

Rahner Seminars 2011

Series 2: Rahner's God



The second series of Rahner seminars held between January and March once again proved very popular. Particularly pleasing this year was the mix of people, with former students, EPS tutors and members of the clergy in regular attendance. This resulted in some fascinating contributions from some who had experienced the same type of priestly formation that provided the background to Rahner's philosophical theology.

Having considered Rahner's Christology last year, this year attention turned to Rahner's more philosophical reflections. Rahner is concerned with how it can be that God actually gives God's Self in such a way as to be received, without ceasing to be God. Rahner is clear that knowledge of God (the ineffable one, the one who does not enter into this world as part of it) is different from knowledge of things. Knowledge of God takes place only in the encounter with the world, and it is in fact knowledge of God that grounds our knowledge of the finite. Rahner famously talks of immediacy to God as "mediated immediacy."

For Rahner, theology and anthropology are necessarily linked, since God is only known as the transcendent ground of the human person (the spiritual being). There can be no knowledge of God outside the Creator / creature relationship. 'God' is the name we human beings give to the absolute mystery that grounds human existence, while the human person, at once an autonomous being, and yet in the hands of that which is uncontrollable. The experience of God is inseparable from the experience of creatureliness.

As we grappled with these and other ideas, we explored their practical implications with regard to various issues, such as what is to be understood by sin, what constitutes a miracle, when creation happened or happens, and so on.

Philip Endean, SJ, once again came down from Oxford for the final seminar and in his own inimitable style gave further striking insights into Rahner's God, stressing particularly the grounding that Rahner had in the philosophical theology of Thomas Aquinas. Yet again we were left with more questions than answers, and already planning for next year.