

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Karl Rahner: Theologian of the Graced Search for Meaning by Geoffrey B. Kelly; I Am a Happy Theologian by Edward Schillebeeckx

Review by: Eamonn Conway

Source: *The Furrow*, Vol. 46, No. 12 (Dec., 1995), pp. 734-736

Published by: The Furrow

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27663075>

Accessed: 07-12-2018 12:47 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

*The Furrow* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Furrow*

## THE FURROW

and figures which he quotes, that they might leave the reader close to despair. But the third section emerges with a biblical and radical Christian message of hope for the building of global community.

After the collapse of communism soon will come the fall of capitalism and consumerism, says Wallis, when the world will need this Alternative Vision or otherwise will self-destruct. In order to develop this Vision, amongst other subjects the following must be addressed: Priority of the Poor, Honouring the Whole Creation, Fostering Equality for Women and for all races, Hungering for Justice. To underpin his insistence on God's concern for the poor as spelled out in the Old and New Testaments, Wallis describes how a copy of the Bible from which all references to the dispossessed had been snipped out with a scissors could scarcely be held together at all, so full of holes had it become.

This white American – an evangelical Christian doggedly opposed to the 'religious right' – works with the largely black community of Washington DC (fourteen blocks from the White House but worlds apart in life-style and life experience). His book is dedicated 'To the people of South Africa who have taught the world the power of hope'. May all who read it receive something of that power!

UNA O'HIGGINS O'MALLEY

*Dublin*

**Karl Rahner: theologian of the graced search for meaning.** Ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly. Edinburgh: T and T Clark. Pp. 372. Price stg£9.95.

**I am a happy theologian.** Edward Schillebeeckx. London: SCM Press. Pp. 104. Price stg£7.95.

I still remember a fellow 'Dunboyne' student, quite delighted with himself for having arrived at such an advanced level of insight, telling me that Rahner's theological legacy was relatively worthless, given that he (Rahner) had not developed a theological system as such. Perhaps it is still too soon for either of us to claim that the other has been proven wrong but what is beyond dispute is that Rahner continues to be written about and spoken about, and serious theology students still have to engage in the struggle to understand him. Karl Rahner's brother Hugo reputedly said that when he had time he would like to translate his brother's books into (readable) German. Rahner is not the most 'user-friendly' of theologians, though his abstruseness is frequently exaggerated. Nonetheless books such as that of Prof. Kelly (La Salle University, Philadelphia) have a value, particularly for students of theology who themselves have not had an opportunity to explore the context and milieu in which Rahner reflected theologically and who may also lack a background in philosophy.

If one wishes to understand a theologian, one must understand his/her questions. Rahner was driven by a search for meaning in his own life, a search that would not settle for half-truths no matter how dogmatically proclaimed. This search was guided by a few ground-rules the validity of which may be disputed, but a knowledge of which

makes reading Rahner a much easier matter. In a substantial introductory essay Kelly points out, for example, that Rahner was a theologian of the *quotidinal* rather than of the occasional feast. Genuine meaning, for Rahner, had to be chiselled out of and in turn invigorate the 'day to day', the dull, the routine. Thus daily personal and pastoral encounters were the nourishment and context for Rahner's theological reflections. People had questions, Rahner listened to them and made them his own, thus facilitating a dialogue between them and the Christian tradition, especially as interpreted by Ignatius and Thomas, while attentive to the critical voices of people such as Hegel, Kant and Heidegger. In short, as Kelly comments, Rahner did theology in an intellectually rigorous manner, but always with a view to kerygma, preaching and pastoral care. Perhaps this is why Rahner found the International Theological Commission, of which he was a member for some time, little more than 'a theologian's club', and at that, one full of malice and arrogance! (p. 27)

Another ground-rule for Rahner was that God and the human are always to be found together. The question of God, for Rahner, was the question of what humans are called to become. Obviously this is quite literally a *vital* question, a question not only of theology, but actually of faith and life itself. And this gives us another ground-rule for Rahner: theology, as an exploration of faith, cannot remain at an intellectual level. It touches the whole person because ultimately what is involved is the risky adventure of accepting God in faith and in freedom. It is very helpful, therefore, that in the book under review Kelly presents not only an edited version of Rahner's theological writings but also some of his more explicitly spiritual reflections which make it quite clear that although human history is the concrete locus of God's self-revelation and must therefore also be the prime matter for theological reflection, the origin and goal of such reflection is communion with God who, when human self-exploration has exhausted itself (and it is, after all, a *graced* self-exploration), God is found disturbingly yet gently close, as the human heart's companion who nonetheless remains mysteriously and distinctly 'other'.

There is no 'Rahner without tears'. The student has to struggle with concepts such as 'supernatural existential', 'fundamental option', 'transcendental' and 'categorical'. Particularly helpful, therefore, are the short introductions to each of the selected writings which Kelly provides in this volume. This book is about introducing people to Rahner and about helping them to understand him. It does not set out to provide a critique. The attentive reader may well be brought to the stage where she/he begins to come up with the now familiar questions and criticisms of Rahner's way of doing theology. If that happens, then the book has served its purpose of introducing the reader to Rahner well.

In passing, it is worth mentioning another recently published collection of Rahner's writings which provides a fresh translation, and an excellent introductory essay by Karl Lehmann, a former student of Rahner's and present chairman of the German Episcopal Conference, entitled *The Content of Faith* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

## THE FURROW

*I am a happy theologian* is not a theology book as such. It is a selective autobiography of Edward Schillebeeckx but perhaps more importantly a biography of the European Church in the latter part of this century. It consists of an edited series of interviews with Schillebeeckx and, as with the book on Rahner, provides an opportunity to get to know the theologian and his questions. In his brief introduction and preface Gibellini stresses that the key issue for Schillebeeckx was the relationship between Christian experience and human experience. Following the Second Vatican Council, and largely due to people such as Rahner and Schillebeeckx, Catholic theology began to acknowledge systematically that there are *two* sources of theological reflection: revelation and the Christian tradition on the one hand, and *human experience* on the other. Aside from his many useful volumes on topics such as christology, ministry etc, Schillebeeckx still has something to say to us regarding the more fundamental methodological question of how to relate human experience and the Christian tradition in a manner which is respectful of both. In many ways this remains a key question today.

That Schillebeeckx is overall 'a happy theologian' comes across in the anecdotal manner in which he relates his own history, and the frankness and honesty with which he talks about personal 'ups and downs' more than makes up for what is at times a rather disjointed style. Schillebeeckx talks very openly, for example, about his relationship with his Dominican superiors and indeed about Dominican life in general (pp. 9, 10). There is also an account of the storm concerning the then *Dutch New Catechism*. Perhaps the most chilling section is of his three investigations by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the first in 1968 and the last in 1984. While there are, of course, two sides to every story, if even the account of the actual procedures in place for such processes is accurate then the Church is still far from the reign of God (interestingly Rahner was delegated as the *relator pro auctore* (advocate) for Schillebeeckx in the first process in 1968).

In the course of this short book Schillebeeckx outlines his position on questions such as creation, religion and ethics, atheism, the silence of God, Mary, eschatology. He does not hedge on issues such as 'voluntary' celibacy and the ordination of women, the latter he sees simply as a matter of discrimination which should be challenged albeit with 'much respect, kindness and serenity' (p. 77). One of the most helpful features of this book is the use the editor makes of footnotes to explain theological terms which may be unfamiliar to the reader or to provide relevant background information. So, for example, he explains 'epiclesis' (p. 38), '*Nouvelle Théologie*' (p. 16), 'mental qualification' (p. 33). He gets one wrong: unless the editor knows something which we don't, Cardinal Ratzinger was never Archbishop of Monaco as claimed on p. 18!

EAMONN CONWAY

*All Hallows, Dublin*