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From the Editor: Philosophy and Theology: Why Bother?

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Philosophy and Theology: Why Bother?

This week, I sent off \$99 for a set of CD lectures on the Great Ideas of Philosophy, beginning with the Greeks, of course, and ending with one teasingly titled, "God, Really?" Somehow, at this stage of my life, I'm thinking more about the fundamental questions.

I mention this because my own experience echoes the questions raised by several of our writers in this issue.

My philosophy background is mixed. I spent my Fordham junior year in Paris reading what I wanted. In senior year I had excellent courses in philosophical psychology from Joseph Donceel, S.J., then defying his critics by teaching us evolution, and in ethics from Edward McNally, S.J. But in the seminary at Shrub Oak in the 1960s — which those of us who were there consider among the worst years of our lives — we read, with few exceptions, nothing but professors' notes and were evaluated by nerve-racking oral exams in Latin. Theology at Woodstock College in Maryland was better, and I developed an enthusiasm for scripture, film, and moral theology which has continued to nourish me as I teach into theology I & II today.

I ordered the CDs for long summer car rides partly to compensate for the weaknesses in my education, but mostly because the state of the world demands that we confront its moral and religious chaos with all the wisdom at our command. At the Jesuit community Mass on the feast of the Sacred Heart, as the violence in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank suddenly split the Holy Land asunder again, one of us observed that the Heart of Christ had been broken again.

About 50 years ago, when Jesuit college students wore philosophy robes to class and took the equivalent of a second major in philosophy, we were led to believe that philosophy and theology, both sources of truth, were the heart and soul of our education. As several of our articles show, this claim

might not withstand critical analysis. Today those courses represent about one tenth of the curriculum. Yet there is evidence that these courses are both more professional and more relevant today than they had been before.

Our articles, which try to answer why we should care deeply about the health of these two disciplines, for the most part, follow three approaches: personal testimonies from those who teach and those who have been taught, including prominent alumni and students; historical studies which tell us how far we have come; and analyses of problems we face along with some proposals for what we might do.

As a special feature, we present the edited text of one of the several major addresses which Jesuit General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach has delivered on American campuses during the past several months. It represents the thinking of the Jesuit leadership as the Society approaches its 35th General Congregation which will meet in 2008 to elect Father General's successor.

A note on the cover. We have lined up the philosophers and theologians of the ages and mingled them with some of the contributors to this issue, which, it seems, is right where they belong. Most of the questions we deal with in these two professions transcend place and time, and we have brought these lovers of truth and wisdom together for some conversation, which we hope you will carry on over sandwiches and coffee and in the classrooms, dining rooms and dorms of our colleges and universities. ■

RASSj

For those who might like the exercise of quizzing themselves on who's who among famous scholars on the cover, here is a list, beginning in the upper left corner of the front page.

Front Cover (left to right, top to bottom) Row 1: Charles Darwin, Fr. Charles R. Curran, Thomas Aquinas, Margaret O'Brien Steinfels, Frederick Nietzsche. Row 2: Pope Benedict XVI, Dorothy Day, Eugene Selk, Rene Descartes, Pope Pius XII. Row 3: Fr. John Courtney Murray, S.J., St. Robert Bellarmine, S.J., Karl Marx, St. Teresa of Avila, Jean Paul Sartre/courtesy www.sartre.org. Row 4: St. Thomas More, Plato, Jennifer Glancy. Row 5: Jeannine Hill Fletcher, Galileo, Pierre Teilhard deChardin, S.J./courtesy www.companymagazine.org. Back Cover (left to right, top to bottom) Row 1: William James, D.R. Koukal, Albert Schweitzer. Row 2: Voltaire, Reinhold Niebuhr, Francisco Suarez, S.J. Row 3: Thomas Merton, St Teresa of Lisieux, Jacques Maritain/courtesy Notre Dame. Row 4: Thomas Schubeck, S.J., St. Augustine, Martin Heidegger/courtesy www.heidegger.org.uk. Row 5: Pope Leo XIII, Jon Sobrino, S.J., Immanuel Kant. Row 6: John Stewart Mill, Aristotle, G. W. F. Hegel.