Karl Rahner & Catholic Theology Before (& During) Vatican II

1. Karl Rahner (1904-1984): Theological Writings
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5. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955)

1. KARL RAHNER (1904-1984): THEOLOGICAL WRITINGS

Karl Rahner, Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity [Grundkurs des Glaubens: Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums, 1976], trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad / Herder, 1983). Karl Rahner is widely acknowledged as the greatest Catholic theologian of the 20th century. He was a German Jesuit who, over the course of his career, wrote on an astonishing range of topics of Christian life, devotion, and thought. Towards the end of his life, he put together Foundations, which offers something of an overview of his thought and serves as an entry into his more profound meditations. Given the difficulty of his style, it is probably best to read studies about him at the same time.

Karl Rahner, Theological Investigations [Schriften zur Theologie, 1954-1984], 23 volumes (New York: Crossroads, 1960-1992). Rahner is usually described as a “systematic theologian,” and while he does use a coherent philosophic framework, his actual theological method is more tentative and piecemeal. “Investigations” is the best way to describe his probings and explorations. Over the course of his career, he gathered these essays in a vast assembly of books under the rubric of Theological Investigations. Here are the collections:

• Vol. 1: God, Christ, Mary, and Grace, trans. Cornelius Ernst (1965)
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• Vol. 2: Man in the Church, trans. Karl Kruger (1963)
• Vol. 4: More Recent Writings, trans. Kevin Smyth (1966)
• Vol. 5: Later Writings, trans. Karl Kruger (1965)
• Vol. 13: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, trans. David Bourke (1975)
• Vol. 17: Jesus, Man, and The Church, trans. Margaret Kohl (1981)
• Vol. 20: Concern for the Church, trans. Edward Quinn (1981)
• Vol. 22: Humane Society and the Church of Tomorrow, trans. J. Donceel (1992)


2. KARL RAHNER: STUDIES

Declan Marmion & Mary E. Hines, eds., The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Rahner is a very difficult writer and frames his theology using a complex philosophic framework, drawing especially on Heidegger and transcendental Thomism. This introduction offers a good current overview of his methods and key ideas.


3. YVES CONGAR (1904-1996)

Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and a Theological Essay* [*La tradition et les traditions*, vol. 1: *Essai historique*, 1960; vol. 2: *Essai théologique*, 1963], trans. Michael Naseby & Thomas Rainborough (London: Burns and Oates, 1966; reprint, Basilica Press, 1997). Yves Congar (1904-1996) was a French Dominican who spent his career before the Council tracing the history of ecclesiology. Perhaps more than any other single thinker, Congar paved the way for the thinking of Vatican II—focused as it was on formulating a coherent and many-sided theology of Church. Congar, in particular, laid the groundwork for the theology of collegiality and of ecumenism; he pioneered a theology of the laity; and in this massive study he radically rethought the subtle, intricate, and intimate relationship between Scripture, Church and Tradition (and in so doing shaped the theology found in the Council’s Constitution *Dei Verbum*).

Yves Congar, *My Journal of the Council* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012). As we approach the 50th anniversary of Vatican II, it is especially appropriate to have the first English translation of the private journals of one of the major architects of Vatican II.


Yves Congar, *True and False Reform in the Church* [*Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'Église*, 1950], trans. Paul Philibert (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011). It took nearly 60 years to get this into English translation—one of the most controversial and important theological works of the last century.


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**Studies**


**4. EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX (1914-2009)**


**Studies**


5. PIERRE TEILHARD de CHARDIN (1881-1955)

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* [*Le phenomenon humain*, 1955], trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Harper Perennial, 1976). Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was a French Jesuit and a paleontologist who boldly integrated Christian theology and scientific perspectives on evolution. Most of his major works, at the time of his death, were unpublished and circulated among a devoted friends in mimeograph form. Only after the election of John XXIII was the ban lifted, and Teilhard became widely recognized for his brilliant speculations that tried to reconcile science and faith. This is his most important work. Here he argues (against the scientific mainstream) that the human being is no accident of evolution, but its leading edge.


Studies


6. HENRI de LUBAC (1896-1991)


Studies


7. JOHN COURTNEY MURRAY (1904-1967)

John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (1960; reprint: Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2005). John Courtney Murray was an American Jesuit who fiercely defended the American constitutional experience of religious liberty and emerged as the primary author of the Council’s *Dignitatis Humanae*, its “Declaration on Religious Liberty.” Like other leading theologians of the Council, he clashed bitterly with Alfredo Ottaviani during the 1950s and was silenced on various matters, only to be vindicated at the Council. The Council’s stand on religious liberty was more than a “development of doctrine”; it marked a reversal of earlier Catholic teaching, and it was Murray who did the historical research and put together the theological arguments to make possible such a stark reversal in church policy.


Studies


8. HANS URS von BALTHASAR (1905-1988)

Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* [*Herrlichkeit: Eine theologische Ästhetik*, 1961], 7 vol., trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, ed. Joseph Fessio & John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982-1990) hardcover, $40 per volume. Von Balthasar, a conservative thinker of the same generation as Karl Rahner and Yves Congar, has exerted his influence more in the post-Vatican II era. John Paul II made him a cardinal, and his theological achievements have received more and more appreciation in the English-speaking world as his works have been steadily translated. Von Balthasar uses an aesthetic rather than a philosophical method; it is both subtle and difficult, as complex as Rahner. This, like several other of his major works, is a complex multi-volume exploration.


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**Studies**


