

inspired fiction is the shortest distance between human understanding and truth." To this the Communication Theology group says "Amen."

Next year the Communication Theology group will examine how changes in the dominant form of communication over time (oral to written to print to electronic) has impacted the development of doctrine.

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Unda-USA, Odyssey Channel
New York, New York

KARL RAHNER SOCIETY

Topic: Teaching Rahner

Convener: Robert L. Masson, Marquette University

Presenters: Jack Bonsor, Santa Clara University

Thomas F. O'Meara, University of Notre Dame

Carmichael Peters, Santa Clara University

Moderator: D. Thomas Hughson, Marquette University

The presenters' five-minute highlights of their papers, which had been distributed in advance on the Society's web page (www.theo.mu.edu/krs), provided an occasion for lively and wide-ranging discussion among thirty participants. The complete texts will be published in volume 11 of *Philosophy & Theology*. The participants reflected on varied experiences teaching Rahner either as part of syllabi in courses on broader themes or in courses devoted specifically to his work—and in a number of different contexts (that is, courses for undergraduate general education, majors, seminaries, and graduate programs). It was not surprising that in this group everyone reported finding Rahner a rich resource for teaching. The diversity in using this resource, however, was noteworthy. Some, for example, have had success utilizing Rahner's theological insights without the burden of his philosophical vocabulary, while others have found that introducing students to key philosophical insights provides a helpful entry into theological discussion. The papers themselves illustrated the variety of opportunities and challenges.

Jack Bonsor, who taught a number of years in the seminary, had his first experience teaching undergraduates last year. Although these two contexts required different approaches, his strategy in both cases was similar: "to help students think critically about the faith with an eye toward deeper appropriation." He gave three illustrations of how he used Rahner and the seminarians' personal investment in ministry as "hooks" to spark interest in serious theological reflection: (1) inviting them to work out how to make sense of *Lumen gentium's* apparent assertion that Church structures go back directly to Jesus despite

apparent, contrary historical evidence; (2) asking them to imagine a funeral homily for a woman who died suddenly; and (3) challenging them to grapple with some key insights Rahner has appropriated from Western philosophy. In each case, the seminarians' desire to mediate the faith credibly to a congregation led to appreciation of Rahner's efforts and even provided the basis for raising further theological questions about Rahner's positions. For undergraduates, his hooks for initiating theological reflection and engaging Rahner are the pervasive questions of evil and suffering.

Although O'Meara did not explicitly set out to teach Rahner in his courses, and was not aware of how much Rahner was influencing him in student days in Munich, Rahner's thought has proved to be an invaluable teaching resource because his conceptions of the human person, God's self-communication, and history provide such helpful frameworks for wrestling with five key theological issues which still challenge Catholics: (1) modernity; (2) the separation of nature, grace, and sin; (3) the humanistic action of atheists and agnostics; (4) the loving believer in other religions; and (5) the changing forms of the Catholic Church after Vatican II. O'Meara predicted that when "other theologians offer a framework which faces these issues better, then Rahner's influence will fade." He went on to illustrate how Rahner's framework informs his graduate class on "Theologians of Grace" and his undergraduate class on "The Kingdom of God, the Human Personality, and the Future."

Peters teaches courses on Rahner to undergraduates, very often from diverse religious backgrounds, who nevertheless have in common a "relative lack of living ties to their religious past." He believes that this "break" with their spiritual heritage testifies to a pervasive "uprootedness" which provides the context for an interpretive application of Rahner's thought (rather than a mere repetition) which brings it to bear on the students' own experience. Peters explained how his courses present Rahner's theology as made up of three basic elements: (1) reflection on this experience of existential uprootedness—which Peters interprets as a manifestation of transcendence; (2) living faith in Jesus as the Christ; and (3) Catholic tradition. Rahner's engagement with the twofold task of interpretively understanding and responding to the experience of uprootedness in light of his tradition's faith in Jesus provides a model and conceptual framework with which Peters can point students towards reflection upon and appropriation of their own faith journeys.

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