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Logos-Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner

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Book Reviews

LOGOS-SYMBOL IN THE CHRISTOLOGY OF KARL RAHNER. Biblioteca di Scienze Religiose-61. By Joseph H.P. Wong. Roma: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1984. 280 pages.

Joseph H. P. Wong is a Salesian from Hong Kong, at present lecturing in dogmatic theology at the Salesian Pontifical University in Rome. His *Logos-Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner*, which originated as a doctoral dissertation at the Gregorian University (Rome), attempts an original synthesis of Rahner's concepts of *Logos* and *Symbol* set within what Wong himself calls "a Christology of the heart of Jesus."

Wong develops his essay in three parts. The *first* takes up the background of Rahner's symbol theory. Its origin was in the spiritual experience of the Ignatian *Exercises*. Its development was sought in a philosophical system constructed to conceptualize and communicate the grounding experience; systematization was in function of theological and spiritual concerns.

Part two is an interpretative exposition of Rahner's *Logos-symbol* Christology: it is both "from above" and "from below"; remaining faithful to the Chalcedonian definition, it nonetheless moves beyond it in dynamic and existential perspectives. The Christ-Event is seen as the "self-interpretation" and "self-realization" of the Son-Saviour through history — a history which culminates in death: the Cross is the final Trinitarian revelation. The human reality of Jesus, with its own history and process of becoming, is thus the *Realsymbol* or the very "*ek-sistence*" of the Logos in the world and in history.

In Wong's "critical-constructive evaluations" (Part Three), the focus is on a few core-themes: Rahner's "Logos-symbol" concept as a model for God's self-revelation; the actuation theory of "Son-consciousness" as basis for the self-expression of the Logos-Son (a psychological-revelation model); the idea of revelation demanding a unified person concept. "The subsisting conscious relation of the eternal Son becomes humanly conscious through the incarnation . . . (which is thus) the living out in a human way of the one and the same conscious relation of the eternal Son towards the Father."

Wong then examines various polarities in Rahner's transcendental Christology: the relation between Christology and anthropology; the tension between transcendentalism and history; the dialectic between God's immutability and becoming.

The concluding chapter centers on two points: (1) Rahner's Christology is ultimately "a Christology of the heart of Jesus, which is a concrete symbol of the incarnate Logos;" (2) This Christology is presented in the language of symbol or of the heart, because it arises from Rahner's personal experience and thus can speak (*cor ad cor loquitur*) to the depth in others. St. Bernard's *Christus tantum cognoscitur, quantum diligitur* (Christ is known only in the measure that he is loved), finds a contemporary expression in Rahner's "Christology of the heart of Jesus."

The outline just given of Wong's study will suggest, we hope, something of both its richness and its inevitable technicality. There is much more in the essay than can even be summarily indicated here. There is, for instance, the careful analysis and critique of Rahner's thought on the "Son-consciousness" of Jesus, and the creative interface of Rahner's position (on this point) with the notions of person and consciousness in trinitarian theology. Following in his own measure the example of Rahner himself, Wong has passages where, in and through sentences of precise theological language, insights deriving from spiritual experience find moving expression.

Wong also points out at least three areas where Rahner's Christology might be developed and/or clarified: the *mysteria vitae Christi*, if reflected on more fully, would have given concrete content to the Christ-symbol; Rahner's denial of the interpersonal Father-Son relationship in the *immanent* Trinity weakens the idea of Jesus' relation to the Father as the *Realsymbol* of the inner trinitarian life; Rahner's "always given supernatural existential" can be seen as brought to fulfillment by the Christ-Event as a fully "Christic or filial existential."

This admirable work, with its painstaking scholarship; its remarkable and yet critical understanding of Rahner's thought; its range, clarity and depth of speculative exposition, gives ample evidence of the gifts of a young Asian theologian of much promise.

Rahner's Foreword to the book, written only a few months before his death, is an unusually laudatory one, and serves as perhaps the best recommendation the author could want. Rahner acknowledges that the creative drawing-together of the notions of *Logos* and *Symbol* as found in his thought leads to "an appreciation of my Christology which is original on the one hand and which on the other synthesizes many of the insights which I myself up to this time have left unconnected." Wong, he adds, "also allows the presuppositions of my Christology to become more clearly recognizable than they are in my own explicitly Christological essays . . ." This in turn permits clarifications of points in Rahner's Christology which have in fact been misunder-

stood by his readers. Thus the thesis renders a service to Rahner's work for which Rahner himself expresses his sincere gratitude. "Fr. Wong has carried out his research in a most gratifying and fair way," Rahner says in the Foreword, "without having sacrificed its independence and conscientiousness."

There is little one can add to Rahner's praise, except a word of sincere congratulations for a study excellently accomplished. We can only voice the hope that Wong's theological concerns will, in years to come, also move in the direction of the concerns of the Church in his own country and in Asia. We trust that his theological work may become a part of the self-understanding and self-realization of the Church as it lives out the incarnate presence and the ongoing redemptive work of the Lord — in the life and history of peoples in our part of the world.

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SITTING IN DARKNESS: AMERICANS IN THE PHILIPPINES. By David Haward Bain. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984. 646 pages.

When one speaks of a historian, the image that often comes to mind is that of an indefatigable scholar stuck to his desk, poring over brittle documents amidst the dust and cobwebs of dank archives. But examining the contemporary written records of a past event is only one facet of a historian's task; equally important is an attempt to understand the past by "experiencing and reliving" it so that one's rendering of it in the present becomes vivid and relevant.

David Haward Bain's *Sitting in Darkness* is an effort in that direction. Spurred on by the writings of Mark Twain, a known anti-imperialist at the turn of the century and from whose essay Bain takes the title of his book, the author became interested in the Philippine-American War of 1899-1902, a topic which during his student days, had often been relegated to the footnotes of standard American history textbooks, overshadowed by America's short-lived but "splendid little war" with Spain in 1898. After over a year of research in American libraries, two figures emerged for him as the major historical characters of that era: Emilio Aguinaldo, president of the Malolos Republic and head of the revolutionary forces against the Americans, and Frederick Funston, the American officer who planned and executed the capture of Aguinaldo in Palanan, Isabela.

Bain believes that both men were "considered heroes of the highest sort in their respective countries . . . (and) emblematic of their people's aspirations at the time" (p. 4). Thus convinced of the inadequacy of pure documentary research, Bain journeyed to the Philippines in 1982 for a six-week