



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Special Section: *Renovatio Mundi: The Jesuits as Educators in History*

Teaching Christianity: Genesis, Composition, and Context of Karl Rahner's *Foundations of Christian Faith*

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ABSTRACT

Foundations of Christian Faith is of central importance for understanding both the theology of Karl Rahner (1904–84) and the development of the Catholic Church after Vatican II. Rahner's thought is closely connected to his activity as a teacher. The book stands for Rahner's theology as a whole and is also shaped by its origin in academic lectures and its intended audience. Initially concerned with priestly education and the reform of theological studies, the book addresses a wider audience. Examining the genesis of the work—especially its development from lectures at different universities—reveals the importance of composition, revision, and collaboration in shaping its final form. By analyzing the composition of the lectures and their contexts, his theology, method, and working process become visible as shaped by historical circumstances. *Foundations of Christian Faith* thus also provides a privileged approach to Rahner's theology as a historical document.

Keywords:

Karl Rahner; twentieth-century theology; theological introduction; teaching and method

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It may come as a surprise to see Karl Rahner (1904–84) in the context of education and pedagogy, and no one would be more surprised than the famous theologian himself. However, Rahner had an extensive academic career, and this is reflected in his teaching and writing. This is particularly evident in a key work of his, *Grundkurs des Glaubens* (*Foundations of Christian Faith*).

According to Rahner himself, the “several characteristics”¹ of the book—including the weighting of the individual sections and the absence of footnotes—can be explained by the fact that it emerged from lectures.² The conception, realization, and publication of *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* accompanied the development of Rahner’s thinking over a long period of time. Biographical and historical data place the *Grundkurs* in a historical context, which reveals a shift in methodology and intended audience. This was important not only for Rahner but also for the evolution of Catholic theology in the twentieth century. Moreover, an analysis of the various phases of text production and revisions provides important insight into Rahner’s teaching, working methods, and theology.

Rahner had been designated for an academic career by his order, the Society of Jesus, early on. The primary aim was to enable him to teach young Jesuits. He had been giving lectures since 1937 and—apart from an interruption due to the Second World War—he continued to teach until a year before his death in 1984.³ Although Rahner came from a family of teachers on his father’s side,⁴ he never addressed the topics of teaching and education in detail from a practical point of view. Nor was he himself known for his sophisticated pedagogy, but as former students report, he could captivate his audience and was even regarded as an “outstanding teacher.”⁵

- 1 Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (Crossroad, 1978), xiii. Cf. Karl Rahner, *Sämtliche Werke* 26 (Benziger/Herder, 1999), 5 (hereafter KRSW). Special thanks to Albert Raffelt and Judith Lipperheide for the valuable insights and helpful suggestions. I also appreciate the discussion with Andreas Batlogg, S.J., and Julio Minsal-Ruiz, S.J., at the beginning of my research. Klaus P. Dietz, S.J., helped to decipher Rahner’s handwriting. I thank Michael T. Castori, S.J., for proofreading.
- 2 Cf. Karl Rahner, “Grundkurs des Glaubens: Eine theologische ‘Summe’ Karl Rahners,” in KRSW 26, 529–30, here 529.
- 3 Cf. KRSW 32/2 (Herder, 2018), 33–42; Karl Rahner, “Zum Generationenwechsel der Theologen,” in KRSW 31 (Herder, 2007), 82.
- 4 Cf. Karl Heinz Neufeld, *Die Brüder Rahner: Eine Biographie* (Herder, 2004), 30–42.
- 5 Emerich Coreth, “Dozent in Innsbruck 1937–1939,” in *Karl Rahner: Bilder eines Lebens*, ed. Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons (Benziger/Herder, 1985), 32–34,

Rahner earned this reputation among the international group of Jesuits and seminarians who studied at the Leopold-Franzens-University in Innsbruck.⁶ Rahner had his first, short phase in Innsbruck from 1936 onward, where he initially taught after his habilitation as a Privatdozent from the winter term of 1937–38.⁷ Although his subject was dogmatics, fundamental theology and the history of spirituality were also present in his publications during this time. The latter are particularly evident in the preparation of a German edition of the 1930 published book *La spiritualité des premiers siècles chrétiens* (*Spirituality in the Early Christian Centuries*) by Marcel Viller.⁸ However, Rahner was only able to be active as an academic teacher in the summer semester of 1938. The political situation had worsened after the “Anschluss Österreichs,” so that by year’s end the

here 33 (my translation). Bernhard Meyer vividly describes the teaching style, as he explains that Rahner’s “lectures were truly exciting. He was extemporaneous and thought out loud as he walked back and forth as we tried to follow his thought. This ethos of proclamation was characteristic of him, as can be seen in his entire thought. He could with one step alternate between the most difficult speculative reflections and the practical ecclesial pious life, so that one saw how one was connected to the other. That was a great talent and it deeply impressed us.” Hans B. Meyer, “Ethos of Proclamation,” in *Encounters with Karl Rahner: Remembrances of Rahner by Those Who Knew Him*, ed. Andreas R. Batlogg and Melvin Michalski, trans. Barbara Turner (Marquette University Press, 2009), 57–64, here 58. Cf. Otto Muck, “Not Only for Opportunistic Reasons,” in *Encounters with Karl Rahner*, 65–68, here 65.

6 Cf. Andreas Batlogg, “Karl Rahner in Innsbruck: Aus der Wissenschaftsbiographie eines Jesuitengelehrten—zugleich ein Stück Fakultätsgeschichte,” *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 129 (2007): 397–422, here 397–400.

7 Cf. Batlogg, “Karl Rahner in Innsbruck,” 400–422; Neufeld, *Die Brüder Rahner*, 130–37.

8 Cf. Neufeld, *Die Brüder Rahner*, 130–40. The book was first published in German in 1939 with the title “Aszese und Mystik in der Väterzeit: Ein Abriß,” with both Viller and Rahner listed as authors. Rahner explained this and the importance of the topic in an interview: “Then later, just before the Second World War, I edited an expanded translation of Marcel Viller’s book, *Asceticism and Mysticism in the Time of the Fathers*; this was a translation of Viller, but I did write half of it myself. In addition, you know, I also wrote an essay on the mysticism of Bonaventure. And so, I grounded myself fairly well in the original sources of Jesuit spirituality. Also, for that matter, in Teresa of Ávila and John of the Cross and so forth. [. . .] I think that the great spirituality of the church in general and especially of the Jesuits had a larger and broader influence on me than did my immediate teachers both inside and outside the order.” Karl Rahner, “Living into Mystery: Karl Rahner’s Reflections at 75—A Conversation with Leo J. O’Donovan,” in *KRSW* 31, 176–93, here 182.

faculty of theology had been dissolved and all Jesuits had to leave Tyrol.⁹ While some of the teachers, including Karl Rahner's brother Hugo, were in exile in Sion, Switzerland, they continued to try to provide an education for students.¹⁰ Karl Rahner, on the other hand, worked for the "Wiener Seelsorgeamt" from 1939 to 1944. Even during this time, he remained active as a theological teacher, though only to a limited extent.¹¹ After a period as a temporary pastor,¹² he held a position as lecturer at the Jesuit's Berchmans College in Pullach from 1945 to 1948,¹³ before returning to Innsbruck. From 1949, Rahner worked there as a full professor of dogmatics at the faculty of theology, which was state-run but entrusted to the Jesuits.¹⁴ As part of the *Theologia dogmatica cursus maioris*, Rahner lectured in Latin on the tracts on creation and original sin, on grace and justification, on the sacraments of penance, consecration, and anointing of the sick in a three-year cycle.¹⁵ In addition, he held seminars, colloquia, and *exercitatio scholastica*, that is, exercises in which the students had to attack or defend the lecture material in Latin. With this method, Rahner stands in a long tradition that was not least intended in the Jesuit pedagogy of the *Ratio studiorum*.¹⁶

9 Cf. Neufeld, *Die Brüder Rahner*, 138–44; Batlogg, "Karl Rahner in Innsbruck," 398–400.

10 Cf. Neufeld, *Die Brüder Rahner*, 145–58.

11 Cf. Magarete Schmid, "Mitarbeiter im Wiener Seelsorgeamt 1939–1944," in *Karl Rahner: Bilder eines Lebens*, 36–38; Neufeld, *Die Brüder Rahner*, 159–77.

12 Cf. Elisabeth Meuser, "Aushilfspfarrer in Niederbayern 1944/45," in *Karl Rahner: Bilder eines Lebens*, 40–41.

13 Cf. Fritz Herrler, "Dozent in Pullach 1945–1948," in *Karl Rahner: Bilder eines Lebens*, 42–43.

14 Cf. Coreth, "Dozent in Innsbruck 1937–1939," 33.

15 Cf. Vorgrimler, "Ordentlicher Professor in Innsbruck 1948–1964," in *Karl Rahner: Bilder eines Lebens*, 45. Cf. KRSW 32/2, 33–39.

16 Herbert Vorgrimler explains that Rahner, in addition to lectures, "had to give an *Exercitatio scholastica*, an exercise for students in which they were initiated into the art of attacking and defending theses from the lecture material in Latin, taking on different roles; this art was customary from Scholasticism of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries onwards, but nowadays is forgotten." Herbert Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner: An Introduction to His Life and Thought*, trans. John Bowden (SCM, 1986), 70. With regard to the importance of the *Ratio studiorum* for the training of Jesuits up until the 1960s: Claude Pavur, *In the School of Ignatius: Studious Zeal and Devoted Learning* (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2019), 47f. The view that the "exercitatio" has been forgotten today must be described in a differentiated way, as it is practiced in a modified form in "debating clubs." Cf. Manfred Kraus, "Exercitatio," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, ed. Gert Ueding, vol. 3 (De Gruyter, 2013), 71–123, here 121.

The lectures were held in Latin and Rahner mostly stuck closely to his lecture manuscript, but he also extemporized in German, allowing his listeners to participate in the development of his thoughts.¹⁷ Apart from his work as an academic teacher, Rahner worked on numerous other tasks and topics, which made him increasingly well-known and expanded his areas of work and impact.¹⁸ For example, Rahner became editor of the second edition of *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* and wrote many articles for it himself.¹⁹ But he also went beyond this as an author on various topics.

This also included thinking about an appropriate and renewed form of theological teaching. Rahner's endeavors were directed toward a fundamental change, with the objective of establishing a renewed understanding of theology. He was convinced that theological education needed to be reformed to achieve this, as he discussed in an essay that was first published in 1954.²⁰ Not only did this essay appear in further versions, but Rahner also pursued the issue in an article that first appeared in 1964 and then also in later versions, entitled "Über die theoretische Ausbildung künftiger Priester" ("On the Theoretical Training of Future Priests").²¹ These con-

17 Cf. Johann Baptist Metz, "Intellectual Passion and Spiritual Courage," in *Encounters with Karl Rahner*, 135–51, here 140; Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, 70. As a student of Rahner between 1955 and 1959, Otto Schärpf wrote down several lectures and seminars in stenography and later transcribed them. Although the transcripts are not Rahner's original texts, they can be regarded as authentic transcripts and thus provide information about Rahner's teaching style. The transcripts can be found in the folder Archiv der Zentraleuropäischen Provinz der Jesuiten (Archivum Provinciae Europae Centralis Societas Jesu), Munich, 47–1088 (hereafter APECESJ).

18 With Herbert Vorgrimler, several "creative initiatives" can be identified for the increasing reputation of Rahner. These can be seen in particular in his publishing activities as well as his organization of and collaboration in numerous projects: Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, 72–87.

19 The number of articles written by Rahner is impressive, cf. KRSW 32/2, 448–78. For Karl Lehmann, this shows one of Rahner's characteristics: "Rahner was interested in many things. He was able to be enthusiastic. That's the reason it was not a problem for him to write many articles about a variety of themes, which shows that his thinking is universal. In the *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, for example, the question of whether there was human life on other planets arose. And what does he do? He sits down and begins to write. There is an article 'Star dwellers' that no one even knows that Rahner wrote, but when one looks for some information on this question it is the best thing one can find." Karl Lehmann, "He Simply Was Unique," in *Encounters with Karl Rahner*, 111–34, here 121.

20 Cf. KRSW 16 (Herder, 2005), 417–33.

21 Cf. KRSW 16, 434–55. The references to the different versions are to be found in: KRSW 16, 568.

tributions demonstrate the significance Rahner attributed to the role of teaching and the structure of theological education.

In the ten years between these two articles, not only did the context of the Church as a whole shift, but Karl Rahner's personal situation changed several times. This can be summarized under the category of "difficulties," which went as far as preliminary censorship on the part of the Vatican.²² At the same time, Rahner gained a growing reputation and also became increasingly recognizable internationally.²³ This dimension is most clearly illustrated by Rahner's appointment as peritus of the Second Vatican Council and the influence he had on it.²⁴ Rahner, who saw the reform of the training of priests and theologians as necessary even before the Council, not only took part in the church assembly that decided on a reform but was also asked to help implement the Council's resolutions through his teaching.

On October 28, 1965, the decree on priestly training, *Optatam totius*, was promulgated. Rahner and other theologians who called for a renewal could see themselves confirmed on the one hand and challenged on the other.²⁵ However, this applied not only to further theoretical considerations, which Rahner continued to make,²⁶ but above all to the practical implementation. This concrete dimension is most evident in the development of an introductory course (*cursus introductorius*) that *Optatam totius*

22 Cf. Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, 87–94; Klaus Wittstadt, "On the Eve of the Second Vatican Council (July 1–October 10, 1962)," in *History of Vatican II: Announcing and Preparing Vatican Council II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, vol. 1 (Orbis Books, 1995), 405–500, here 454–57.

23 Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, 94–111. Cf. Neufeld, *Die Brüder Rahner*, 237–71.

24 Cf. Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, 94–111. The Archbishop of Vienna, Franz Kardinal König, described in retrospect how he made Karl Rahner a peritus and the influence that Rahner on the Council had: Franz König, "Erinnerungen an Karl Rahner als Konzilstheologen," in *Karl Rahner in Erinnerung*, ed. Albert Raffelt, vol. 8, *Freiburger Akademieschriften* (Patmos, 1994), 149–64.

25 Grant Kaplan emphasizes in particular the importance of Marie-Dominique Chenu and at the same time places the decree in a wider historical context, which also addresses the question of the significance of the Council document: Grant Kaplan, "The Renewal of Ecclesiastical Studies: Chenu, Tübingen, and Theological Method in *Optatam Totius*," *Theological Studies* 77 (2016): 567–92.

26 Rahner's article on the significance of biblical studies, published in 1968, is a response to Norbert Lohfink: Karl Rahner, "Die Exegese im Theologiestudium," in KRSW 16, 456–62. Further considerations on the reform of theological studies were then published in 1968 and 1969, respectively: Karl Rahner, "Zur Reform des Theologiestudiums," in KRSW 16, 463–530. The references to the different versions are to be found in KRSW 16, 568.

required.²⁷ Through this course the importance of ecclesiastical studies would be explained on the basis of the mystery of salvation.²⁸

For Rahner such a *Grundkurs* (basic course), as he first called it in an essay published in 1964, had to be more than just an introduction to theological disciplines. Rahner also called for spiritual preparation, which he compared to a kind of “novitiate” for seminarians.²⁹ Rahner’s consideration of an *introductio generalis in mysterium Christi* should also be seen in connection with this. He saw this introduction as the “central discipline of theology”³⁰ and called it “for lack of a better word” and, in contrast to a previous understanding, a “new fundamental theology.”³¹

According to Rahner, a “basic course” had to provide both “scientifically accurate and methodical reflection on the existentially relevant reasons for faith today” and “the possibility of their existential appropriation.”³² The importance that Rahner attributed to this course broadened the view

27 The suggestion for the course was put forward at the Council by the archbishop of Durban, Denis Hurley. Cf. Josef Neuner, “Decree in Priestly Formation,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, vol. 2 (Herder and Herder, 1968), 371–404, here 394, note 31.

28 Cf. Vatican Council II, “Decretum de institutione sacerdotali [*Optatam totius*, October 28, 1965],” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966): 713–27, no. 14.

29 Cf. KRSW 16, 454.

30 Cf. KRSW 16, 452 (my translation).

31 Cf. KRSW 16, 445 (my translation). In a later encyclopedia article, Rahner explains why an introductory course is particularly relevant for understanding of systematic and fundamental theology: “Fundamental theology is a theology of Christian *faith*, not metaphysics and philosophy of religion. Furthermore, at the present day in particular, a purely abstract, formal demonstration of the credibility of the existence of revelation would seem to be insufficient. Nowadays each of the various mysteries of faith requires an initiation into its credibility and the possibility of its actual concrete assimilation by the individual. Only such initiation in its totality, therefore, would represent an adequate demonstration of the credibility of revelation. Whether such a task should be carried out to a large extent by special dogmatic theology alone (dogmatic theology cannot renounce the task entirely) or whether fundamental theology itself is to assume the task, is a secondary question, of a more technical and pedagogical kind, which cannot be settled here. In the latter case fundamental theology would certainly be considerably extended, and in a certain way would have to keep before it the whole of dogmatics and interpret its fundamental affirmations in relation to the ‘credibility’ (concrete assimilability) and so perhaps discover the true nature of that *cursus introductorius* which the Vatican II plan of studies calls for without precisely determining in what, from the methodological point of view, it consists.” Rahner, “Dogmatics,” in *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (Burns & Oates, 1975), 366–70, here 368.

32 KRSW 16, 449f (my translation).

beyond the training of priests, as “the basic discipline described” could also be of great benefit to “lay theologians.”³³

To what extent the project was also relevant and practicable with regard to the “spiritual situation of the young academic”³⁴ was a question for Rahner himself, given the new position he had held since 1964. Rahner’s contribution to the Second Vatican Council in particular made him a recognized figure and thus gave him appeal to a wider audience.³⁵ The chair for “Philosophy of Religion and Christian Worldview” at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University in Munich, which had been created and made famous by the respected Romano Guardini (1885–1968),³⁶ appeared to be a good basis for Rahner’s work after the Council.

According to Rahner, Guardini himself was interested in having Rahner as his direct successor.³⁷ This is understandable insofar as both

33 KRSW 16, 454 (my translation).

34 APECESJ, Abt. 47-1010 (KRA) I, E, 172 a, No. 1385 (my translation).

35 Karl Lehmann, who was Rahner’s assistant from 1964 to 1967, said in retrospect: “The Second Vatican Council helped improve Rahner’s reputation. It was like being in a state of siege for him prior to the Council. The Council provided for a closer look at Rahner—and was an ‘aha’ experience for his attackers—‘look, he is actually more reasonable; he knows much more than we thought; he is not a heretic.’” Lehmann, “He Simply Was Unique,” 123.

36 The significance of Guardini’s contributions to intellectual discourse in Germany and beyond can be identified through several factors that predate the Second World War, but which underwent further development in the postwar era: “In autumn 1945, he [Guardini] moved to the University of Tübingen to serve as Professor of Philosophy of Religion and Christian Weltanschauung. Here he remained for two years, turning down ‘calls’ to the universities of Göttingen, Munich and Freiburg im Breisgau, where he was offered Martin Heidegger’s chair. Then, in 1948, he accepted the invitation to the University of Munich. Assuming the specially created chair of Philosophy and Weltanschauung within the faculty of philosophy, he remained in this academic position until 1963, when he was succeeded by Karl Rahner. As in Berlin [where Guardini was professor earlier], Guardini filled the lecture halls of Tübingen and Munich with students, professors and international guests. [. . .] During these years, Guardini was influential outside the lecture hall as well as within it.” Robert A. Krieg, “A Precursor’s Life and Work,” in *Romano Guardini: Proclaiming the Sacred in a Modern World*, ed. Robert A. Krieg (Liturgy Training Publications, 1995), 15–29, here 24.

37 Cf. Karl Rahner, “Erinnerungen im Gespräch mit Meinold Krauss,” in KRSW 25 (Herder, 2008), 85–143, here 121. With regard to the appointment to the chair, Rahner said: “I felt that this was attractive and quite an honour, because the appointment came ultimately from Romano Guardini himself. I discussed it with him beforehand, and I gladly accepted it, even though later much happened other than originally planned. I had always held Guardini in high esteem, and for that reason this appointment was something significant, something different, for example, from an earlier experience when on the order of my religious superiors

theologians can be placed in the line of a renewal of theology. For Rahner, the chair could furthermore help him achieve greater publicity and attention. Within the Jesuit order, Rahner's decision was also viewed critically, as the work in Innsbruck could be considered more important. Still, after a certain waiting period, Rahner finally received permission from the higher superiors to accept the position in Munich.³⁸ The reluctance of the order is understandable insofar as Rahner was lost to the formation of seminarians and Jesuits, and he himself had long been a decisive reason why students began their studies at the university in Innsbruck.³⁹ Instead, he had to teach at a state university, where he now held a chair within the faculty of philosophy. However, philosophy was only indirectly addressed in the lecture that was to form the focus of Rahner's work in Munich. From the summer term of 1964 to the winter term of 1965–66, he read the "Introduction to the Concept of Christianity" in four terms.⁴⁰

The changing academic setting and audience are important factors in understanding the approach and aim of the "basic course." For they form the background against which Rahner put his ideas into practice for the first time. The preparation of the lecture manuscript initially progressed quickly despite additional obligations for the Second Vatican Council, publication, and lecture activities.⁴¹ Although he was now supported by two assistants, Karl Lehmann and Jörg Splett, who did a lot of the work for him, Rahner also continued to do many things himself, as he was used to doing. His way of working in relation to the lectures becomes clear when he writes to his student Herbert Vorgrimler in a letter dated May 5, 1964: "above all I've dictated my lectures like a madman. I've already 120 forty-line pages. That's a good beginning, but only a beginning."⁴²

These pages can now be found in the Karl Rahner Archive, which was first in Innsbruck and has been in Munich since 2008 as an independent department of the archive of the Central European Province of the Jesuits. The entire manuscript for Rahner's four-semester lecture series in Munich is contained in a total of three folders.⁴³ The first pages of the typescript

I immediately had to refuse a possible appointment to Münster. My superiors did not want me to leave Innsbruck for Münster before 1964, because they claimed to need me there, but they readily allowed me to go to Munich." Karl Rahner, *I Remember: An Autobiographical Interview with Meinold Krauss*, trans. Harvey D. Egan (SCM, 1985), 73; KRSW 25, 121.

38 Cf. Neufeld, *Die Brüder Rahner*, 252–54.

39 Cf. Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, 71.

40 Cf. KRSW 32/2, 39f.

41 Cf. Jörg Splett, "Auf dem Lehrstuhl Guardinis," 72.

42 Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, 182.

43 Cf. APECESJ, Abt. 47-1010 (KRA) I, E, 172 a/b/c, Nos. 1385, 1386, 1387.

provide information on how Rahner, whose lectures were part of the program *Studium universale*,⁴⁴ now no longer addressed theologians but “academics” in general. He addressed the latter—regardless of their personal faith—because “if he wants to do justice to his name, his task and his responsibility, he has the duty and task of developing a responsible knowledge and a personal position on the spiritual powers of his time.”⁴⁵

As a professor, Rahner himself was challenged when it came to “getting the whole of Christianity into view”⁴⁶ and explained that the task before him “could almost make the teacher and the listeners despair.”⁴⁷ However, whether the attempt—which Rahner, using a Hegelian phrase, called “*the strenuous effort of the concept*”⁴⁸ (“Anstrengung des Begriffes”)—would succeed depended not only on the teacher but also on the listener, who was addressed at the beginning of the lecture:

44 The course catalogs are available online: <https://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/view/lmu/vlverz=5F04.html>. In the 1964 summer term, Rahner is not yet included in the catalog. In the 1964–65 winter term, the lecture “Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums II” is listed as a two-hour lecture without an exact time. Rahner also held two-hour “Übung: Heilsgeschichte und Weltgeschichte.” In the summer term, the title of the two-hour lecture is “Heilbringer und Heilsgemeinde (Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums III),” which was held on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6:00–7:00 p.m. In addition, there was the two-hour “Übung: Grundfragen christlicher Ethik,” which took place on Wednesdays from 6:00–8:00 p.m. In his last term in Munich in 1965–66, Rahner held the lecture “Das christliche Leben und die christliche Zukunft (Einführung in das Wesen des Christentums IV).” This was again a two-hour lecture and was taught on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6:00–7:00 p.m. There was also a two-hour “Übung: Zur Theologie des Unglaubens” on Wednesdays 6:00–8:00 p.m. Cf. Jörg Splett, “Auf dem Lehrstuhl Guardinis,” in *Karl Rahner: Bilder eines Lebens*, 72–73, here 72. The times given in the course catalogs suggest that the intention was to reach as wide an audience as possible, not just full-time students. Albert Keller’s statements are not compatible with this: “When he held the Guardini Teaching Chair (*Romano-Guardini-Lehrstuhl*) in Munich, he scheduled his lectures to begin at the earliest possible time in the morning. I believe that he began the class at 7:15 a.m. He only wanted students to come who were really interested. That’s the reason he scheduled his class at the earliest possible time; no one else began classes that early.” Albert Keller, “Possessed by Theology,” in *Encounters with Karl Rahner*, 207–14, here 208.

45 APECESJ, Abt. 47-1010 (KRA) I, E, 172 a, No. 1385, p. 1. The deletion of “die christliche Weltanschauung” (the Christian world view) and the handwritten addition, that the lecture is an introduction to “den Begriff des Christentums” (the concept of Christianity), are though not by Rahner himself.

46 APECESJ, Abt. 47-1010 (KRA) I, E, 172 a, No. 1385, p. 2.

47 APECESJ, Abt. 47-1010 (KRA) I, E, 172 a, No. 1385, p. 2.

48 APECESJ, Abt. 47-1010 (KRA) I, E, 172 a, No. 1385, p. 2.

Each of you is asked at the very beginning, from the sacred dignity of the question posed, whether he is willing to put forth seriousness and patience. If not, it is better not to begin at all.⁴⁹

In this remark, a certain harsh manner of address can be identified, but also the sincerity that Rahner demanded of himself and his listeners. The first question that Rahner poses thematically, however, is a change of perspective, as it is not Christianity that becomes the object but the human being that comes into view: "What kind of a hearer does Christianity anticipate so that its real and ultimate message can even be heard?"⁵⁰

In terms of topics and questions, there are many similarities between Guardini and Rahner, but Guardini was generally more accessible to his listeners because of his more literary style and rhetoric, as well as his theoretical approach.⁵¹ Rahner, on the other hand, mostly relied on the lecture manuscript in Munich, as he wanted to present the lecture material as concisely as possible.

49 APECESJ, Abt. 47-1010 (KRA) I, E, 172 a, No. 1385, p. 3. While it is customary to speak of "Kapitel" (chapters), Rahner chooses the word "Gang" (course). It can be clearly seen on the sheet how he adds the word "course" by hand (presumably for the lecture in Münster).

50 APECESJ, Abt. 47-1010 (KRA) I, E, 172 a, No. 1385, p. 3 (cf. KRSW 26, 29).

51 Johann Baptist Metz comments: "Munich was not the right place for him, not because of the city, but the Romano Guardini Chair in Philosophy was not right for him. He was also probably too speculative, too much of a theologian, though not in the strict sense, not literary enough, nor popular enough. He also was too much of a monk, even though that now sounds a little strange to say." Johann Baptist Metz, "Intellectual Passion and Spiritual Courage," 142. Rahner's fellow Jesuit Albert Keller also emphasizes the change in style compared to Guardini and at the same time gives a general description of the two theologians: "What he regretted was that he had not been as successful in Munich as his predecessor Romano Guardini. Guardini was a brilliant rhetorician, not a 'Show-Man,' but an aesthete who spoke excellent German and was a master of literature. That was not Fr. Rahner. He also could speak very eloquently, but he was much more interested in the ideas, than in their formulation. With Guardini, it was exactly the opposite. If you were inclined to be somewhat harsh and critical you could say that it is pleasing to read Guardini, but it is not exciting. Everything is beautiful and balanced and not rubbish, but it doesn't compare with Fr. Rahner, who had his own ideas and insights. On the other hand, Guardini had full lecture halls; lectured in the largest auditorium and attracted people from all the faculties—not only philosophers, theologians. You could say that Guardini was a cult figure: you felt it. Rahner did not fill the lecture hall and that rankled him. He was somewhat hurt that he was not appreciated as much as Guardini." Keller, "Possessed by Theology," 208f. Cf. Heinrich Fries, "Professor in München 1964–1967," in *Karl Rahner: Bilder eines Lebens*, 70; Splett, "Auf dem Lehrstuhl Guardinis," 72–73.

The presentation of anthropology, which was fundamental to the project, was only thirteen typewritten pages. Rahner was brief in stating that “an interlocking of philosophy and theology”⁵² already resulted from the questions posed in the lecture. For Rahner, a “philosophy of human existence” is based on a historical experience, which is given by Christianity and determines the characteristic understanding of the subject through the “personal relationship to God.”⁵³ According to Rahner, however, man is characterized as a “transcendent being”⁵⁴ on the “infinite horizon of questioning.”⁵⁵

In this sense, it is more accurate to refer to it as “foundations of the Christian faith” rather than a “basic course,” since it covers the foundations that precede theological interpretation.

Those who were familiar with Rahner’s thoughts—this anthropology can be found in “Hörer des Wortes”⁵⁶—were able to follow the explanations, but for others the reflections were too demanding. Listeners complained that the explanations were too abstract or boring.⁵⁷ Yet Rahner was willing to accept their dissatisfaction, partly because he did not want to fundamentally change the text and its style, for example, by providing longer explanations. Despite the change in language from Latin to German in the lectures, a clear continuity in the style of teaching can still be recognized. Rahner adhered closely to his manuscript, reading it without significant deviation.

This was also because he put himself under pressure, fearing that he would not be able to cope with the content or time constraints of the material. But Rahner was also thinking of publication and ultimately believed that a book based on the lectures would be of greater benefit than the immediate satisfaction of his students.⁵⁸ The manuscript was therefore written not only for the university audience but also for the intended readership

52 APECESJ, Abt. 47-1010 (KRA) I, E, 172 a, No. 1385, p. 3 (cf. KRSW 26, 29).

53 APECESJ, Abt. 47-1010 (KRA) I, E, 172 a, No. 1385, p. 5 (cf. KRSW 26, 31).

54 APECESJ, Abt. 47-1010 (KRA) I, E, 172 a, No. 1385, p. 9 (=KRSW 26, 36).

55 APECESJ, Abt. 47-1010 (KRA) I, E, 172 a, No. 1385, p. 9 (=KRSW 26, 36).

56 Cf. KRSW 4 (Benziger/Herder, 1997), 82. Karen Kilby places the book and the approach in a historical context: “*Hearer of the Word* is Rahner’s second book. Published in 1941 and based on lectures originally given in 1937 [Salzburger Hochschulwochen], it is in some ways the companion piece to *Spirit in the World*. The supernatural existential is an idea Rahner famously introduced into a debate about *nouvelle theologie* in 1950; it recurred in subsequent years and came to play a central role in many parts of his theology. The book and the idea are both important. [...] There are important similarities between what Rahner was trying to do in *Hearer of the Word* and what he did with the notion of the supernatural existential, and between the patterns of thought at work in both.” Karen Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy* (Routledge, 2004), 49.

57 Cf. Vorglimmer, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, 182f.

58 Cf. Vorglimmer, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, 183.

of the book that was underway.⁵⁹ Even if the exact audience remained finally unclear, the text was not conceived solely as a lecture text from the outset. At the same time, it was far from ready for publication. The original manuscript required further revisions, prompted by its renewed use in a lecture hall. After just three years, Rahner changed jobs again and became a full professor of dogmatics at the faculty of theology at the University of Münster in 1967. But even in this position, Rahner read a four-hour lecture entitled “Introduction to Christianity”⁶⁰ within two terms.

The existing manuscript was reworked and supplemented for this purpose, as shown by handwritten notes that refer to the specific lectures and can therefore be dated to a particular time period and assigned to a specific occasion.⁶¹ Yet the composition of the majority of the other handwritten notes and the typewritten additions can be dated by comparing them with the lectures held in Münster. For this purpose, reference can be made to a student lecture transcript, the first volume of which can now be found in the Freiburg University Library under the reference *Handschrift 1297*.⁶² These volumes became important regarding the book publication,

59 Vögrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, 182.

60 The title and the intention were explained in more detail on the back of the lecture manuscript (cf. APECESJ, Abt. 47-1010 [KRA] I, E, 172 a, No. 1385, p. 2). In the original manuscript, the relevant references were added by hand. The additions can then be found directly at the back of the manuscript. The explanations are from a different typewriter than the original lecture manuscript, and there are also handwritten additions that were not made by Rahner. Cf. APECESJ, Abt. 47-1010 (KRA) I, E, 172 a, No. 1385, p. 2a. The course catalogs are available online: <https://sammlungen.ulb.uni-muenster.de/hd/periodical/structure/546271>. The following lectures are relevant to the “Grundkurs” project: In the winter term 1968–69 he held the lecture “Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums I” on Mondays and Wednesdays 6:00–7:00 p.m. and Thursdays 6:00–8:00 p.m. Complementing this, he held a “Seminar: Einzelfragen zur Vorlesung” on Tuesdays from 3:00–4:30 p.m. In the summer term of 1969, Rahner continued the lecture “Introduction to the Concept of Christianity II” on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 6:00–7:00 p.m. and Tuesdays from 5:00–6:00 p.m. The lecture was supplemented by a “Seminar: Einzelfragen zur Vorlesung” on Tuesdays from 3:00–4:30 p.m. Cf. Heribert Woestmann, “Ordinarius für Dogmatik und Dogmengeschichte in Münster 1968–1971,” in *Karl Rahner: Bilder eines Lebens*, 84–88, here 84f.

61 Cf. APECESJ, Abt. 47-1010 (KRA) I, E, 172 a, No. 1385, n.p. The page is also a good example of Rahner’s handwriting, in which the influence of Sütterlin can also be found.

62 UB Freiburg, Hs. 1297, vols. 1–8. Cf. KRSW 26, xxxvii. Cf. Albert Raffelt, “Handschrift 1297 der Universitätsbibliothek: Karl Rahner; Grundkurs des Glaubens,” in *Informationen / Bibliothekssystem der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg i.Br.* 21 (1984), 7–8. In addition, it is possible to consult tape transcripts of the lec-

for which further texts were used, some of them already published, while other parts were newly dictated by Rahner.

An analysis of the alterations made to the original lecture text reveals that, in addition to offering supplementary or clarifying explanations, the intention was to employ a more systematic structure and focus the material. For example, a significant definition for understanding theology was introduced through a revision. There, theology is distinguished from other sciences by the fact that it is not confined to an expert discussion, “but it intends to be this salvific knowledge which is for everybody.”⁶³ In this context, the concept of a “first level of reflection” is employed, thereby underscoring the significance of this category in the reception of the work.⁶⁴

However, an analysis of the extant text material reveals that Rahner’s approach was significantly shaped and interpreted during the various stages of editing the text. Nevertheless, the revisions for the lectures in Münster were regarded merely as an intermediate step.

Not only did years pass before this final stage in the making of the book, but an initial attempt to realize the publication as quickly as possible also failed. Rahner’s assistant, Karl Heinz Neufeld, revised the text material, but the project did not progress beyond the first version.⁶⁵ The publication of the *Grundkurs des Glaubens* remained a desire after Rahner’s retirement,⁶⁶ but it hardly seemed achievable. The requirements for revising and organizing the text material seemed to go beyond Rahner’s powers and resources.

tures, which are volumes 2 and 3 of the same signature and are also accessible in the Karl Rahner Archive under the reference APECESJ, Abt. 47-1010 (KRA) I, E, 193 a/b, Nos. 1403, 1404. Cf. KRSW 26, xxxvii, n. 65.

63 Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 15. Cf. KRSW 26, 21. The expression “erste Reflexionsstufe” is a handwritten addition that was not made by Rahner. Cf. APECESJ, Abt. 47-1010 (KRA) I, E, 172 a, No. 1385, p. 2a.

64 Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, “Vom Verstehen des Glaubens. Anmerkungen zu Rahners Grundkurs des Glaubens,” *Theologische Revue* 74 (1978): 177–86.

65 Neufeld started in 1971 to work for Rahner as an assistant and his “task was to prepare volume 10 of *Schriften zur Theologie* and then volume 11 of *Schriften zur Theologie*, on the History of Penance and in addition to that begin preparation for his book, *Foundations of Christian Faith*.” Karl Heinz Neufeld, “Collaboration Was Not Easy!” in *Encounters with Karl Rahner*, 143. In the two years to which his position was limited, he was only able to produce a first version of a text that was intended to give an impression of what a possible overall revision might look like: APECESJ, Abt. 47-1010 (KRA) I, O, 202 a, No. 1920. This version was then submitted to the Jesuit and professor of fundamental theology in Innsbruck Walter Kern and Rahner’s former assistant Karl Lehmann, who had in the meantime become professor of dogmatics and ecumenical theology in Freiburg, for review: APECESJ, Abt. 47-1010 (KRA) I, O, 202 a, No. 1919.

66 Cf. KRSW 31, 84.

Nevertheless, the project was not finally abandoned and was entrusted to various people for revision.⁶⁷ The approach became increasingly pragmatic, as it used not only lecture material but also previously published texts.⁶⁸ And yet it remained doubtful whether the project would be completed.

The fact that a book could be published in 1976 was largely due to the insistence of the Herder publishing house.⁶⁹ The publisher not only exerted pressure on Rahner but also provided crucial help in the form of collaborators to realize the project.

After Elisabeth von der Lieth⁷⁰ organized and edited the text material, Albert Raffelt was given the task of preparing the manuscript, which Karl Rahner then revised with the help of a secretary.⁷¹ The fact that Rahner was

67 Cf. Neufeld, *Die Brüder Rahner*, 314–16. In the preface to the book, Rahner refers to the long time it took to write the book and the help he received, mentioning four people by name: “In the long history of this work since 1964 the author has received abundant help. He cannot mention by name here all those who helped him during those years in Munich and Münster. But in addition to my two fellow Jesuits, Karl H. Neufeld and Harald Schöndorf, there are two other names I must mention. Elisabeth von der Lieth in Hamburg and Albert Raffelt in Freiburg in Breisgau took care of a large part of the final editing of the text by organizing the original class lectures and shortening them.” Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, xv. Cf. KRSW 26, 7.

68 Elisabeth von der Lieth, who examined and organized the text material, commented in a letter dated July 25, 1975: “Anyone who knows your writings to some extent will find familiar passages word for word in some of the ‘Grundkurs.’ In my eyes, this ‘economy’ of writing is an advantage, not an objection. It is not understandable that a new verbal expression has to be sought every time the same idea arises, especially not if the expression once found has been particularly favorable. But perhaps you could counter possible criticism from the beginning by pointing out (in the preface, in the introduction, in the preliminary remarks or wherever) that the ‘Grundkurs’ is a kind of sum of your theological work and that in terms of content and language you are drawing on much that has already been published.” APECESJ, Abt. 47-1010 (KRA) I, A, 924, No. 768, p. 2 (my translation).

69 Wolfgang Seibel, Rahner’s fellow Jesuit and long-time editor-in-chief and publisher of the review *Stimmen der Zeit*, comments: “As a rule Fr. Rahner wrote mostly essays and very few books. *Foundations of Christian Faith*, which was his major work, was written under pressure from the Herder Publishing Company. He was put up in a hotel room in Freiburg and a secretary of the publishing house took his dictation.” Wolfgang Seibel, “An Incredible Facility for Language,” in *Encounters with Karl Rahner*, 89–95, here 93.

70 Cf. Uwe Schmidt, “Lieth, Elisabeth von der,” in *Hamburgische Biografie*, ed. Franklin Kopitzsch and Dirk Brietzke, vol. 4 (Wallstein, 2008), 216–17.

71 Raffelt, who was Karl Lehmann’s assistant at the time, describes the task: “Fr. Rahner examined all the material and made some corrections. Ms. Schwab retyped whatever was illegible. When it was finished, I was given the draft. At

accommodated by Herder in a hotel room in Freiburg can be seen as an expression of pressure from the publisher, but the procedure was successful.⁷²

Herder had an interest in presenting the book as the “crown of [Rahner’s] theology.”⁷³ This went so far that the publisher influenced the title,⁷⁴ designed the book to be as appealing to the public as possible, and advertised it as an “intellectual event”⁷⁵ that had been awaited for years.⁷⁶ Indeed, the *Foundations of Christian Faith*—regardless of the discussion as to whether it should be described as a sum or culmination—has an exceptional place within Rahner’s oeuvre, as it is a summary of many topics in one book, which is an exception, as Rahner himself noted in an interview: “Nearly all the things I have written are shorter commentaries or essays on specific points of dogmatic theology.”⁷⁷

From the publisher’s perspective, the book was a success. It was translated into many languages, appeared in several editions, and is probably Rahner’s most widely read work. The paratexts played a significant role in this success, but the archived material also makes it evident that the

first, I was very, very cautious. Franz Johna and Gerbert Brunner [editors at Herder] also went over the manuscript and agreed that I had to be more aggressive in the editing. I had to get accustomed to doing that, to deleting the texts of Karl Rahner. The main thing was to have a text that flowed smoothly. That, of course, changed the style; some sentences needed to be shortened; some conclusions needed to be formulated differently and above all put into subsections. Fr. Rahner then read everything one more time.” Franz Johna and Albert Raffelt, “He Took His Students Seriously,” in *Encounters with Karl Rahner*, 69–80, here 72.

72 Cf. Johna and Raffelt, “He Took His Students Seriously,” 72. A more critical stance with regard to Herder’s approach is taken by Seibel in “An Incredible Facility for Language,” in *Encounters with Karl Rahner*, 89–95, here 93.

73 Franz Johna, editor at Herder, explains: “I would like to add something, speaking from the perspective of the publishing house. We urged Fr. Rahner to create a large, comprehensive foundational work which would be seen as the crown of his theology and so to complete the *Foundations of Christian Faith*.” Johna and Raffelt, “He Took His Students Seriously,” 72.

74 Albert Raffelt, “‘Grundkurs des Glaubens’—ein einzigartiges Rahner-Werk,” in *Karl Rahner: Bilder eines Lebens*, 89–90, here 89.

75 KRSW 26, xxvi.

76 For the first edition, an additional strip with advertising text was placed over the dust jacket. It reads: “Seit Jahren erwartet: Das Ganze des Christentums neu durchdacht” (“Expected for Years: The Whole of Christianity Newly Thought Through”), “Mehr als Wissenschaft: das Zeugnis einer unvergleichlichen denkerischen Dynamik und einer nüchternen Glaubensergriffenheit” (“More Than Academia: The Witness of an Incomparable Intellectual Dynamism and a Sober Grasp of Faith”), “Ein geistiges Ereignis: aus dem Profil unserer Epoche nicht wegzudenken” (“An Intellectual Event: An Indispensable Part of the Profile of Our Epoch”).

77 KRSW 31, 2.

text itself had a long history and went through many editing phases and organizational processes. The category of a “multiple-text manuscript”⁷⁸ can therefore be applied. By considering the materiality, it becomes clear how varied the work on the text was and that it was not carried out by Rahner alone. In addition to different typewriter lettering, there are a large number of other handwritings that may have been made by secretaries but especially by assistants and lectors. *Grundkurs des Glaubens* thus becomes clear as a complex text, both in its form and its authorship.

The question of the intended audience, which had already come up in the context of the lectures, is also relevant to the book. Rahner himself was aware of this difficulty and addressed it in the foreword, drawing attention to the cause of the problem.⁷⁹ In his view, the problem lies less in the presentation and language than in the thought process itself. The “first level of reflection” is challenging and requires a reader willing to follow an argument that is not necessarily immediately accessible.⁸⁰ Yet this is of fundamental significance for understanding Rahner’s theology. This may explain why Rahner considered the *Grundkurs* to be one of his most important works.⁸¹ Despite all critical aspects, *Foundations of Christian Faith* remains a comprehensive outline of his systematic thought.

Analysis of the genesis of the text reveals it as a significant contemporary document emerging from a specific ecclesiastical, academic, and social context. But the archival material is also a historical document. It shows how an original manuscript of a lecture was transformed into a printed version through various editing processes over a period of years. The various people involved in the process are recognizable, as are the methods of editing, which include deletions, pasting in, insertion of copies,

78 Cf. “What these manuscripts all have in common is that they are made up of more than one text and have been planned and realized for a single project with one consistent intention; as a result, they are usually made of a single production unit. We call such manuscripts ‘multiple-text manuscripts’ (MTMs).” Alessandro Bausi, Michael Friedrich, and Marilena Maniaci, “Preface,” in *The Emergence of Multiple-Text Manuscripts*, Studies in Manuscript Cultures 17 (De Gruyter, 2020), vii; Cf. Forschergruppe 963: Manuskriptkulturen in Asien und Afrika (2008–2011); Sonderforschungsbereich (SFB) 950: Manuskriptkulturen in Asien, Afrika und Europa (2011–20).

79 Cf. KRSW 26, 3.

80 Rahner puts it pointedly: “From these insights comes the intention of it on a ‘first level of reflection.’ The reader himself must decide whether this goal is reached. But he also has to be critical of himself, of course, and ask himself whether perhaps the real cause of a failure in this undertaking does not lie in himself. This to be sure is not inconceivable a priori.” Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, xii. Cf. KRSW 26, 4.

81 Cf. KRSW 31, 191.

and typed and handwritten additions.⁸² Although Rahner gave his collaborators a great deal of freedom, he remained interested in the details of the design, as shown by his comments on paragraphs and typesetting before going to press. It provides insights simultaneously into the thinking and working methods of a prominent theologian and Jesuit.

Taking the genesis, composition, and context of the *Foundations of Christian Faith* into account has the potential to change the understanding of Rahner. He remains recognizable as an exceptional theologian, but to imagine Rahner as a lone fighter working at a desk without the help of others is in any case a misleading image.⁸³

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82 The diverse methods of editing are particularly observable in UB Freiburg, Hs. 1297, vol. 5. Cf., e.g., UB Freiburg, Hs. 1297, vol. 5, p. 7. Cf. KRSW 26, 13.

83 In addition to many fellow Jesuits and assistants, the secretaries who supported Rahner should also be mentioned. However, women in particular were also important for Rahner's theological work. Elisabeth von der Lieth should be mentioned in particular for the basic course, but there are also other women who supported Rahner in principle or in relation to certain publications. Cf. Neufeld, *Die Brüder Rahner*, 414. Trained as an educator and seminar leader, Elisabeth von der Lieth was important in communicating and applying Rahner's theology and making it understandable. She was also instrumental in designing the program of the Hamburg Catholic Academy, making Rahner's theology more accessible. Cf. Schmidt, "Lieth, Elisabeth von der," 217.