of the argument.:] As he explores other theological themes, it all builds to a conclusion when he says, "...in Christology, man and God are not the same, but neither are they ever separate." (p. 447)

As a Baptist minister (as well as professor at a Catholic University), I was particularly interested in Rahner's approach to the Church. It was amazing to see how open he was to the dogma of Evangelical Christianity and how he explained Catholic understandings. For example, how many times have Protestants been told that Catholics "worship" Mary, the mother of Jesus. Rahner says, "The dogma [of the Assumption of Mary:] says nothing else but that Mary is someone who has been redeemed radically." (p. 387) He warns about the dangers of idealizing the church (p. 390) because it shackles a believer to a SYSTEM instead of allowing said believer to be led through the multiplicity of reality into a sophisticated and enduring experience of life (p. 407). Perhaps, it is best to end this review with Rahner's definition of humankind: "...a being who exists from out of his present 'now' towards his future." (p. 431) Being open to that future via God's self-communication is the challenge.

This book is the kind of volume that I end up reading 10-15 pages at a time. I have to think about what's been said and consider where it fits with my thoughts, my studies, and my interpretation of Scripture. It is a challenging, mind-expanding experience that I expect to revisit from time to time. It will have an honored place on my shelf.

Marc says

If you want to be sure that you hav read the most important work by one of (if not the) mot important philosophical Catholic theologian of the twentieth century, this is it! Do not let the subtitle fool you, though.

Although "an introduction to the idea of Christianity" this magnum opus of Karl Rahner, SJ is no introductory book - or perhaps it is introductory in the way that Thomas Aquinas says that his *Summa Theologica* is an introduction to the basics!

Rahner is perhaps best known for his correlation of Christian theology (particularly a retrieval and renewal of St. Thomas' thought from the ossified confines of pre-Vatican II neoscholasticism) with existential philosophy, particularly as expressed by Martin Heidegger. This forms the basic thrust of his theological approach in this book and elsewhere, as he seeks to provide an intelligent explication of the Christian faith in the new circumstances created by Enlightenment and post-enlightenment thought. Arguing that the human person is fundamentally open in his or her very existence to the transcendent reality, and that this experience is (necessarily) mediated through the categorical and historical experiences - in particular the definitive self-communication of God in the person of Jesus Christ - Rahner seeks in this book to both retain traditional Catholic orthodoxy while recognizing that the philosophical categories that have been used to express this faith may be freighted with understandings that actually hinder a properly orthodox understanding. He therefore uses the book as a way of showing how a contemporary theology which takes as its concrete starting point the concrete human person existing in history and in his / her existential reality can provide an enhanced foundation upon which Christianity can continue to be intellectually robust and honest in the contemporary world.

Rahner is certainly no leftist. His comprehensive vision has suffered from baseless attacks of heterodoxy, however, partially because the denseness of his German is pregnant with multivalence. (That's the Rahnerian equivalent of saying He says a lot with few words!) However, the book assumes a familiarity with the Denzinger manuals of theology - the hallmark of neoscholasticism - with which he takes issue in articulating his own method, mostly because he considers them no longer adequate to the task of fundamental theology. Thus, those that don't know the manuals and don't know their technical vocabulary as well as that of existential philosophy, run the risk of misunderstanding and mischaracterizing this quite orthodox Catholic thinker.

On the whole I tend to think Rahner is right on target as far as he goes, however, he has been criticized as focusing on the existential reality of the individual believing Christian and not enough on the social, political, and ecclesial dimensions of the faith. His later works represented a turn in this direction but he died before he could develop these ideas further, and that task has fallen to his students such as Johann-Baptiste Metz and others.

However, it can never be denied that this book, and Rahner's other works, have offered a coherent theological vision and helped bring about a substantive and important renewal in Catholic theology, its understanding of the human person, and the truths of the faith in a way that is not only intellectually substantive, but can even be spiritually inspiring!

Charlie says

All of the philosophical heaviness and technical vocabulary we've come to expect from a 20th-century, German-speaking theologian, but without any of the dynamism or charm of his Protestant counterparts.

Russ Booton says

This book was a challenge, but a rewarding one. I don't think I could have comprehended it without another book, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner* by Mark Fischer -- a very useful summary / paraphrase. There was a lot in this book I loved. His emphasis upon humanity's capacity for transcendence was something I pondered for weeks. His explanation of the Trinity is very helpful (the best I've read, I think), and I've still working through his Christology in my head. I certainly enjoyed his exploration of the Christian's relationship with Jesus Christ. His understanding of the Church and especially of the Scriptures, however, don't work for me, and seem to need further development. All in all, though Rahner is now definitely one my favorite theologians, probably this is not the book I will come back to, but the anthology *The Content of Faith* (which is a bit more accessible).

Kenneth says

An important book in terms of recent theological developments.

The Roman Catholic Church divided at the time of Vatican II into two mainstream lines of theological thought. Rahner led the leftist or progressive side that rallied behind him. Joseph Ratzinger (who later became pope) led the opposition.

Rahner was an integral theologian at Council. His central ideas are spelled out in this volume. The primary concern is with the notion of grace or the "supernatural existential" or the "pre-conceptual" apprehension of God who is then defined thematically with revelatory symbols.

God remains the ultimate "ground of being" or "absolute mystery" that is intrinsic to human existence. Logical consequences such as the "anonymous Christian" who is existentially Christian (albeit barring the thematic content) or the notion of sacraments that draw grace from the naturally supernatural state of mankind were deduced from Rahner's re-ordering of theology along finer shades of modern thought.

Interestingly Rahner befriended Heidegger who influenced him significantly. Much of Rahner's thought is in Heidegger absent the mapping of Christian Revelation onto the existential framework. An important book for the aspiring theologian that is penetrable when the main ideas have been grasped adequately.

Chris Danes says

Extremely hard to read, not least because KR invented a technical language of his own. Nonetheless if you can get past that it's the standard work on Existential Neo-Thomism. As though we care.

