Student No-limits Questions:

1. “What exactly is theology and what meaning does it have in society?”
Theology is the reasonable, rational study of the divine or religious faith. The term comes from a combination of the Greek words “theos” (meaning God, a god, or the divine) and “logos” (the disciplined use of reason, or study). Theology differs profoundly from religious studies in that it involves the reasonable examination of all reality, including both this worldly and the transcendent, whereas religious studies ignores (or refutes) the realm of the transcendent. Religious studies are also subjective, while theology is instead objective. Theology helps us clarify our own beliefs (or lack thereof), which influence all aspects of our daily life, such as how we interact with the world.

2. “Were most atheists religious at some point?” (Karl Rahner’s probable reply).
Karl Rahner believes that the experience of the transcendent is part of the very structure of human existence. If all religions are defined by the belief in the transcendent, then Rahner would likely say that all atheists were religious at some point in their lives, especially since he trusts that we are all born with the option of believing in this transcendent horizon.

3. “If God knows everything (past, present and future), then does free will actually exist for humans?”
If an omnipotent being exists (God), he would exist in a reality where there is an absence of time. Whereas for humans, time is linear, thereby making all of our decisions free while still allowing such a God to maintain knowledge of the past, present and future. Alternatively, God knows our future, because he knows us infinitely well, but he still gives us the option to choose, for he made us in his image, and is accepting of our choices, even if we choose to reject his love.

4. “Does purgatory mean that Jesus’ death wasn’t good enough?”
According to Albl, purgatory is not a specific place, rather it is a state of final cleansing (like Pope John Paul II’s assertion that hell is a state of being, rather than a physical environment) before entering into God’s presence, and therefore it does not detract from the death of Jesus.

Supporting Lecture Material:

Handout Chapter One Points
• Albl’s conviction: faith and reason are harmonious and mutually necessary to each other.
• Theology is the reasonable study of faith: Theos means God or a god, and logos means study, or the disciplined use of reason.
• At critical times the question of meaning naturally arises. These questions imply a “higher power” = spiritual = transcendent = “numinous” (Rudolf Otto) = “Sacred” (Eliade) reality.
  o For Rudolf Otto, the numinous is marked qualities of Mysterium (wholly other), tremendum (powerful) and fascinans (fascinating attractiveness).
  o Eliade acknowledges sacred space and sacred time (versus the profane space or profane time).
• Karl Rahner highlights openness to a “transcendent horizon” and the very experience of the transcendent as part of the very structure of human experience.
• C. S. Lewis suggests that a pre-awareness of a “higher” sense of right and wrong (Moral Law) confirms our capacity for transcendence.
  o So does the young Augustine’s feeling of holy “restlessness,” longing and desire, as do unexplained coincidences.
  o Marx and Freud disagree with all of this, claiming that religion is the blind drug of the masses, which Lewis then challenges.
• Religious studies are an objective approach to the study of religion that “brackets out” the question of the transcendent ultimate reality; conversely, theology takes seriously the reality of the transcendent, within a particular tradition.
  o All religions share the belief in the transcendent.