

A Formula To End All Formulas

W. H. MARSHNER

A San Francisco novelty company has succeeded where yours truly and (I hate to say it, but) all the other *Wanderer* writers have consistently failed. This company has been able to put the entire problem of dogmatic relativism into 27 simple words. Here they are:

I know you believe you understand what you think I said, but I am not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant.

Now that is Karl Rahner's theology in a nutshell. You see, the "I" who is speaking here is the Holy Spirit as Herr Doktor Rahner conceives of Him-Her. The merely traditional theologian believes (his first mistake) that he understands (problem of dogmatic theology) what he thinks (problem of positive theology) the Spirit said, but the trouble is that what the theologian has heard (dogmatic formulas)

are merely the "ever inadequate (categorical, predicamental) expression of what the Spirit really (transcendentally, non-predicamentally) meant.

You see, there is nothing unchangeable in the Church's dogma except what She (and the Spirit) really *mean*, but what She means is never reducible, according to Fr. Rahner, to what She says. Therefore, even if you think you know what She said, and even if you also understand what She said, you are still nothing but a hack theologian in the "manual" tradition.

You cannot rise to Teutonic profundity . . . (Does one "rise" to profundity? Very well) . . . you cannot sink to teutonic profundity until you realize that "a formula is just a formula," that is, a categorical translation of the transcendentally untranslatable. Or, as the Italians say, "*tradditore e traditore*," translation is always treason. You must go behind all the translations, rethink all the formulas, and

consult your own transcendental intellectuality in order to mint therefrom your own fresh words of wisdom for the men of our time. It's really not so difficult once you get started. Besides, if Rosemary Reuther can do it, any woman can.

For your own handsomely crafted copy of these 27 liberating words, lettered in black on a gold plate with pine finishing, merely send \$1.98 plus 25 cents postage to Anthony Enterprises, Inc., HB6, 585 Market St., San Francisco, Calif., 94105. Perfect for your kitchen wall; a sure guarantee that the Blessed Virgin will never embarrass you in front of your liberal friends by appearing there. Got an updated pastor? He'd love one, too. Special discounts for nuns and seminarians can probably be arranged, though I don't know that for a fact, having never talked to the manufacturer, who (if I understand what I think he would have said) is not paying me a dime for this puff.

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