



Introduction

A Pastoral Pilgrimage

Grace and peace to you, dear reader, as we begin this pilgrimage to the heart of Holy Mystery. With theology rooted firmly in the confessions of Nicaea and Chalcedon—which continue to serve as the normative boundaries of Christian faith—this work seeks to engage the modern age with both courage and confidence.

Rediscovering Holy Mystery

Ever since Karl Rahner, SJ,¹ published his masterpiece *Foundations of Christian Faith* in German in 1976 (and in English in 1978), Christians have been invited to rediscover God as Holy Mystery—not a distant deity hidden beyond the

clouds, but the One who is ever present. This has marked a shift in how we live our faith: from imagining God as far away to seeking God’s Presence woven through the pilgrimage of our daily lives; from confining holiness to the walls of a church to finding the sacred in the ordinary; from prayers of petition and bargaining with a detached divinity to prayer as communion with Holy Mystery who shares our very existence.

This book seeks to guide us into that encounter with Holy Mystery—beyond our comprehension, beyond our grasp, yet so near that Holy Mystery forms the horizon and background of every moment and every breath.

Holy Mystery *in Love* is the eternal source of love, the origin and energy of life itself, the Author of our being. Holy Mystery *Incarnate* as we walk with Jesus, our teacher, healer, and friend—the anointed and beloved one. And Holy Mystery *Indwelling* as we encounter the Spirit, the source of wisdom and the Holy One who continues to accompany us, sustain us, and draw us into the inexhaustible depths of God’s own life.

Honest Christianity

This book is also an invitation to walk together on the shared journey of discipleship—families, faith communities, and individuals—side by side, discovering that faith is never confined to the walls of a church but lives and flourishes in the heart of everyone. It is in daily life—around tables, in conversations, in acts of care and forgiveness—that faith takes root and grows.

We are called to live with honest Christianity: a faith that does not bend the Gospel to serve political gain or economic

advantage but instead allows the message of Jesus to shape our choices and guide our steps. Such honesty leads us back to what matters most—community that welcomes, trust that heals, hearts that listen, and a love that reaches especially toward the poor, the forgotten, and the excluded. To live this way is to make God’s hope visible in the world. It’s our only hope.

In this way, theology becomes not only an intellectual discipline but also nourishment for us as pilgrims of faith, a shared feast that is at once rigorous and life-giving.

The Four Tasks of This Book

(1) **What we believe (in Latin, *lex credenda*)**. This book explores by what name we address God, the Holy One. How we address God should reflect what we believe. As we will see, we humbly speak today of God as Holy Mystery—both incomprehensible but also as near as our breath. The Holy is Mystery *in Love, Incarnate, and Indwelling*. The name we use for the Holy One must be faithful to divine mystery while honest about the limits of human language, including matters of gender and presence.

(2) **How we pray (in Latin, *lex orandi*)**. Based on how we name God, this book also explores how we pray. It suggests a renewed vocabulary of prayer and faith, echoing God as Holy Mystery. Our ways of praying must address the questions and hopes of the modern world.

(3) **How we live our faith (in Latin, *lex vivendi*)**. The book also invites readers to embrace a daily pathway to honest Christian living. Regardless of whether we live our faith within the embrace of organized religion or beyond its formal boundaries, we all want to see honest Christianity. Such living

embraces the Way of Jesus, to welcome, feed, heal, and befriend both stranger and neighbor.

(4) **How we organize our pastoral work (in Latin, *lex pastoralis*).** This book also explores how the pastoral practice of the church might unfold—within our lives, homes, and parishes. Pastoral practice is not an “extra” added onto belief, prayer, and daily life. It is the tender face of all three.

The Method of this Book

Each chapter begins with a gentle **Introduction** meant to awaken our hearts and ready our minds for what is to come. What follows in each chapter is an **Opening Poem** to touch the heart with beauty and help us cross the threshold from study into reflection and prayer. As each chapter unfolds, various **Meditations** are offered—meant for us to chew on and digest. At the conclusion of each chapter, there is an invitation to **Theological Reflection**. You may choose to ponder the reflection topics quietly on your own, or to share them in conversation with others. As we near the conclusion of each chapter, we consider the all-important **Pastoral Implications** of these ideas. **And finally**, at the close of each chapter rests a **Prayer Poem** that summarizes key thoughts and helps us take them away in our hearts. Here we may bring all that we hold within: our hopes and fears, our questions and gratitude, our longing and love.

The Importance of the Poetry

The poetry in each chapter is integral to the theology here. Karl Rahner taught that ordinary, analytical language can never fully capture the Holy Mystery that is God. Theology, while necessary, often runs up against the limits of

words. Poetry, however, with its imagery, rhythm, and openness, can gesture toward what is beyond precise concepts. It lets faith “speak” in a way that keeps mystery intact.

In his essay “Priest and Poet” (1954), Rahner reflected on how the poet’s word is closer to the experience of mystery than ordinary speech. He distinguished between everyday language, which serves practical tasks, and “primordial words,” which are charged with existential depth. Poetry uses these primordial words, allowing mystery to shine through language.

“There are words which are not just tools, but living beings,” he wrote in that essay, “embodying the mystery which they reveal. Poetry is the sphere in which such words live and speak.”

Rahner went further, saying theology should not treat poetry, music, or art as “optional illustrations.” They are intrinsic ways of expressing the human encounter with God’s self-communication. The Mystery of God overflows rational categories, and so the symbolic, poetic, and artistic become vital to theology itself.²

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For added chapters, additional poetry, new ideas, ideas from readers like you, applications of this to faith formation, liturgy, and pastoral care, free and reproducible parish resources—and many other helpful elements—please visit the book’s website: **SpeakingOfGod.org**.

As We Begin

Pilgrimage Poem of Invitation

We set our feet upon this way,
with dawn to light our steps today.
Through winding paths, both near and far,
we'll walk beneath your guiding star.

O Holy One, draw close, abide,
a faithful Presence at our side.
In every neighbor, every face,
we seek your mercy, love, and grace.

So make our hearts both strong and kind,
with hope renewed and peace of mind.
As on this pilgrimage we start:
Come dwell within each pilgrim heart.

¹ Karl Rahner SJ was a German Catholic theologian and is considered one of the most influential theologians of the 20th century. He died on March 30, 1984. We shall only glimpse part of the breadth of his work in this book.

² Karl Rahner, “Priest and Poet,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 3, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon, 1967), 354–67. See also Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4, *More Recent Writings* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966), where he speaks of symbolic and artistic language as mediating mystery.