

deserve the name have not yet advanced to the point of trying to answer the questions. And so Communism, including the semi-Communism of the third world (terms have not even been coined for its varieties, in or out of power), continues its march. Shipments of weapons and economic aid, presidential "doctrines," boycotts, and embargoes may serve domestic political ends and even distract or divert the adversary for the moment, but not stop its progress.

Reviewed by DONALD W. TREADGOLD

"A Mystagogical Summa"

Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity,
by Karl Rahner, New York, N.Y.:
Seabury Press, 1978. xv + 470 pp.
\$19.50.

SOMETIME AGO Father Karl Rahner indicated that our age is not suited for a theological work in the tradition of the great *Summas* of the past. Throughout his career he has opted for the brief essay, bound together in a series of volumes entitled *Theological Investigations* (now numbering sixteen in English). There have been other monographs of note and the *Quaestiones Disputatae*, but in the *Foundations of Christian Faith* we have for the first time by Rahner a work of synthetic range, drawing together in an organized way the basic concerns and themes of the Christian faith, most of which have been dealt with piecemeal by the Jesuit theologian in the past. In fact, Rahner has offered us a compact *Summa*. Comprehensive in its reach, profound in its grasp, singular in its scope, Rahner has written a remarkable and often brilliant "introduction to the idea of Christianity." It is a challenge to the uncommitted non-believer who is searching for a contemporary, intellectually stimulating presentation of the

ground for faith. And it is a full-fledged challenge to the believer who is vaguely and timidly holding to his faith; to the more traditionally, scholastically grounded theologian who is wary of theological change; and to the Evangelical who may seek out the differences and agreements touching the Catholic standard. But it is not a book for those unwilling to read attentively, or who are unfamiliar with a strongly cast philosophical-theological tone such as this work is.

The scope of *Foundations* is thoroughly outlined in a "Detailed Table of Contents" at the back of the volume. While beginning with the human person as the "hearer of the message," the book deals with the basic theological themes moving from knowledge of God, to creation, personal freedom and responsibility, original sin, the supernatural existential, Trinity, history of salvation and revelation, transcendental Christology, miracles, soteriology, personal relationship to Christ, church, scripture, the sacraments, eschatology, and concluding with "brief creedal statements." It's all there—and more.

At the outset Rahner cites two important points facing the contemporary theologian today. First, there is the inherently pluralistic nature in theology, philosophy, and in all scientific endeavors. Indeed, "There is a genuine pluralism in reality." And yet there is the longing for a unitary method in all intellectual spheres. Second, there is a mandate from Saint Peter himself (I Peter 3:15) to give a reasonable account of our faith in the age we live. It is to "theological anthropology" and the "transcendental method" that Rahner turns to meet both of these points.

What is the transcendental method as employed by Rahner? Man is a transcendent being who is dynamically oriented to the experience of the holy mystery. "Mystery" and "experience" are dominating themes in Rahner's work. He has us turn to the human subject to identify a "transcendental experience." In every act of knowing the subject not only knows the object before him but in the same act, not in a reflexive act, knows

himself as subject. "In knowledge not only is something known, but the subject's knowing is always co-known." How? Not as a conceptualized self-presence but as an "original self-presence of the subject" to himself. So this "being-present-to-onself" is an experience, yielding implicit knowledge, unthematic, yet ever present, being "a moment within and a condition of possibility for every concrete experience of any and every object." Why is this experience transcendental? It is such because it is an experience belonging to the very "structures of the knowing subject" while transcending any categorical object of knowing. Hence this "transcendental experience" is really an experience of transcendence, an experience of the knowing and willing subject as an actual dynamism having as its term no finite object, but possessing an infinite openness towards absolutely all of reality.

Having established man's being as transcendence Rahner moves to show, especially in the first two chapters of *Foundations*, that the term of this transcendence is nothing short of God himself as absolute mystery. As a transcendent being man "is that existent to whom the silent and uncontrollable infinity of reality is always present as mystery." But what is this mystery? It is not something unknown alongside of that which is known. Mystery is given to us and confronts us as the unfathomable. It is not produced out of us, as an absolute Fichtean ego to confront us as confronting ourselves. In an obvious repudiation of philosophical idealism Rahner writes that "it would be the greatest misunderstanding...if this term [the holy mystery] were explained as something in the mind, as an *idea* which human thought established as its own creation." This term of transcendence is an ever present horizon of our existence often only implicitly grasped. "Mystery...is rather the characteristic which always and necessarily characterizes God, and through him characterizes us. This is so true," Rahner maintains, "that the immediate vision of God which is promised to us as our fulfillment is the immediacy of the incom-

prehensible." It is the role of the traditional metaphysical proofs for God's existence to make explicit this original and underived experience of the absolute mystery implicitly present to every human person.

Part of Rahner's strength is the personalized style that breaks through his sometimes ponderous prose. In striving to awaken us to the presence here and now of God in our lives, and not to conceive God to be some "infinitely distant horizon" savored in dread as a remote judge, Rahner speaks of man's experience of the holy mystery. "He experiences...a hidden closeness, a forgiving intimacy, his real home, that it is a love which shares itself, something familiar which he can approach and turn to from the estrangement of his own perilous and empty life. It is the person who in the forlornness of his guilt still turns in trust to the mystery of his existence which is quietly present, and surrenders himself as one who even in his guilt no longer wants to understand himself in a self-centered and self-sufficient way...."

It may seem strange to many readers, considering Rahner's concern with the "idea of Christianity," to arrive at his treatment of Jesus Christ nearly two-fifths through the book. Without the anthropological framework, however, there can be no understanding of Rahner's "transcendental Christology." This Christology he terms as "ascending," "searching," "consciousness" and "existentiell Christology" at various points, all with distinct meanings, yet all grounded in transcendentality. The wonders of his Christology lie not alone in the insights we gain concerning Jesus Christ as the God-man, but also in the increased understanding of ourselves, and the call encountered throughout a sophisticated theological, yet almost pastoral monograph encouraging us to open up to a personal relationship to Jesus Christ. Speaking of the Christian life, the theologian from Munich writes that "human experience is nothing else but a challenge to entrust oneself to the development of one's own Christian existence in patience, openness and fidelity, and to do

this until slowly, and perhaps painfully and with failures, this life unfolds and develops into the experience of a personal relationship to Jesus Christ."

Throughout his *Christology* Rahner avoids overemphasizing the divine at the expense of the human nature of Christ, or the human for the divine. He deplores a mythological tendency on the part of some to envision God as coming down ("descending Christology") and taking on human nature as a livery. He strives to explain Jesus' constant and total union with God in terms of Jesus' transcendental experience, freely assented to, and constantly with him. Yet, as human, the mediation of this union, of this experience, comes through the historical milieu of which he is a part, together with its conceptual tools and its horizons of self-understanding. This objectifying self-consciousness expressed through Jesus' own history does not come about as a "condescension" on his part to others. Explaining Jesus' consciousness Rahner writes in an illuminating passage: "It learns and has new and surprising experiences. It is threatened by ultimate crises of self-identity, although...they remain encompassed by the consciousness that even they are hidden in the will of the 'Father,' but they are not for this reason any less acute."

The chapter on Christology is the longest in the book, being almost 150 pages. It is succeeded by a chapter entitled "Christianity as Church." Throughout this chapter Rahner is in dialogue with Evangelical theology. He attempts to validate the claim of Roman Catholicism as the authentic expression of the church of Christ, possessing a "more evident and less encumbered historical continuity with the church of the past going all the way back to apostolic times." He refutes ecclesiological relativism and notes that the reformation fathers themselves do likewise. Rahner offers a three-fold criterion as a defense against ecclesiological relativism, and a guide to authenticating the claim of the Catholic church to be the church of Christ: First, to be such it must have "the closest possible historical approximation to the

original Christian church of Jesus Christ." Second, "the basic substance of Christianity may not be fundamentally denied in this concrete church...." Third, "the religious community of church must obviously exist as a reality which is independent of my subjectivity."

The argument from historical continuity is especially significant and as the framework for this argument is developed Rahner reveals himself to be what I believe he is throughout this work, an authentic conservative in Edmund Burke's sense of the term, that is a "conserving" conservative. He doesn't seek to return to a lost golden age, nor cling to the status quo of the present; rather he aims to guide, gently and deliberately, the inevitable fact of change (as Burke noted, the chief law of nature) in such a way as to preserve the best of the past in order to build and grow in stable and orderly fashion into the future. It is in this seventh chapter that Rahner shows himself to be a social philosopher of merit. He notes the historical and social nature of man and acknowledges the role of presumption and prescription in man's life. He writes, "Man is a spiritually free and historical being who has to begin to take responsibility for his existence. But first of all he is someone who relies confidently on the situation in which he finds himself...we are bound to a particular situation...we are justified in presuming the legitimacy of our historically conditioned situation." Further, no one can "ground the concreteness of his existence exclusively by means of reflection." So, the weight of history, culturally and traditionally expressed, is a powerful claim to man's allegiance while not relieving him of the responsibility ultimately to think through the correctness of his situation.

A critical assessment is now in order. For many, Rahner has proven unacceptable. This unacceptability for some derives from the very transcendental assumptions grounding Rahner's methodology. One critic, Louis Dupré, finds himself in agreement with Rahner's basic insight, "that the metaphysical horizon of affirmation necessarily raises the *problem* of

transcendence."¹ But the problem raised does not result in the requirement of affirming an absolute Being as the term of transcendence. Dupré states: "That the mind affirms Being infinitely does not imply that it affirms *an* infinite Being." For Dupré any affirmation of an absolute Being as the goal of transcendence is a "choice," a matter of faith. Dupré welcomes the transcendental method as leaving open the possibility of such a Being, but not the necessity, at least as the result of philosophical reflection. In this conclusion Dupré appears to ignore the evidence. To recognize the fact of the human spirit's dynamism beyond all finite beings, a dynamism never content to rest in any limited realm, and yet to be unwilling to assent on these grounds to an absolute infinite Being is itself the "choice," one that is taken by Kant's philosophy, thus separating both Kant and Dupré from Rahner on this point. The first thing to acknowledge is, again, the experience of transcendence; the experience, achieved in knowing and willing, of a "beyond" of every objectifiable, limited object. Knowing limit, we experience the infinite horizon of Being that surpasses all limitation. Man as spirit is open to infinite transcendence. But may not this surpassing result in nothingness rather than absolute Being? Rahner rightly rejects this—perhaps with Heidegger in mind—when he claims that nothing cannot ground beings. Finite reality could not stand out from a horizon of nothingness because "nothingness grounds nothing."

So, granting man's transcendent nature, his desire for knowledge without limit, as well as hope and happiness, and seeing these to be things one continually experiences, we must see the goal of transcendence as either itself a further limit, which it cannot be as we experience ourselves as beyond limit as limit, thereby experiencing the illimited; or as nothingness, but this is to reduce man's transcendent nature to an absurdity, to a grasping of an illusion; or to affirm this universally encountered experience as what it is, the absolute mystery

of Being. Finally, Rahner is saying something similar to Saint Bonaventure, an acknowledged influence on his thought,² where, in *The Mind's Road to God*, the Seraphic Doctor writes, "For how would the intellect know that a being is defective and incomplete if it had no knowledge of being free from all defect?"³ Likewise with Rahner: how can a man grasp limit or finitude without having at least an implicit, pre-grasp of infinite Being?

Reviewed by JOSEPH PAPPIN III

¹*The Other Dimension: A Search for the Meaning of Religious Attitudes* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972), p. 135. ²For an excellent introduction to the background of Father Rahner's intellectual formation see Gerald A. McCool's "Introduction" in *A Rahner Reader*, ed. Gerald A. McCool (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975). ³*The Mind's Road to God*, trans. George Boas (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1953), p. 24.

The 1980s— Where Do We Go From Here?

The United States in the 1980s, edited by Peter Duignan and Alvin Rabushka, Stanford, California: Hoover Institution, 1980. xxxix + 868 pp. \$20.00.

THE BEGINNING of each decade brings forth a review of the major events of the previous decade and an attempt to anticipate events of the coming decade. Recalling George Santayana's famous admonition that "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it," observers of the public scene expect to get an insight to help determine events of the future years and to avoid the pitfalls of the past. It is this sense of prophetic vision that the reader perceives in *The United States in the 1980s*.

This volume is divided into two major parts: domestic issues (edited by Mr. Alvin Rabushka) and foreign affairs (edited by