

# Against Karl Rahner's Rule

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This essay is a critique of Karl Rahner's famous rule: The economic Trinity *is* the immanent trinity and the immanent Trinity *is* the economic Trinity.<sup>1</sup> Though Rahner, together with Karl Barth, is considered one of the most influential writers on the doctrine of the Trinity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, his famous maxim has been the subject of penetrating criticism. David Hart and Randal Rauser are two among those who offer objections to Rahner's rule. In this essay, I present a brief summary of their arguments, some interaction with them, and an alternative Trinitarian rule that attempts to satisfy the deep and legitimate concern from which Rahner's rule was born, and offer a more concrete Trinitarian vision than Rahner.

Another reason for devoting a short essay to this subject is to clarify my position on Rahner's rule, which has been misunderstood and misrepresented. The most egregious example is J. V. Fesko, who critiqued my view of the Trinity as if I agreed with Rahner. In my response to Fesko, I wrote the following.

Fesko writes (p. 11), "In fact proponents of the federal vision go as far as to say that 'the 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity.'" Again, he writes, "Stated more succinctly, the federal vision believes there is no distinction between the economic Trinity and the ontological Trinity. To say the least, this theological construction is fraught with problems."<sup>2</sup>

I said in my response that I agree with Fesko that the formula is "fraught with problems." It is not the case, however, that proponents of the Federal Vision hold to Rahner's view. Also, my own endorsement of Bavinck's view does not *necessarily* represent the views of the men who hold to the theology of the Federal Vision, though Bavinck's view is standard Reformed theology and probably is shared not only by the proponents of the Federal Vision, but most Reformed theologians.

But the issue of Rahner's rule is much larger than the Federal Vision controversy. It is important to interact with Rahner in order to have a mature statement of the doctrine of the Trinity that takes into account the 20<sup>th</sup> century discussion. It is not enough for Reformed thinkers to say that Rahner's view is "fraught with problems." Some exposition of the problems involved must be offered, together with the presentation of a more Biblical view.

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<sup>1</sup> I italicize the "is" as Rahner has done, for example, on page 23 of his *The Trinity* (New York: Crossroad, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.berith.org/essays/brief\\_response\\_to\\_fesko.html](http://www.berith.org/essays/brief_response_to_fesko.html). Dr. Fesko graciously responded to my email enquiry about his erroneous representation of my views in his essay. He seems to believe, however, that the difference between Bavinck's view and Rahner's is not significant. I hope that this essay will make the difference very clear.

## **David Bentley Hart's Critique of Rahner**

Although David Bentley Hart is among those who regard Rahner's rule as a profound contribution to Trinitarian theology, he does not approve it without qualification. His extended critique penetrates the heart of the issue.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, his endorsement of Rahner is emphatic, "More to the point, what Rahner's maxim describes is the necessary shape of all theological rationality."<sup>4</sup> The reason for this emphasis is found in the history of theology, where we encounter what Hart refers to as a "divorce of the doctrine of God from the story of God's manifestation of himself in history."<sup>5</sup> Rahner's rule called the church back to a doctrine of God in which the narrative of the one God in Christ expresses the truth of the one God who exists eternally before the foundation of the world. The doctrine of God is saved from abstract speculation to be grounded in the concrete revelation of Jesus.

In this sense, Hart follows Rahner. However, he also cautions against what he regards as two perils that attend "any attempt to translate Rahner's maxim into fuller theological discourse."<sup>6</sup> From my perspective, it is a devastating critique of Rahner to say that any and every attempt to translate Rahner into fuller theological discourse is attended with peril. It seems to me that what Hart actually does is offer a definition of Rahner that does away with Rahner.

Hart offers two criticisms, which amount to saying that whichever side of the equation one takes as a standard, the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity is endangered. In Rahner's equation, the immanent equals the economic. If that is the case, one could start with the economic and make it the standard by which to judge and evaluate the immanent. In fact, if the immanent is defined by the economic, then God *must* create the world and become incarnate in order to become who He really and truly is. God the immanent Trinity realizes Himself through history. Hart says that various recent Trinitarian theologies, including Jurgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Robert Jenson tend in that direction.

If the identity of the immanent Trinity with the economic is taken to mean that history is the theater within which God — as absolute mind, or process, or divine event — finds or determines himself as God, there can be no way of convincingly avoiding the conclusion (however vigorously the theologian might deny the implication) that God depends upon creation to be God and that creation exists by necessity (because of some lack in God),<sup>7</sup> so that God is robbed of his true transcendence and creation of its true gratuity.<sup>7</sup>

Hart devotes quite a few pages to eloquent and profound refutation of this sort of thinking.<sup>8</sup> But the point concerning Rahner is already clear — if the defining side of the equation is the economic, the Creator God must be understood as a God who had to create in order to realize His Trinitarian self. This is not a Christian view of God.

On the other hand, if one makes the immanent Trinity the defining side of the equation, much of the historical revelation of God in Christ is relegated to the merely contingent. History

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<sup>3</sup> *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 156 ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 157-67.

*Against Karl Rahner's Rule*

shows us very little about who God truly is. We are haunted by the specter of the unknown and unknowable God. The One God of eternity is reduced to a God in whom there are three “persons,” where the word “person” is defined as “a mode of relation to the essence of God,” or some other abstruse expression. Thus, the Persons sound impersonal, as in formulas like: there are three modes of subsistence in the one substance.

The dynamically passionate love between Father and Son revealed in the Gospels finds no place in this theology of the “one God.” Ironically, Rahner himself, whose maxim apparently provoked 20<sup>th</sup> century theologians to consider the economic Trinity more seriously, falls into the category of those for whom the immanent Trinity swallows the economic trinity, leaving an abstract doctrine of the one God, in whom there are three relations but only one subject.<sup>9</sup>

This problem appears, it seems to me, most clearly in his definition of a Trinitarian person. To give proper due to the nuance of his explanation, Rahner deserves to be quoted somewhat at length.

Nonetheless, the main difficulty regarding the concept of person in the doctrine of the Trinity is rather different, and we have already mentioned it several times before now: When *today we* speak of person in the plural, we think almost necessarily, because of the modern meaning of the word, of several spiritual centers of activity, of several subjectivities and liberties. But there are not three of these in God — not only because in God there is only *one* essence, hence one absolute self-presence, but also because in God there is only one self-utterance of the Father, the Logos. The Logos is not the one who utters, but the one who is uttered. And there is properly no *mutual* love between Father and Son, for this would presuppose two acts. But there is a loving self-acceptance of the Father (and of the Son, because of the  $\tau\alpha\chi\iota\sigma$  of knowledge and love), and this self-acceptance gives rise to the distinction. Of course, that which we call “three persons” in God exist in God with self-awareness. There is in God a knowledge of these three persons (hence in each person about himself and about the two other persons), a knowledge about the Trinity both *as consciousness* and as “*object*” of knowledge. But there are not three consciousness; rather, the one consciousness subsists in a threefold way. There is only one real consciousness in God, which is shared by Father, Son, and Spirit, by each in his own proper way. Hence the threefold subsistence is not qualified by three consciousnesses. The “subsistence” itself is as such not “personal,” if we understand this word in the modern sense. The “distinctness” of the persons is not constituted by a distinctness of conscious subjectivities, nor does it include the latter. This distinctness is conscious. However, it is not conscious for three subjectivities, but it is the awareness of this distinction in one only real consciousness.<sup>10</sup>

Rahner's tortured explanation reveals the difficulty of finding a way to reconcile the Biblical picture of the relationships among Father, Son, and Spirit with the doctrine that God is One. In his definition of a Trinitarian person, what Rahner does, in effect, is reduce one side of his equation — the economic side — to the other side of his equation — the immanent side. We

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<sup>9</sup> This is an overly simplistic statement that does not do full justice either to Rahner or to Hart, but I think it states the essence of the matter.

<sup>10</sup> *The Trinity* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), pp. 106-7.

know that God cannot be three *subjects* who mutually love one another — even though the Bible unquestionably speaks this way — because God is one. If the economic Trinity is defined by our knowledge of this absolute One, then the relationships among Father, Son, and Spirit in the Gospels cannot really be relationships among three subjects, three conscious persons. What we really have is three distinctions in the one consciousness of the one absolute being of God, a threefold subsistence in the one substance. How do we know that what appears on the pages of Scripture to be three fully personal subjects relating in mutual love is in fact not three “persons” but a threefold distinction within the one substance? The answer is that we know this because we know that the immanent God is one.

### **Conclusion**

To summarize then, either side of Rahner's maxim may be emphasized to the detriment of the other. If the economic Trinity is identical to the immanent Trinity, then we may conclude either that God must create the world and reveal Himself in history in order to realize His own being, or that the God who reveals Himself in history must be understood according to our knowledge of the immanent God, an abstract One, whose nature may not be so fully revealed as the formula might suggest. In either case, one side of the equation strips the other. The fruit of the tree, together with its leaves, is violently wrenched off, and the trunk severed from the root. What originally seemed to offer a delicious repast has been reduced to firewood.

## **Randal Rauser's Critique of Rahner**

Randal Rauser offered a critique of Rahner that is, in some respects, even deeper than Hart's.<sup>11</sup> According to Rauser, Rahner actually says either nothing new or nothing true. In Rauser's words, “In order for the Rule to be judged worthwhile for theology, we must first identify an interpretation of it that meets two criteria: (1) it must be interesting, meaning either (a) it tells us something important we would not know otherwise or (b) it reinforces something important we already know with unique power and insight; (2) it must be at least possibly true.”<sup>12</sup> According to Rauser, Rahner fails to meet either of these criteria. To demonstrate this, Rauser suggests three possible interpretations of Rahner's rule: 1) what he calls the “strict realist” interpretation; 2) what he calls a “loose realist” interpretation; and 3) what he calls an “antirealist” interpretation. Let us consider each of these briefly.<sup>13</sup>

### ***The Strict Realist Interpretation***

The “strict realist” interpretation turns out to be complicated, for it can be understood in

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<sup>11</sup> “Rahner's Rule: An Emperor without Clothes?” *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, vol. 7, no. 1, Jan. 2005, pp. 81-94.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>13</sup> My brief summaries do not do justice to the full statement of the argument by Rauser, but I hope that they are adequate to introduce the subject and provoke interested readers to further study. Rauser's article includes references to other articles and books that wrestle with Rahner's rule.

*Against Karl Rahner's Rule*

two ways.<sup>14</sup> One, it can be understood as the rather banal assertion that the same Three Persons who constitute the immanent Trinity are the Persons who constitute the economic Trinity. If this were the point of Rahner's maxim, it would fail to say anything significant. No theologian in the history of the Church has maintained that there are two Trinities.

Two, it can be understood to mean that the properties of the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity are identical. Rauser quotes Bruce Marshall's explanation of the second interpretation.

Not only do the same persons make up both the economic and immanent Trinity, but their *features* or characteristics are the same in both cases: being incarnate belongs to the Son immanently as well as economically, being poured out on all flesh belongs to the Spirit immanently as well as economically, and so forth.<sup>15</sup>

According to Marshall, the second interpretation is not just false, it is self-contradictory. Rauser explains the self-contradiction by applying the language of essential and contingent properties. An essential property is something necessary for a being to exist. A contingent property is not necessary to the existence of a being. So, for example in my own case, to be the image of God is essential to my humanity. If I ceased being God's image, I would cease to be a man. However, having hair is contingent and not essential to my humanity. In my youth, I had a full head of hair. Now, I have a clean scalp. But I am still I. And I think I am still a human.

What that means for God is this: if the immanent Trinity is *identical* to the economic Trinity, then creation, incarnation, etc. would be essential to the life of God, apart from whether or not God created the world. God could be "creator" without having created because everything essential to the economic Trinity would have to be true of the immanent Trinity. Follow this carefully: to say that God is creator, *whether He has actually created or not* involves us in a contradiction.

It also seems to entail that God *must* create and that the only world that could possibly be is the world in which we are now, for everything in this world is essential for God to be who He is. Rauser points out that this would not only imply a rigid determinism, but would also constitute a fundamental denial of the sovereignty and freedom of God. In addition, it may imply that God only becomes who He really is as history unfolds, a point made by Hart.

On a strictly realist interpretation, therefore, Rahner's rule is either trivial or absurd. In either case, it hardly serves as a guide for Trinitarian theology. But Rauser believes the subject has to be considered further, for there is no question about the fact that Rahner's maxim is frequently quoted in Trinitarian discussions and it is considered by many theologians to be important. Perhaps there is another interpretation of Rahner's rule that saves it from the dilemmas implicit in the strict literalist interpretation.

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<sup>14</sup> Rauser follows the arguments of Bruce D. Marshall, *Trinity and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 264 ff.

<sup>15</sup> Rauser, p. 83.

### ***A Loose Realist Interpretation***

Perhaps a less rigid interpretation will work, a “loose realist” interpretation. Rausser illustrates what he means by a “loose realist interpretation” through a number of quotations, one of which is from John Polkinghorne.

If you think about it, Rahner's Rule, which says that ‘the economic trinity is the immanent trinity’, is a statement of theological realism, that what we know about God is not misleading. In other words, the economic trinity *is* the essential trinity; what we know about God is a reliable guide to the divine nature.<sup>16</sup>

Rausser believes that most theologians who discuss the rule interpret it along these lines. God really and truly is as He has revealed Himself to be. This is true and profound. But Rausser finds two problems with this interpretation. One, if this is what Rahner meant, why didn't he say it in this language? What is the point of positing a maxim in the language of identity when one is not *really* saying that the immanent *is* the economic and the economic *is* the immanent? At best, this is a very awkward way of expressing the truth that God has revealed Himself truly and faithfully. Two, the “loose realist” interpretation does not tell us anything new. On this interpretation, Rahner is reaffirming ancient Trinitarian truth in extremely awkward and misleading language. Rausser concludes that if the loose realist interpretation is the correct interpretation, Rahner's rule is unhelpful and unnecessary.

### ***Anti-realist Interpretation***

In Rausser's article the discussion of this interpretation constitutes almost half the article, since Rausser has to explain what he means by realism and anti-realism before he can discuss Rahner. The question is important because Rausser sees a parallel between the debates between realists and anti-realists about the world, and the anti-realist interpretation of Rahner's rule.

The realist claims that our knowledge of the world is true when what we know corresponds to what really is. But the anti-realist denies that we can know anything about the world-itself. All we know is what we experience, or what we think we know about the world. We have no contact with the world-itself, only our perceptions of the world. Applying this to the Trinity, an anti-realist understanding of Rahner's rule would say that we cannot know God-in-Himself, we can only know Him as He has revealed Himself in the economy of salvation, that is, as we experience Him. Once again, this seems to make the economic Trinity the standard.

But the problem is deeper. From the anti-realist perspective, talk about the world-itself is illegitimate. We simply have no access to any such thing. We may take a pragmatic approach to truth or a coherence theory approach to truth, but in either case, we would not be saying anything about the world-itself, a subject utterly beyond our ken. What this means for Trinitarian theology is clear. All talk about the economic Trinity is talk about our ideas and experiences. As such it may be legitimate, but we are not really saying anything about the immanent Trinity because we cannot talk about God-in-Himself any more than we can talk about the world-itself.

Rausser shows that both Jurgen Moltmann and Catherine LeCugna move in this direction. His quotation of Moltmann is perhaps the clearest indication of what this means.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

## *Against Karl Rahner's Rule*

The thesis about the fundamental *identity* of the immanent and the economic Trinity of course remains open to misunderstanding as long as we cling to the distinction at all, because it then sounds like the dissolution of the one in the other. What this thesis is actually trying to bring out is the interaction between the substance and the revelation, the 'inwardness' and the 'outwardness' of the triune God. The economic Trinity not only reveals the immanent Trinity; it also has a retroactive effect on it.<sup>17</sup>

LeCugna's view is similar.

There is neither an economic nor an immanent Trinity; there is only the *oikonomia* that is the concrete realization of the mystery of *theologia* in time, space, history, and personality.<sup>18</sup>

In Rausser's view, the problems of an anti-realist reading of Rahner, which Rausser thinks has some foundation in Rahner himself, are the problems of epistemological anti-realism as a whole. The anti-realist interpretation of Rahner's rule has to mean, at best, that the economic determines the immanent. More properly, it would seem to mean that there can be no knowledge of God-in-Himself, only God in the economy, which Rausser sees as opening the door to all sorts of skepticism.

### **Conclusion**

In a way, Rausser's analysis of the problems in Rahner's view does not really take us much further than Hart's, unless our concern is about realism versus anti-realism. However, his detailed argument is helpful because it pushes a point that Hart did not. Contrary to Hart, there is simply no good way to take the rule seriously. Either Rahner's rule is trivial or heretical. If Rahner's rule says anything good at all, it says what Christians have affirmed throughout history in grotesquely awkward language. Rausser rightly concludes that we are better off without it.

## **Why So Much Influence?**

We are still left with the historical question of why Rahner's rule has been so frequently quoted and so highly regarded by modern theologians. Perhaps part of the answer is that the apparent precision of the rule combined with its actual vagueness has made it theologically convenient, especially for those like LeCugna who wish to take what appears to be an orthodox proposition in an unorthodox direction. But that would only explain why a certain type of theologian finds the rule helpful. This is not therefore, the real answer.

The real answer, I think, is found in Rahner's objection to Thomas Aquinas.<sup>19</sup> Aquinas divided his discussion of God into two treatises, *On the One God* and *On the Triune God*.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 92

<sup>19</sup> The order and divisions in Aquinas theology may not be a fair basis of judgment for his view of God. But it seems undeniable that in the Western tradition, the emphasis is on the "One God," with the theology of the Three Persons being limited to the ontological relations described by Thomas as the "five notions," which are the defining characteristics of a divine Person: 1) unoriginatedness, 2) paternity, 3) filiation, 4) spiration, 5) procession. There is

## *Against Karl Rahner's Rule*

Rahner objects to this sort of presentation because it isolates the doctrine of the Trinity. In his words, "It looks as if everything which matters for us in God has already been said in the treatise *On the One God*."<sup>20</sup> This problem manifests itself in the history of Western Trinitarianism, critiqued by Rahner as mere monotheism.

We must be willing to admit that, should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged.<sup>21</sup>

Rahner's book on the Trinity is a robust appeal for Christians to take the doctrine of the Trinity seriously not only as the doctrine of who God is, but as the core truth in the whole of Christian theology, the doctrinal hub around which all else revolves, the absolute light of truth which is reflected in the entire Christian system of truth. His rule has been seen in the context of an appeal to develop a more Biblical view of the Christian God and to make that understanding of God central to worship and daily life. It is this appeal for a fully Trinitarian Christian theology that has resonated so profoundly. Christian theologians are affirming his rule because they see it as the means of restoring the Trinity to the center,<sup>22</sup> thereby escaping the bare monotheism exemplified most infamously in Friedrich Schleiermacher, who placed the doctrine of the Trinity near the end of his work *The Christian Faith*, as a virtual appendix to his theology.

What we have seen through Hart and Rauser is that Rahner's rule cannot actually accomplish what Rahner and most of those who quote him wish for it. The rule is trivial or awkward at best, heretical at worst. But Rahner's critique of traditional Western theology has much to commend it, even if he is not entirely fair to Aquinas. Whether or not we should follow him in his preference for Greek theology and its understanding of the Father as the font and origin of divinity, or in his definition of a Trinitarian Person as a "distinct manner of subsisting" are more difficult questions and I cannot discuss them in this essay. What all Christians should affirm without hesitation is that we seek a theology in which the Triune God is everywhere the heart of all we confess, a theology in which every topic is calculated to bring us before the Father, Son, and Spirit in worship and praise.

## **A Biblical Alternative**

Is there something better than Rahner's rule? Yes, traditional Trinitarian theology, as expressed, for example, in Bavinck's formula — "The ontological trinity is reflected in the economic trinity." In these words, Bavinck expresses the truth that Rauser included in the "loose realist" interpretation. God reveals Himself to us as He truly is. What we see God doing in history reflects the relationships of Father, Son, and Spirit in eternity. The attributes of God

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some debate about whether or not this tradition should be blamed on Aquinas.

<sup>20</sup> *The Trinity*, p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> This also seems to be LaCugna's understanding of the significance of Rahner. "Rahner's book launched one of the most significant theological developments of the last few decades: the restoration of the doctrine of the Trinity to its rightful place at the center of the Christian faith." *Ibid.*, p. xxi. Hart's expressed appreciation of Rahner follows this same line, as I pointed out above, p. 2.



## *Against Karl Rahner's Rule*

apparent in the creation of the world and the redemption of fallen humanity are the attributes that characterize Him before the foundation of the world and apart from His relationship to mankind.

This is traditional theology, both Western and Eastern. But, as Rahner and others have emphasized, the church has neglected the doctrine of the Trinity. We do need to return to the truth of the Trinity. The problem is that we need something much more than a rebuke for neglecting the Trinity and a command to get back to it. We need to see how and why the Trinity is the center of all thought and life.

Here is where two reformed theologians, Abraham Kuyper and Cornelius Van Til, offer insights into the doctrine of God that are far more important than the contributions of Karl Barth and Karl Rahner. Ironically, the largest portion of the Reformed world has more or less ignored their contributions, just as the Western church historically tended to neglect the Trinity. In the United States today, these insights are not only neglected by Reformed pastors and theologians, they are often opposed and sometimes attacked as if they were heresy. What did Kuyper and Van Til propose that provokes such a strong reaction?

Kuyper taught that the three Persons of the Trinity relate to one another essentially in covenant. The covenantal love of Father, Son, and Spirit revealed in the economy is essential to the intra-trinitarian relationship. By viewing the Persons of the Trinity in covenant, the personal relationships among Father, Son, and Spirit become concrete and the fully personal nature of all reality comes to fore. Kuyper's view of the Trinity in covenant makes the doctrine of the Trinity concrete because in the Bible, creation and redemption are covenantal. In Kuyper's theology, therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity is vitally related to the doctrines of creation and redemption.

Cornelius Van Til, following Kuyper, showed how the doctrine of the Trinity is the Biblical solution to the philosophical problem of the one and the many. To be more precise, Van Til showed how the doctrine of the Trinity, rightly understood, obviates the problem of the one and the many. This ancient philosophical problem lies at the heart of every academic discipline and all human intellectual endeavor. Thinking of the doctrine of the Trinity concretely and applying it to the problem of the one and the many brings the Biblical doctrine of God into clear relation to all conceivable intellectual and practical human thought or action.

What Kuyper and Van Til introduced was elaborated by their followers. Meredith Kline made an important contribution by demonstrating that creation itself was a covenant-making act.<sup>23</sup> This means that man's very nature and all basic human institutions are covenantal. Vern Poythress demonstrated specifically some of the concrete implications of a covenantal and Trinitarian view by showing how the doctrine of the Trinity is central to mathematics,<sup>24</sup> logic,<sup>25</sup> hermeneutics and linguistics.<sup>26</sup> James Jordan's Biblical theology follows Kuyper and Van Til and applies insights from these and other men to his study of Biblical theology, including his Trinitarian analysis of the flow of history.<sup>27</sup> Jordan has also written numerous essays demonstrating how the Trinity applies to Christian worship. Peter Leithart applied the doctrine of the Trinity to the life of the Church in his various writings.<sup>28</sup> Jeffrey J. Meyers expounds

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<sup>23</sup> See Meredith Kline's demonstration that creation is a covenant-making act in *Kingdom Prologue*, available for free on the internet here: <http://www.twoagepress.org/books.htm>

<sup>24</sup> See his articles on the net: [http://www.frame-poythress.org/poythress\\_articles/1976Biblical.htm](http://www.frame-poythress.org/poythress_articles/1976Biblical.htm) and [http://www.frame-poythress.org/poythress\\_articles/1974Creation.html](http://www.frame-poythress.org/poythress_articles/1974Creation.html)

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.frame-poythress.org/poythress\\_articles/1995Reforming.htm](http://www.frame-poythress.org/poythress_articles/1995Reforming.htm)

<sup>26</sup> [http://www.frame-poythress.org/poythress\\_articles/1986Divine.htm](http://www.frame-poythress.org/poythress_articles/1986Divine.htm)

<sup>27</sup> See Jordan's internet site for an abundance of material: <http://biblicalhorizons.com/>

<sup>28</sup> See his internet site: <http://leithart.com/>

*Against Karl Rahner's Rule*

Jordan's and Leithart's views of the Trinity and liturgy in an extended study in his *The Lord's Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship*.<sup>29</sup> Other followers of Van Til have applied his insights to various academic disciplines. My own book on the Christian worldview offers a worldview introduction that discusses basic worldview issues in terms of the Biblical teaching about the Trinity.<sup>30</sup>

Followers of Kuyper and Van Til have not only written of the doctrine of the Trinity, they have offered specific applications of Trinitarian theology to various aspects of the Christian worldview, giving concrete expression to the idea that the Trinity must be the center of all Christian thought and life. No other intellectual movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has offered a more Biblical or more definite Trinitarian theology. No other movement has written so much about the Trinity as it applies to the Christian life.

My own conclusion is that it is not Rahner that we need for a vital Trinitarian theology, but Kuyper, Van Til, and their followers. More than Rahner or Barth, Kuyper and Van Til lay the foundations for a Trinitarian revolution that not only centers Christian theology on Father, Son, and Spirit, but also restores Trinitarianism to its proper place — at the center of theology, of course, but more importantly at the center of all knowledge and all life.

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<sup>29</sup> Jeffrey J. Meyers, *The Lord's Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship* (Moscow, Id: Canon Press, 2003).

<sup>30</sup> My book, *Trinity and Reality*, is an introduction to the Christian worldview from a Trinitarian perspective. It is available from Canon Press, Covenant Media Foundation, Amazon, and the Westminster Theological Seminary Bookstore. [http://www.wtsbooks.com/product-exec/product\\_id/3989/nm/Trinity\\_and\\_Reality\\_An\\_Introduction\\_to\\_the\\_Christian\\_Worldview](http://www.wtsbooks.com/product-exec/product_id/3989/nm/Trinity_and_Reality_An_Introduction_to_the_Christian_Worldview)

Rahner, christology and grace. Philip endean. Heythrop College. But surely Karl Rahner would feature large in the account, and in particular Rahner's lifelong concern for making connections, both between the various aspects of theology, and between Christian thought and other visions of the human condition. Introducing The Heythrop Journal's tribute to Karl Rahner in 1984, Brinkman wrote of how Rahner's greatest concern, was the inner unity of human experience, a structured unity. Against such criticisms, at least three points can be made in Rahner's defence. Firstly, both Kasper and Marshall read Rahner as grounding Christological claims on an understanding of the human person arrived at independently of revelation. This is false. Karl Rahner, SJ (1904-1984), was one of the most important theologians of the 20th century. Of note, his meditations on mysticism rejected any world view which would suggest a dichotomy or hierarchy between the "ordinary" and "extraordinary" forms of mystical experience. For him, divine grace is seen as a fundamental element of human existence. Rahner was born in March 1904. He was the fourth of seven children, the son of a local college professor and a devout Christian mother. At the core and crux of Rahner's meditations on mysticism is a fundamental emphasis of a world view which militates quite radically against any which seek to erect a dichotomy or hierarchy between the "ordinary" and "extraordinary" forms of mystical experience. Karl Rahner is representative of a body of theologians who during the middle of the twentieth century wanted to rearticulate Catholic sacramental theology so as to make it more palatable to the modern world. Like other theologians, Rahner focused on an articulation of the sacraments as symbols, and this for a number of reasons. The emphasis on "symbol" was one means of avoiding questions regarding material causality and the traditional metaphysical philosophical commitments surrounding the term "transubstantiation." A Summary of Karl Rahner's Thesis of the Anonymous Christian. . . a. Defining the Term "Anonymous Christian" . . . b. Jesus, the Supernatural Existential, and Salvation . . . . Catholics, Rahner makes an ad hominem attack against those who think most people may. actually be going to hell, singling out St. Augustine specifically: With all respect to Saint Augustine, he must be asked: "How can you believe in the victory of the cross of the eternal Son of God and at the same time see no problem in the fact that apparently enormous numbers of people are damned? Against Karl Rahner's Rule Rahner objects to this sort of presentation because it isolates the doctrine of the Trinity. In his words, It looks as if everything which matters for us in God has already been said in the treatise On the One God.<sup>20</sup> This problem manifests itself in the history of Western Trinitarianism, critiqued by Rahner as mere monotheism. Harts expressed appreciation of Rahner follows this same line, as I pointed out above, p. 2. -8-. Against Karl Rahner's Rule apparent in the creation of the world and the redemption of fallen humanity are the attributes that characterize Him before the foundation of the world and apart from His relationship to mankind. This is traditional theology, both Western and Eastern.