



# OPEN HOUSE

Issue No. 191 £2

Child prisoners of Auschwitz

A SCOTTISH RELIGIOUS MAGAZINE OF COMMENT, OPINION AND REFLECTION

## Thank God for Lent.

Page 1

## There's (probably) no dialogue here.

Page 2

## Catholicity and Ecumenism: Are they the same thing?

Page 3

## The Holocaust and the Papacy.

Page 5

## Gerard Manley Hopkins in Scotland.

Page 6

## Faith in Art.

Page 8

## Scotland's Churches Scheme.

Page 10

## Hunting the heretics: where are they in today's Church?

Page 10

## Zion: Historic Land of the Jews or Imaginery, Mythical Place?

Page 11

## Reviews:

Pages 12 - 13

## Your Letters:

Page 14 - 16

## Contact Details:

Page 16

## EDITORIAL

# Thank God for Lent

Faced with the prospect of a 13 year old boy entering into a media led paternity dispute with his pals one is reduced to Oscar Wilde's immortal line: *You would need a heart of stone not to laugh.*

The secular agenda has been so successful that nobody with a salary at stake dares utter the words Right or Wrong. Public health staff are reduced to the status of human vets monitoring genital activity (as in Larry Clark's 1995 film *Kids* - reviewed in *Open House* 48). Hygiene is the new morality. *How many condoms do you think you'll need for the weekend, son?*

Even the average Catholic who bothers to go to church on Ash Wednesday and kiss the cross on Good Friday has become convinced that the traditional practices of restraint for the 40 intervening days are impossible in a consumer society. Although some of the new Polish Catholic immigrants are still resisting temptation.

And yet healthy eating and keeping fit, for example, are increasingly successful businesses. A majority of people has a belief that slim is ideal; fat is poor, marginalised and in need of a cure. There are people for whom Lent couldn't come quickly enough. They know they have eaten and drunk to excess over Christmas. They need the motivation *to get back into shape*, as they put it.

In fact the traditional practices of Lent - prayer, penance and almsgiving - are cultivated in various forms by many in our society. Just think of the value attached to MEDITATION! EXERCISE!! FUNDRAISING!!! They also coincide

with the mantras of healthy ageing which are exercise, undereating and relating to others. If the church wasn't so identified with (bad) religion it could probably manage a good business in these areas of self-help.

However the rising profile of Ramadan (a lunar month of daylight fasting moving forward by 10 days each year) reminds us that there is more to spirituality than improving ourselves. Benedict XVI while applauding any sacrifice that benefits the impoverished overseas warns Catholics against treating Lent as beauty therapy.

The very physicality of the 40 days teaches us with St Paul that our bodies are not our own. The clearest proclamation of faith in the resurrection of the body we can make to believers and to unbelievers alike is to use our bodies to prepare our minds for the adult renewal of baptismal promises at the forthcoming Easter Vigil.



# There's (probably) no dialogue here

## Believers, non-believers, and the problem of language.



Probably everybody in the UK and in the wider world has already heard about the so-called atheist buses, which have appeared on the streets of Britain and elsewhere, carrying the slogan: 'There's probably no god. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.' The reaction to the buses has been mixed among Christians. Some have claimed that the buses are a good 'discussion starter,' while others have argued that there can be no talk of dialogue here. In reaction to the possibility of introducing the buses to Canada, Bishop Fred Henry, for instance, was reported to have said: 'The premise for a dialogue begins with respect, and I don't see this in this ad.'

I agree with the Bishop that there indeed is a problem with communication here, but I would say that he misidentified its cause. Of course, the slogan is very much, as he put it, 'in your face,' but this is after all what all campaigns are about, even those pursued by Christians themselves. In particular, it is worth mentioning here that no less 'in your face' was the Christian message that provoked Ariane Sherine to conceive the whole idea of the atheist bus campaign in the first place. Just to remind you, she was upset by the fact that the bus advert issued by the organization *JesusSaid*, contained the internet address of a site where non-believers could learn that they would surely burn in hell 'for all eternity.' Let he who is without sin, cast the first stone, Bishop Henry.

If this is not about the tone of the advert, then why do I think it is not a good starting point for dialogue? To put it concisely, the main problem is

that the advert addresses the question of the existence of God. For however paradoxically this might sound, if believers and non-believers want to talk to, instead of campaigning against, each other, each party needs to forget for the moment about precisely that which defines it, i.e. whether God exists or not. I must immediately stress that the point is actually not mine as I borrow it from the late Richard Rorty - one of the most famous philosophers of recent decades and a self-declared atheist and anti-clerical. And in order to explain it I must refer to his more general views, especially those espoused in his essay 'Cultural Politics and the Question of the existence of God' (Rorty, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007).

Basically, the whole idea boils down to the claim that it is the discourse (simply, the type of language) we use that primarily decides what can be considered to be existent by us; or, to put it another way, that the question of existence is determined by the so-called 'canonical designators' that determine a given logical space. Examples should make this clearer. As Rorty claims, for instance, in the logical space of Conan Doyle's novels on Sherlock Holmes, that what exists is determined by the descriptions that are contained in, or implied by, these works (from which we might learn that there is such a person as Watson's wife, while there is *no* such person as the wife of Holmes). Coming back to the question of God, in the logical space whose canonical designators are 'the descriptions of spatiotemporal grid whose zero point is the place where speaker is now' (ibid. 18), nothing which transcends time and

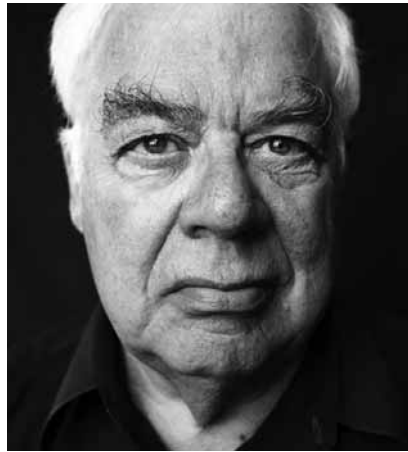
space, e.g., the God of the Christian religion, can be thought of as existing. Whereas the logical space of Scripture, and thus of Christianity, with its canonical designators understood as the content of the verses inspired by the Holy Spirit, naturally does allow for God's existence.

It is worth emphasizing here that for Rorty, language, or discourse, is not merely something that we use, but is rather something that constitutes us as human beings, determining our perception and beliefs. Seen from this perspective, the fact that believers and non-believers use different discourses and remain within different logical spaces means that they, in a certain sense, inhabit different worlds. In one of them the existence of God is an obvious fact that no sane person can deny and to which all facts attest to; in the other it is as clear as the sun that either God does not exist or that we cannot know it, and hence if anybody claims otherwise they must be victims of a dangerous delusion.

Although Rorty's position seems abstract, it has some practical advantages. For example it can account for the fact that every theist and atheist must have encountered a person who belonged to the opposite party yet, somehow, mysteriously, was a person of remarkable intelligence and/or moral character. Who hasn't thought at least once in their lifetime: 'She is so insightful and smart, maybe even smarter than me, but how can't she see that she's so deeply wrong about God' or 'He's such a bigot/such a heathen yet I wish I did so much good as he does'? The answer to such questions is simple. The fact that one moves within a different logical space

---

does not necessarily mean that one does so in an irrational or unethical way. But on the other hand, this does not change the fact that since the discourses that believers and non-believers are engaged in necessarily preclude each from seeing the question of the existence of God in the same way, their every attempt to debate this question must result in, as Rorty puts it, 'mere table-thumping.' (ibid. 9) And this is regardless of how intelligent, clear and coherent the arguments put forward by each party might be.



*Richard Rorty*

What is the way out of this impasse? According to Rorty, if we want to have a dialogue between believers and non-believers we need to change the topic. Instead of dealing with big otherworldly questions, let us concentrate on the good we can do together here, on this earth: how to reduce the unnecessary suffering of our fellow-humans, how to make people more sensitive to human misery and poverty - the goals we both agree are worth pursuing (note that Rorty does not claim that this kind of dialogue does not take place at all, but that we need more of it). But, someone might object, isn't it the case that notions such as suffering, misery,

happiness etc. are ethical concepts that are inextricably tied to one's more general outlook, that is to say, in this case, to the theistic or secular worldview? Therefore, isn't it the case that we would have to eventually come back to the question of the existence of God anyway? Rorty's answer to both these questions is yes, but he nevertheless points out that there is a difference between trying to seek the common ground as long as possible, and announcing right from the start: 'Happiness is x or y because the Scripture, or the secular humanist ethics, says so! Here I stand, and won't move an inch!' But even if this sounds plausible, one could think of

another, much more serious objection. Namely, isn't Rorty's strategy just a cunning way to impose secular rules on the dialogue, under the pretext of providing a neutral ground for it? After all, the very idea of concentrating on worldly misery and happiness while ignoring the perspective of eternity is the quintessence of secular outlook as such.

This may be so, but exactly at this point there emerges a question for Christian ethics. Let us suppose that by agreeing to pursue their dialogue on secular grounds believers and non-believers could do more good on this earth than had they proceeded otherwise. Could that be a reason enough for believers to abstain from spreading the word to their secular interlocutors, from trying to convert them, that is to say, from caring about the latter's eternal happiness? Myself a non-believer I cannot be sure whether this question makes any sense to believers or not. Yet I would be glad to hear their answers, especially if they agreed not to begin with the question of the existence of God.

---

**SR L M CECILY BOULDING OP**

## Catholicity and Ecumenism: Are they the same thing?

I think the short answer now is, sadly, No, but they ought to be. 'Catholic' is not a biblical term, yet its essential meaning is surely present in the Pentecost story when 'people from every nation under heaven heard the Apostles speak in their own tongues,' and at the close of Matthew's Gospel: 'Go and teach all nations.'

For Ignatius of Antioch at the beginning of the Second Century 'Catholic' clearly equals 'universal' when he writes: 'Where Christ is, there is the Church'. In the late

Second Century Irenaeus developed the theme of every Church in the whole world maintaining the tradition of the Apostles, so universality and orthodox belief became indissolubly linked. In the mid Third Century Cyprian developed Irenaeus' presentation of the Church as having its centre in Rome into the actual equation of 'Roman' with 'Catholic'. The Council of Nicea in AD 325 agreed that a universal (*oikumenes*) standard of faith should be adopted; so the

Nicene Creed canonised the word 'Catholic' as equivalent to orthodox, because universal. Leo I (AD 440-461) developed the doctrine of papal primacy and the petrine office in manner which consolidated the concept of 'Catholic' as meaning universal unity in the correct faith in communion with the Bishop of Rome. In AD 1075 Pope Gregory VII formally declared that none could be called 'Catholic' who did not agree with the Roman Church, and this identification was not effectively

questioned in the west until the 16th Century Reformation.

In 1530, because of this association of 'Catholic' with 'Rome' Luther replaced this word in the creeds by 'Christian', claiming that the mediaeval church had departed from patristic Catholicity by innovations not legitimised by scripture, but his disciple Melancthon, anxious to preserve the concept of universal unity wrote, 'We must all be Catholic and embrace what the rightly thinking Church holds...unentangled with sects warring against that creed.' In this sense the word Catholic is maintained in all Protestant creeds today.

The structural and political unity of the western Church was not immediately replicated in the East: Cyril of Alexandria in the mid-Fifth Century emphasised its sacramental rather than political unity; John Chrysostom emphasised that the bond holding the Church together was mutual charity, and Gregory of Nyssa spoke of the mystical unity of Christians with one another. Consequently there was already a wide divergence between the eastern and western concepts of Catholicity before the schism of 1054, when the term 'orthodox' came to signify fidelity to the inherited apostolic tradition of the Eastern Church, in reliance on patristic theology commonly expressed in the liturgy. Contemporary Orthodox Churches now generally regard 'Catholicity' as the fullness of Christian life received from, and through the apostolic and patristic Church.

The post-reformation Roman Catholic Church has been characterised by sharp definition of doctrine, centralised ecclesiastical authority and an institutional and juridical unity which often lacked breadth of vision and constrained natural directness of expression. This certainly preserved unity and did not entirely stifle growth and expansion. With the second Vatican Council 1962-5 the institutional Church regained some sense of 'qualitative' Catholicity, in the sense of Cardinal Newman's vision of tradition as a living stream



*Ecumenical Christians at prayer*

rather than a fixed deposit, and of the Church as 'mediator' of the scriptures which are to be expounded in the light of the whole of Church tradition.

The ecumenical movement is commonly held to have actually started with the Missionary

---

*"For Ignatius of Antioch at the beginning of the Second Century 'Catholic' clearly equals 'universal' when he writes: 'Where Christ is, there is the Church'."*

---

Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910, which led to further similar conferences. The establishment of the World Council of Churches (WCC) was mooted at one such conference in 1927, but was only achieved after the Second World War in 1948.

Its basis is a statement of fact, not a confession of faith: 'The WCC is a fellowship of Churches which confess Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfil together, their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.' It rejects any claim to be a "superchurch", but does believe that it can offer some foretaste of what a re-united Church might be like.

It has been criticised by Orthodox, Roman Catholics and others from various points of view, notably for an insufficient theological and doctrinal basis, and for too close an engagement with the agenda of secular society, but has achieved widespread agreement on the need for one, visibly embodied Church, to fulfil the mission of Christ, and has constantly held out the final goal of unrestricted Eucharistic communion.

The Second Vatican Council recognised and applauded the ecumenical movement exemplified in the WCC as inspired by the Holy Spirit, but developed the theme somewhat differently: it asserted that the doctrinal basis for the - already given - oneness of the Church is the redemption of the entire human race by the sacrifice of Christ, his institution of the sacrament of unity in the Eucharist, and the gift of the Holy Spirit who brings about 'that wonderful communion of the faithful and joins them together so intimately in Christ that he is the principle of the Church's unity. The establishment of this, one, Church everywhere was entrusted to Peter and the Apostles, and to their successors.'

However, differences about ecclesiology itself, about the role and authority of tradition, and even about the degree of structural unity necessary, still prevent visible unity, though most Christians would now recognise a deepening of the partial communion they do share.

Those Orthodox Churches who participate in the WCC see it as their role to insist on Catholicity in time as well as pace, and to maintain the one holy patristic tradition as they hold it.

---

They pray that 'The Spirit may lead us to the full expression of the mystery of ecclesial communion that is the wonderful gift of God to the world.' Sacramental ordination and apostolic succession in the episcopate are the guarantee of the *koinonia* of the whole Church, which must draw ecclesiological and canonical consequences from these affirmations of faith. Institutional structures must visibly reflect the mystery of *koinonia*. To be Catholic is to be in communion with the one Church of all times and all places.

The message of its first Assembly in 1948 pointed out that: 'It is not in human power to create the unity of the Holy Catholic Church - only in the power of God - who gave us, at Easter, the certainty that his purpose will be accomplished. By our acts of obedience and faith we can set up on earth signs which point to the coming victory. Let us give ourselves to the tasks that lie in our hands, and set up those signs.'

We have become familiar with the concept of partial, or imperfect, communion: surely no communion at all is possible between groupings unless there is already some natural kindred. The phrase 'ecclesial communities' coined by Vatican II, indicates that the various Christian Churches are bodies whose existence, structure and community life arise from and are sustained by something more than merely human will, choice and decision, and are used by the Holy Spirit. We have a unity of origin in Christ himself, and we hope for eschatological unity - not merely the recovery of that original unity, but a far richer gathering-up of all the diversities of traditions and individuals - the riches that have been unpacked and developed from the original during the ages of the Church's pilgrimage.

In the ecclesiological context

'Catholicity' seems to imply 'containment' - the gathering into structured, organic relationship of universal richness and variety, which are not thereby obliterated. There is constant emphasis that such unity does not, need not, mean uniformity, but is contained within a firm framework. Ecumenism seems to mean discovering links and relationships between the wide variety of ecclesial elements as they exist in themselves, with occasional adaptations (dare I say compromises) when necessary.

Are these links sufficient to constitute real unity in the sense implied by the creedal profession of 'One Holy Catholic Church' or is that profession only truly verified when there is some external, containing framework? This is an urgent question one for our times, and I hope to have shed some light on what is involved in trying to answer it.

---

TOM FITZPATRICK

## The Holocaust and the Papacy

The Holocaust - *Shoah* to the Jews - is surely one of the most significant political, ethical, theological and religious events of the twentieth century which saw, in the plethora of horrors, two wars of unprecedented destructiveness and the rise and fall of communist and totalitarian regimes across Europe. The exposure to the nations of the barbarity of the concentration camps can be seen as a preparation for the spiritual upheaval that followed. The scene was set for the election of Pope John XXIII, who became a sign of healing of division between the Jews and their Christian neighbours.

In 1962, the Second Ecumenical Council opened. The fifteenth of its sixteen documents, *The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to the Non-Christian Religions*, generally referred to as

*Nostra Aetate*, acknowledges the common fatherhood of Abraham to Christians and Jews, and unequivocally states its belief that by his Cross Christ reconciled Jew and Gentile, making them one in Himself. An International Council of Christians

and Jews spread throughout the United Kingdom and branches were founded in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

During the reigns of Popes Paul VI, John Paul I and John Paul II the spirit of John XXIII was very much alive, and the relationship flourished. In 1998 a Centre for the Study of Jewish Relations dedicated to teaching, research and dialogue in the encounter between Jews and Christians was established in Cambridge. John Paul II, speaking at a millennium liturgy of repentance on 12 March 2000, reiterated the wish of the Church to commit itself to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant. The words he used echoed a prayer attributed to John XXIII. At Heythrop, the Jesuit-run



Pope Benedict with Shear-Yashuv Cohen, chief Rabbi of Haifa

College of London University, courses devoted to the study of the three Abrahamic faiths have been introduced. In Glasgow on 30 October 1995 Cardinal Winning addressed a meeting of CCJ on the subject of *Building Bridges*. The hall was packed by a mixed group of more than two hundred people, among them Paul Wendel from London and Scottish Episcopal Bishop Taylor. It was a great occasion. Cardinal Winning spoke eloquently of *Nostra Aetate* to a totally attentive audience and Henry Tinkel gave an impressive vote of thanks.

Sadly and predictably, the path of charity and reconciliation did not run smoothly. In 1988 a breakaway group of priests of the Society of St. Pius X, led by Bishop Marcel Lefebvre was found to be in schism because of its failure to accept fully the findings of the Vatican Council. The Society was excommunicated. In January 2009, during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and on the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the announcement by Pope John XXIII of



*Pope Benedict XVI visits Auschwitz*

the Second Vatican Council, Pope Benedict XVI revoked the decree of excommunication. The dismay caused by the decision outside and inside the Church was compounded by the fact that one member of the Society, Bishop Richard Williamson, denied the reality of the Holocaust. The Chief Rabbinate of Israel broke off relations with the Vatican. This was followed by a statement from the Vatican reiterating the Pope's unequivocal opposition to anti-semitism, and full solidarity with our brothers, the receivers of the first covenant.

The situation of the Church in the world that has arisen is sad and could be tragic. Although excommunication has been lifted, the order of SSPX is not in full communion and all its priests remain suspended from celebrating the sacraments. But uncertainties abound. A translation of the translation of the Roman Missal that revised the Tridentine Rite Good Friday prayer is still awaited. Justified or not, there is a feeling that the findings of Vatican II are being undermined. This in the year of St. Paul, Apostle of the Gentiles. The perplexity of the faithful will continue until this is firmly resolved and the decision comprehensively promulgated.

The Vatican statement requiring Williamson to withdraw his denial of the Holocaust is a welcome step towards repairing the dismay felt by those, Jews, Catholics and other Christians who have been striving over recent decades to heal divisions between members of these two related faiths.

PETER GRANGER BANYARD S J

## Gerard Manley Hopkins in Scotland

Fr. Gerard Manley Hopkins S.J. made three visits to Scotland. The first one was in August 1871 when he was a member of a party of Jesuit students ("Scholastics") who spent their annual fortnight's holiday at Innellan. It was the custom for a whole community to go away together: the annual holiday was known as "Villa", presumably from the fact that Houses of studies in continental cities had somewhere outside the city where they could relax. Hopkins at this time was studying Philosophy at St. Mary's Hall, Stonyhurst in Lancashire. The party sailed up the Clyde from Liverpool in the *Bison*, a ship to be much recommended" and landed at Greenock at 5.15am on 17th August. The two priests in their number said Mass for them in St. Mary's Church:

then they "breakfasted sumptuously at the Tontine" before crossing to Innellan. The modern Tontine Hotel is in a different building. At Innellan they found "three adjacent houses at Broom Lodge very convenient" though "in a very unprepared state". One room was used as a chapel.

Unfortunately we do not know all the expeditions Hopkins himself took part in during this holiday. One day, Wednesday 23rd August, "Seven went to Inveraray to see the reception of the Marquis of Lorne and the gathering of the Highland Clans." Six went out for a sail under the guidance of Henry Schomberg Kerr. He had been a captain in the Royal Navy before joining the Society of Jesus. His name occurs a few years later sailing a boat when on



*Gerard Manley Hopkins*

"Villa" at Barmouth in North Wales. He distinguished himself as a priest pioneering the Zambesi mission in Africa which is now the separate Zimbabwe Province of the Society. Anybody who has been on holiday in the West of Scotland will detect a familiar ring in "Rowing boats were taken only about six times.....sailing or fishing once or twice, all on account of the wet and bad weather". One day

fifteen went via Wemyss Bay to Edinburgh where they were entertained to lunch by Henry Kerr's father, Lord Henry Kerr. Then they saw "Holyrood, the town, the Castle, our church etc." "Our Church" is, of course, the Sacred Heart, Lauriston Street, which is still in Jesuit hands. Hopkins found the tour too quick to allow a fair appreciation of any one place. In 1871 the Jesuits also had charge of parishes in Dalkeith, Galashiels and Selkirk. On one day Hopkins paid a brief visit to Arran. On a Saturday five adventurous men "went to Loch Lomond, going by steamer to Arrochar, steamer from Tarbet to Balloch, and from Helensburgh to Dunoon." - all for 5/- a head. (It would be interesting to know how much spending money was given to each in those days. The money was known as the "Villa Hog". In the early 1950's the "Hog" was still £1!) On their visit to Scotland the Jesuit scholastics wore Roman collars for the first time. The following year Hopkins and his fellow Philosophers "went for our holiday to Douglas in the Isle of Man". It was at that time that Hopkins first made acquaintance with the works of Duns Scotus.

Ten years later in 1881 Hopkins, now a priest, spent a short period in Glasgow helping out at St. Joseph's, North Woodside Road. The Jesuits had been invited to run this parish just before they opened their school, St. Aloysius College, in Charlotte Street, near Glasgow Green. Whilst at St. Joseph's Hopkins made a trip to Inversnaid, "I hurried one day to Loch Lomond. The day (28th Sept 1881) was dark and partly hid the lake, yet it did not altogether disfigure it but gave a pensive or solemn beauty which left a deep impression on me. I landed at Inversnaid (cf. Wordsworth and Matthew Arnold) for a few hours..... "The poem that was inspired by this visit is one of his best known and often anthologized.

"This darksome burn horseback brown,  
His rollrock high road roaring down"

On the centenary of Hopkin's death, 8th June 1989, the burn was trickling, not roaring when with friends I celebrated Mass on the rocks.

Writing to Robert Bridges some days before his expedition to Inversnaid Hopkins declared: "Things are pleasanter here than at Liverpool. Wretched place Glasgow is, like all our

great towns; still I get on better here, though bad is the best of my getting on." A further comment on his experience at St. Joseph's: "The poor Irish, among whom my duties lay, are mostly from the North of Ireland, scarcely distinguishable in tongue from the Scotch and at Glasgow still further Scotified. They are found by all who have to deal with them very attractive; for, though always very drunken and at present very Fenian, they are warm-hearted and give a far heartier welcome than those in Liverpool."

Hopkins visited Scotland for the third and last time in 1888, the year before his death. He came across from Dublin, where he was teaching Greek in the University College, with an Irish Jesuit friend. They headed for the Highlands. He wrote to Robert Bridges that he was going to "put plainly to a Highland congregation of MacDonalds, MacKintoshes, MacKillops" what he had written a month before about the Resurrection

"In a flash, at a trumpet crash,  
I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am and  
This is Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood,  
immortal diamond  
Is immortal diamond."

It was a Scotsman who had the greatest influence on Hopkins. The teachings of Duns Scotus appealed to his poetic view of the world. The works of Thomas Aquinas governed the teaching of philosophy and theology to Jesuits. Put very simply, Aquinas held that the mind's first knowledge is of the universal and that it is a second stage which touches the individual: first the concept "man" then the individual "Gerard". Scotus on the other hand teaches that the mind's first knowledge is of the individual which then leads to the universal. In his poem "Duns Scotus's Oxford" Hopkins declares:

"Yet ah! This air I gather and I release  
He lived on: these weeds and waters, these walls are what  
He haunted who of all men most sways my spirits to  
peace."



**THE  
NEWMAN  
ASSOCIATION**  
(Glasgow Circle)

**2009  
LECTURE SERIES**

Promoting open  
discussion and greater  
understanding in  
today's Church

## 'THE NEW POLES AND THE CHURCH IN SCOTLAND'

A talk by  
**FATHER WILLY SLAVIN**

**THURSDAY 26 MARCH 2009 at 7.30pm**

**GLASGOW UNIVERSITY CHAPLAINCY**

Turnbull Hall, 15 Southpark Terrace, Glasgow G12 8LG

Admission: Non-Members: £3 (includes refreshments)

Enquiries by email to Circle Secretary: danbaird98@btinternet.com

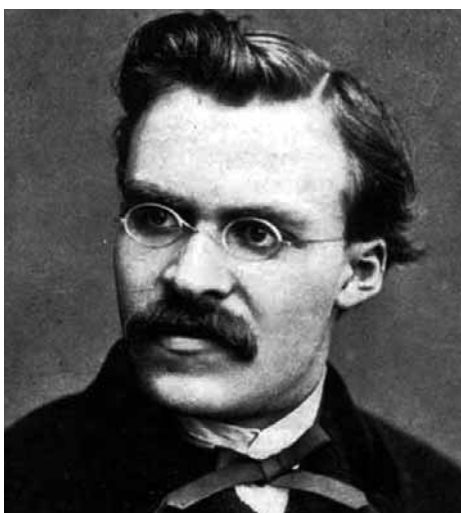
PATRICK REILLY

## Faith in Art

Nietzsche is the crucial figure in Yeats's poetic life, an even greater discovery at the start of the 20th century than was the encounter with Blake a decade earlier. Yeats was spellbound. Apologizing to Lady Gregory for tardiness in correspondence, he writes 'the truth is that you have a rival in Nietzsche, that strong enchanter. I have read him so much that I have made my eyes bad again...Nietzsche completes Blake and has the same roots.' It was to be a life-long fascination, strong enough to withstand his father's attempt to break it: 'The men whom Nietzsche's theory fits are only great men of a sort, a sort of Yahoo great man... the struggle is how to get rid of them.' The son clearly thought otherwise.

What did he learn from Nietzsche? Not the dramatic news that God was dead - Huxley and Tyndall had already taught him that. In Nietzsche he learned how to cope with that appalling demise, how to supply that catastrophic absence. He learned too, that he was right to spurn the modern world as a slum to the spirit and a prison to the imagination. Above all, Nietzsche taught him that art was the new saviour, that life is a work of art or it is nothing, that 'it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that the being of man and the world are eternally justified.' (Nietzsche's italics). That final, arresting word is enough to alert us to the fact that these are the words of a lapsed Christian, the unbelieving heir of generations of Lutheran clergymen.

Nietzsche is the philosopher friendliest to art, because he insists that life itself is a fiction, that all values are man-made, invented, fictitious. Plato expelled the poets from his ideal republic for making up stories. Nietzsche mockingly retorts that everyone makes up stories, Plato included - Plato simply deludes himself that *his* stories are true. But there is no truth, only perspective. Every belief has a human horizon and the world is justified as an aesthetic phenomenon or not at all. At a stroke ethics is scandalously deposed in



Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, 1844 - 1900

favour of aesthetics as the defining metaphysical pursuit of man. Socrates, the arch-villain of Greek civilization, is chastised for leading us down a metaphysical dead-end by promoting the primacy of ethics. It is in art that man finds significance, order, purpose - in art or not at all.

It is a doctrine admirably suited to those who have lost faith in religion while failing to find a compensatory substitute creed in Marxism, science or some other variant of the belief in progress. Yeats fitted the bill perfectly: 'I am very religious, and, deprived by Huxley and Tyndall, whom I detested,



William Butler Yeats, 1865 - 1939

of the simple-minded religion of my childhood, I had made a new religion, almost an infallible church of poetic tradition, of a fardel of stories and of personages and of emotions, inseparable from their first impressions, passed on from generation to generation by poets and painters with some help from philosophers and theologians.' The mind revealed here was clearly fallow ground for the sowing of Nietzschean doctrines. Nietzsche also confirmed the unappeasable hostility of Yeats's former master, Blake, to the modern world of progress, industry and science. Blake mordantly described the incipient Industrial Revolution of his time (those *dark satanic mills*) as an anti-creation, an undoing of Genesis: 'Adam fell asleep, the Garden died; God took the spinning-jenny out of his side.' The spinning-jenny, symbol of the new industry, is plainly no improvement upon Eve.

So, deprived of religion by science and detesting this usurper, where was a man like Yeats to go for solace and significance? It is a mistake, however superficially plausible, to think that he found a haven in Fascist politics. Certainly, he despised what he saw as the squalid corruption of contemporary democracy, but his recourse to the putative disciplined order of Fascism was itself, in turn, the sign of a much deeper commitment. If God is dead, life can have no purpose outside or beyond itself. Whatever meaning or justification it may have must come from within; it must exist purely for its own sake, have import on its own terms alone, be completely self-sufficient. All this makes it like a gigantic work of art. Not science, not politics, but art replaces religion as the justifier of life. As Wallace Stevens says, 'after one has abandoned a belief in God, poetry is the essence which takes its place as life's redemption.' Yeats concurred with this judgement: 'The arts are about to take upon their shoulders the burdens that have fallen from the shoulders of the priests.' Did not Joyce reject the bogus vocation

offered by his Jesuit teachers to become a true priest of the eternal imagination, a priest of art turning the bread of everyday life into the body and blood of the new redeemer? The new creator is the artist, supplying the gap caused by the passing of the Christian God.

Life becomes performance, a poem, a drama, a spectacle, and man is both actor and casting-director, assuming the different masks appropriate to his ever-changing roles. The world, says Heraclitus, is the game Zeus plays. But when Zeus departs, man is the sole player. And so Yeats is forever remaking himself, from the early romantic dreamer of 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' to the harsh, brutal modernist, seeking his subject matter in 'the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.'

His ostensibly political poems are nothing of the kind - politics is simply the pretext, providing an occasion for poetry, a theatre for the play. Instructive here is the affable, carefree Irregular soldier of the 1920s Troubles turning his life into a performance: 'As though to die by gunshot were/The finest play under the sun/' Play your part finely - what else is there to do? Only thus can we make sense of his greatest patriotic poem, 'Easter 1916' which is not a patriotic poem at all, for it belongs, not to the patriot game, but to the art game. Ostensibly about a great political event, the event that led to the creation of modern Ireland, it is really about an aesthetic transformation, the elevation of a 'casual comedy', a low farce, into high tragedy, in which the costume of motley is exchanged for the mantle of heroism: 'a terrible beauty is born.' Beauty. It is not a political concept. Scour the manifestos of political parties and you will not readily discover it. Nor will the poem, attentively read, gladden the heart of the nationalist. Yeats even posits the politically blasphemous possibility that the Rising itself was misconceived, mistaken and unnecessary, that what it achieved politically could have been achieved without violence and blood. But what does that matter? What *does* matter is that clowns, stage Irishmen, figures of fun and derision, have astonishingly become heroes: a terrible beauty is born. Who cares if they transformed Ireland? What is truly

astounding, truly moving, is that they transformed themselves. It is as Nietzsche exhorts: dare to live the life of tragic man, build your homes on the slopes of Vesuvius, live dangerously, and you will be redeemed. So it has transpired. 'Now and in time to be, wherever green is worn,/A terrible beauty is born.'

'An Irish Airman Foresees his Death' replicates the aim and mindset of 'Easter 1916', except that the situation is seen from the protagonist's perspective. Robert Gregory, son of Lady Gregory, was killed flying over Italy in the First World War (a war, so says the poem, for which he cared nothing), foreseeing his death ('I know that I shall meet my fate'), and, heedless of other men and public issues, dying finally for himself - 'A lonely impulse of delight/Drove to this tumult in the clouds.' This is no *alter Christus*, sacrificing himself so that others might live. Young as he is, he has already discovered the routine futility of life. Only in this moment of egotistic self-immolation can he escape the pointless flux of existence and achieve, however briefly, an ecstatic order that is nowhere else to be found.

All that makes us uneasy about Yeats - the dalliance with Fascism, the obsession with power, the rant about eugenics, the senescent posturing - can be explained, perhaps even forgiven, as simply occasions for poetry: 'they give me metaphors for poetry' - and it is the greatest poetry written in English in the 20th century. Marxists politicize art, Yeats aestheticizes life. His predicament is, at root, simply one version of a general crisis. Rilke, Valery, Joyce, Stevens, Yeats, they all preach salvation through art, extolling it as the one unique agency for the restitution of values in an otherwise valueless universe. Only art can redeem us from the meaningless chaos of life; the creative imagination is raised to the level of a surrogate religion.

There is something imperial about all poetry, a rage for order against formlessness. The poet begins with chaos and dictatorially imposes order - every poet is a Greek overcoming Asia. Hence the seductive, disastrous analogy between poetry and political absolutism. For Yeats the root impulse is aesthetic, not political, and he

follows his master Nietzsche in trying to make life itself a work of art; a poem and a civilization are both struggles for control. The trouble - or is it the blessing? - is that ordinary, everyday life is messy, disordered, full of false starts and loose ends, not at all possessing the perfect equilibrium, the exact economy of great art, where everything fits and there is nothing in excess, nothing redundant. The danger is that in trying to translate the order of art into the entirely inappropriate realm of politics, we open a door for tyranny and regimentation. If this was a mistake that the man Yeats came close to making, it leaves the greatness of the poet intact.

## Contributors to Open House

**James McGarry;** Retired Doctor, Reviewer, Author.

**Jennifer Stark;** Former Lecturer in Linguistics at the University of York, on many Anglican Committees, Committee Member of Open House.

**Tom Fitzpatrick;** Formerly Assistant Principal of St. Andrew's College of Education, Bearsden; Author and Reviewer.

**Dr. Wojciech Malecki;** Department of Philology, University of Wroclaw, Poland.

**Peter Granger Banyard, SJ;** Writer, Reviewer, Poet. Member of Jesuit Community at St. Aloysius', Glasgow.

**Patrick Reilly;** Emeritus Professor of English, Glasgow University; Author of Studies on Orwell and Swift; General books on literature are *The Literature of Guilt and The Dark Landscape of Modern Fiction* (2003).

**Dr. Brian Fraser;** Director of Scottish Churches Scheme.

**Sr. L. M. Cecily Boulding, OP;** Lecturer in Theology at Ushaw College and Durham University.

**Paul Fitzpatrick;** Lecturer in Theology and Philosophy in Scunthorpe, Reviewer and Writer.

**Ian Willock;** Retired Professor of Law, Dundee University; Member of many Law committees; An Editor of Open House.

*It is confirmed that the opinions and ideas expressed by all our Contributors are their own and not accepted as the opinions and ideas of Open House.*

DR BRIAN FRASER, Director of Scotland's Churches Scheme

# Scotland's Churches Scheme

New Projects on web-site: [www.sacredscotland.org.uk](http://www.sacredscotland.org.uk)

SCOTLAND'S CHURCHES SCHEME is an ecumenical Charitable Trust which assists Churches and communities to:

- work together with others to make the Church the focus of the community.
- open their doors with a welcoming presence.
- tell the story of the building and its people, its purpose and heritage.
- provide information/education and care for visitors and local residents, young and old.

The Scheme has grown rapidly since its inception in 1994 and there are now 1200 Churches in membership, operating an 'open doors' policy. The member churches are spread across Scotland and across all the denominations.

The Trust has published successive editions of a comprehensive guidebook, *Churches to Visit in Scotland*, well received by local communities and visitors.

Having established a permanent means of providing access to our local church buildings, large and small, urban and rural, the Scheme has raised the awareness of our heritage to a wider audience. At the same time, the church can provide a more accessible sanctuary and become a greater focal point in its community.

The Scheme's existing local network of volunteers across the country, provides advice and assistance to member Churches in opening their buildings and providing a meaningful experience for visitors.

A series of "how-to" brochures assists this advice - for example:

- How to Research your Church's History*
- How to Present your Church's Story*
- How to Welcome Visitors to your Church*
- How to Make your Church Secure*

The Scheme also operates a fund to assist in the playing of organs, providing small grants to churches, financed by the Inches Carr Fund.

In the last 12 months the Scheme has embarked on two major initiatives:

## 1. A new comprehensive web-site [www.sacredscotland.org.uk](http://www.sacredscotland.org.uk)

With support from Historic Scotland SCS has almost completed the design and build of a large, unique web-site which features information and photographs or drawings of all our member churches, publicising details and location of the building; services and opening times; facilities; and special events. There are links to other major web-sites (such as Visitscotland, National Trust, Historic Scotland and the various Church denominations). Member churches are able to update their page on a continuing basis and post forthcoming events on the site - linking into the local church site if there is one.

This facility will be a unique new reference point for visitors to the country and for local groups. The web-site has gone "live" although much information is still to be inputted. The site was launched at the Scottish Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh on 10 December by the Church of Scotland Moderator, the Rev David Lunan and Cardinal Keith O'Brien who spoke encouragingly of the value of the ecumenical, national site.

## 2. Regional guidebooks of churches to visit in Scotland

Scotland's Churches Scheme will also publish a series of regional guidebooks featuring the sacred sites. This will follow the pattern of a recent publication - *Sacred Highlands*, which celebrated the *Year of Highland Culture 2007*. Three of these regional books will be produced each year over the next three years with comprehensive gazetteer sections and learned articles on the development of church buildings in the area and the formation of trails and pilgrimages. The first group will be *Sacred South-West Scotland, Sacred Edinburgh and Sacred Fife & Forth Valley*.

Over a million people visit Scotland's religious sites annually and the growth of "spiritual tourism" places the services of the Scheme now in even greater demand.

JENNIFER STARK

# Hunting the heretics: where are they in today's church?

Following the debate on *l'affaire Williamson* over the last weeks, I have been struck by the apparent consensus over the essentials of the matter. Most commentators and a considerable number of senior church figures clearly think, and many say, that the Vatican displayed, at best, mind-blowing ineptitude in its decision to lift the excommunications of Williamson and his three Lefebvrist colleagues; without consultation, and seemingly without investigation of their current views on a subject so sensitive as the Holocaust.

This, and other events, has prompted the fear that the teachings of Vatican II are under threat and triggered the launch of a worldwide petition, framed by a number of German theologians and endorsed by the International Movement *We Are Church*, and the European Network *Church on the Move* (see [www.petition-vaticanum2.org](http://www.petition-vaticanum2.org)). It also raises wider questions about how heresy, or dissent if you prefer, should be defined or dealt with in this, or indeed any church.

In 1991, Williamson wrote a 'pastoral' letter (from Winona, USA), on 'Why Women Should Not Wear Trousers', and, a decade later, another on 'Why Almost No Girl Should Go to University'. The texts were removed about a fortnight ago from the Society of St Pius X website, but are available at the Catholic internet library ([www.womenpriests.org](http://www.womenpriests.org)). Amongst other things he wrote:

*It is high time for Catholics to buck the current and to buck the world! Europe, center of Christendom, is collapsing, because European girls are all being taught to go to "university" and to "put off" having babies! Woman and family are in desperate crisis - do we want to follow the swine over the cliff?*

This gives no more than a taste of Williamson's opinions (and writing style). What is not clear is how far the bishops and theologians who have

condemned Williamson's views on the Holocaust are aware of this aspect of his theology; and whether they see his views on women as contradicting Conciliar and Church teaching. In the early 1960s, a good deal of what he says, if less offensively phrased, was still common parlance even in Britain and Europe. Women hardly figured on the radar during Vatican II (had it been held ten years later, things would almost certainly have been different), but its teachings left space for the development of Catholic teaching in line with the Gospel and the 'signs of the times'. This is evident even in the thought of Pope John Paul II, not precisely a radical on this question, who in his Letter of 1995, before the Beijing Conference, wrote, "[Women] make an indispensable contribution to the growth of a culture which unites reason and feeling.... to the establishment of economic and political structures ever more worthy of humanity'. He adds, 'There is an urgent need to achieve real equality in every area; ..... the recognition of everything that is part of the rights and duties of citizens in a democratic state.'

Till now, Williamson's views could be dismissed as the unbalanced outpourings of a maverick, who in no way represented the mind of post-conciliar Catholicism. Recent events call that into question. John Allen, of the *National Catholic Reporter*, writes, 'Benedict's move is the most recent step, say those in the know, toward a dialogue with the Lefebvrites, an attempt, in the words of one French bishop, to find a "path to walk together."' What a lovely notion, were it applied equally throughout the community -- including to those who have not condemned popes and completely dismissed the council but instead wish to explore its deeper meanings and implications, or to people who press those questions that are reasonable extensions of the council.' Excommunication for dissent is not the answer. It does not change people's views and is seen by many as completely outdated. Rather, the teachings of Vatican II need to be affirmed at the highest level, disowning Williamson's views not just on the Holocaust but on half the world's population, and making it clear that the gospel message of the full humanity of women is truly and ineradicably part of the *sensus fidelium*, and not an optional extra. Working out the full implications of that message, particularly for women in the Two-Thirds World who suffer most when it is disregarded, remains an urgent challenge for the Roman Catholic, and other, churches.

PAUL FITZPATRICK

## Zion: Historic Land of the Jews or Imaginary, Mythical Place?

Nancy Morris, Scotland's only female rabbi, from the Reform tradition, addressed the Newman Association in Glasgow, on 19th February 2009, on the topic of Jewish thinking about 'Zion'.

Central to her approach to this potentially contentious topic was her insistence on the variety of meanings associated with the concept of Zion, a variety which is present both in the earliest Biblical texts and in their later re-workings and re-interpretations. Zion is a mountain (the precise identification of which might be difficult to ascertain), it is the land of Israel (and again the boundaries of this land would require a lecture in itself), it is the city of Jerusalem, and it is the people 'Israel'. Sometimes it refers to a geographical region, sometimes it is a utopian concept. She emphasised the constant interplay in Jewish thinking between God, the land and the people. These three poles are integral to the notion of the covenant.

This variety within the Biblical tradition continued, not surprisingly, in later Jewish thought. The major influence on modern Zionism is, of course, the secular thinker Theodore Herzl who developed his ideas in response to the Dreyfus affair, and was strongly influenced by wider currents in contemporary post-Enlightenment thinking such as nationalism and utopianism.

Rabbi Morris paid particular attention to the Reform position. The Reform movement arose as a response to modernity. Of particular interest is the evolution in ideas of 'Zion' between the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885, the Columbus Platform of 1937, and the most recent statement of Reform Rabbis issued in 1999. All these dates are significant.

The Pittsburgh Platform demonstrated a confidence in scientific progress and recognised that the Bible reflected the attitudes of its time of composition. 'We consider ourselves no longer a

nation but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state'. In 1937, the rabbis recognised that 'each age has the obligation to adapt the teachings of the Torah to its basic needs in consonance with the genius of Judaism'. Jews 'seek to share loyally the full duties and responsibilities of citizenship' in all lands where Jews live. With regard to the rehabilitation of Palestine, 'we affirm the obligation of all Jewry to aid in its upbuilding as a Jewish homeland by endeavouring to make it not only a haven of refuge for the oppressed but also a centre of Jewish culture and spiritual life'. By 1999, the attitude to the State of Israel had changed. 'We are committed to the State of Israel and rejoice in its accomplishments. We affirm the unique qualities of living in the land of Israel and encourage immigration to Israel. We are committed to a vision of the State of Israel that promotes full civil, human and religious rights for all its inhabitants and that strives for a lasting peace between Israel and its neighbours'. These rabbis recognised a continuing interdependence between Israeli and Diaspora Jewish communities.

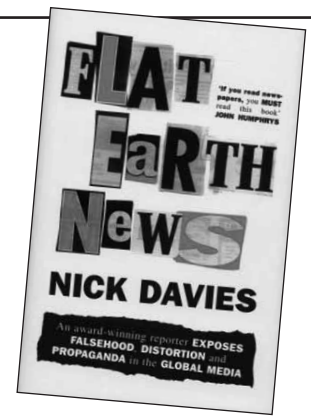
This was the first talk organised by the Newman with a Jewish speaker. Rabbi Morris's tone was eirenic throughout, acknowledging that her religious tradition - like others - had its lunatic fringe. It was not her objective to address the current political situation in Israel. There is much room here for further exegetical reflection on texts which are part of both the Hebrew and the Christian Bible - what is the extent of 'the land that you see' in Genesis 13.15? - or on the Christian spiritualisation of the theme of 'the land', and more generally on the way in which ancient texts should and should not be used in modern, highly charged political debates.

# Reviews

JAMES MCGARRY

## Flat Earth News

by Nick Davies. Vintage Books, London. £8.99. ISBN 9780099512684



Nick Davies is a widely experienced journalist who has recognized there is a great and widening gulf between the written and broadcast news and the truth. He sets out to explore this reality, to find out its likely causes. His illustrative examples are startling and convincing. There are no trivial stories here, only major events which he shows to have been misrepresented. His title, *Flat Earth News*, has clearly been chosen to express just how far these reports are from the truth, and it implies that the publishers of these reports must have been aware, at the time, that they were misleading or false. This book describes the results of his study of the reports of great public events, where he found "falsehood, distortion and propaganda running through the outlets of an industry which is supposed to be dedicated to the very opposite i.e. to telling the truth." This inelegant sentence raises doubts in the mind of the reader. Firstly, Davies treats the word *truth* as if it was the term for something simple, which it often is not. Secondly, he claims that newspapers and news broadcasting channels are devoted to factual reporting, but that is challengeable: they are in competition, they have to be popular, and it shows. The method of proving the charge made in this book is accumulation of examples, but they are so diverse that the guilty verdict is unclear, or at least not clear-cut.

The most important event discussed is the invasion of Iraq in 2003. There was a *will to war* in the government of the USA, supported by Britain and other allies, sanctioned under some conditions by the United Nations. Essentially, Iraq had to be developing nuclear weapons to use against its enemies. There was unchallengeable evidence that this had been the case, but it was uncertain if it

remained true. Some newspapers were given evidence that there were no weapons, but the reports were not published. Did newspapers yield to political pressure to suppress these reports? After the invasion, search failed to find them, and an already commonly unpopular war became a cause of widespread distrust of governments and politicians in every democracy in the West.

Much of this book is devoted to listing, and deploring, the many failings in published and broadcast journalism. Firstly inaccuracy, which is inevitable when speed is of the essence. Then exaggeration, to attract attention, and to sell newspapers. Then selection, and publicity to support a stance, made worse by suppression of contrary information.

All of these can be considered to be natural human failings, but they pale into insignificance when compared with the deliberate manipulation of the news agenda under the heading of public relations. This has existed as long as big business, but has become pernicious now that it is a primary concern of democratically elected governments.

Journalists co-operate fully in these practices, which are called "managing the news agenda". They are briefed in advance of any important announcement, told what the minister will say, told how the opposition political parties will respond, rewarded if they co-operate, but shunned if they do not. Davies tries to paint a picture of an earlier age in which a reporter had a tolerable work-load, time to get the facts right, never to quote a single source, received honest answers to his questions and was himself neutral. If this golden age ever existed it has no present relevance.. He

blames power-hungry proprietors for the deterioration of standards, and turns his attention on shockingly abusive journalism, giving examples of the invention of stories to publish or take revenge on people who have roused the anger of the powerful. His accounts make grim reading.

Quite separately, he describes the ever-increasing part played in reporting by *press agencies*, which collect and distribute news to radio, television and newspapers, and thereby become a dominant force in the modern world of journalism.

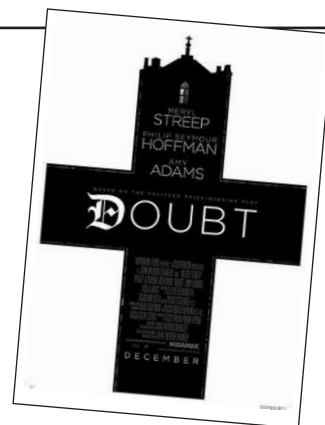
This book is written to expose falsehood, distortion, and propaganda in the global media. It hits its targets. However, what is missing is a remedy for these imperfections and evils. The single ray of hope mentioned is the *Center for Public Integrity* set up by the USA in 1989, insulated from commercialism. It investigates and publishes the critical results: it could be a model for any country. All the reader's doubts about this book are brought together in that sentence. There is no solution, and the initial proposition of this book that journalism is about the truth is shown to be incorrect, now and in the past.

If truth-telling was the objective then, logically, all newspapers would write the same things about matters of fact. Readers choose to buy one newspaper in preference to others, read different pages, enjoy different features, concur with the editorial stance of their choice, get news from radio and television, and now from the internet. It seems fair to say that if the writer took his analysis seriously he would seek a new career: if readers were revolted by what they read they would stop buying newspapers.

IAN D. WILLOCK

## Doubt

*A film starring Meryl Streep and Philip Seymour Hoffman, written and directed by John Patrick Shanley, adapted from his own play of the same name.*



*Doubt* is a film whose action takes place in the narrow confines of a New York Catholic parish and its school; but although there must be mile upon mile of similar urban sprawl we are given no glimpse of it - not even a moving automobile. Parishioners and children come and go. But the dominant actors are two warring figures seeking to vanquish each other. Yes, this film has its origins in a play and it scarcely allows us to see beyond the limits of the stage.

gradually forms the suspicion and then the conviction that Fr. Flynn has seduced the boy who has told him of his ambition to become a priest. The Father's attitude is that he has merely shown kindness to the boy. In a crescendo of rather implausible bawling the two threaten each other with ejection. Fr. Flynn tells his people at mass he has decided it is time to move on and shakes hands with every one. Sister Aloysius tells her young ally "I got him out". But soon she is shocked to

doubts in the English-speaking world, but not with the narrow concentration on two feuding figures. There is a moment of reconciliation when both admit they have sinned mortally and been forgiven in penance. This high-lights what is so often ignored, the clash between the secrecy attaching to what is said in the confessional and the demands of the state. We never hear what the boy made of all this.



*Meryl Streep, who plays Sr Aloysius*



*Philip Seymore Hoffman, who plays Fr Flynn*

The two leading protagonists are Sister Aloysius, the Principal of the nuns who form the teaching staff of the primary school, and Father Flynn, one of the three diocesan priests of the parish. They demonstrate two contrasting life-styles at meals, the nuns eating in gloomy silence, the priests sharing hilarious stories.

Sister Aloysius battles against the abuses of the contemporary world, a special bete-noire of hers being ball-point pens which are leading to the demise of 'penmanship' and thus forbidden to the children, though not to the priest. The underlying animosity between them bursts with full-blown conflict over the one black boy in the school. Probing some remarks by a young teacher the Principal

hear the bishop has promoted him to a larger parish where he will be in charge of both church and school. The film ends with Sister weeping in the snow-filled garden. She has told him she asked a sister in his previous parish if there had been any allegations there against him. In fact she had not done so, but she reckoned his departure confirmed her suspicions were true. Sometimes, she admits to the innocent young nun, it is necessary to move away from God to stop grave wrong-doing. Finally the implications of this excuse bring her to tears.

The relationship giving rise to the conflict explored in *Doubt* and the doubts it engenders are still around and raising

But his mother surprisingly welcomes the priest's affection for her son, because his father beats him savagely. Although this is in 1964 there is no mention of the Vatican Council then sitting. A few references to it could have conveyed that this was not a problem confined to a New York parish.



*John Patrick Shanley*

---

## YOUR LETTERS

# Dear Editors...



Dear Sirs,

As chance would have it, my copy of the February edition of *Open House* arrived in the post along with my copy of *The Tablet* for 7 February. The contrast between the two publications could not have been more striking. 'Crisis at the Vatican' was *The Tablet's* exceptional front-page headline, 'Special Reports on the Lefebvrist Bishops Row that shook the Church.' There followed reports on 'a gaffe too far' by David Willey, on 'old wounds reopened' in France, and on the damage done to Jewish-Catholic relations.

Inside the journal we learned of the concerns expressed by leading German-speaking churchmen such as Cardinal Kasper, Cardinal Lehmann and Cardinal Schonborn; we even learned that, most unusually, the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, had been openly critical of the Vatican. All sorts of issues and questions were spilling out of the Pope's decision to consider revoking the excommunication of the four Lefebvrist bishops, one of whom turned out to be a public holocaust denier. We also learned that the Pope had dismissed the *terna* of possible candidates for the Austrian diocese of Linz and appointed instead an archconservative parish priest who claimed that hurricane Katrina was the punishment inflicted by a vengeful God on an 'amoral city'.

As I say, the contrast with *Open House* could not have been starker. In this journal - not a word about the Pope's decisions or intended decisions; not a dickybird. Yet the Lefebvrist story had been well signaled in the secular press over the previous three weeks - could not the editors have taken steps to ensure that it would get some kind of coverage in the February edition, while it was still hot? Even the story about the appointment in the diocese of Linz had featured prominently in the secular press in the week before the publication of *OH* - yet not a word on this or on any questions that such an appointment might be thought to give rise to. I cannot believe that the 'old' *OH* would have allowed such momentous decisions by the Church's 'top brass' to have gone unmentioned or without so much as a comment. It was certainly less glossy, the paper it was printed on was drab and grey, but the content was focused on relevant issues affecting the Church, issues in which your Scottish readership is surely interested and on which it deserves to hear some kind of reflective comment. I wouldn't mind, but a series of three articles I wrote for *OH*, published some little time ago, had almost predicted this kind of behaviour from this Pope - so *OH* was in a good position to pronounce on what *The Tablet* editorial described as 'A Damaging Fiasco'. Ah well, I suppose if you court 'respectability' some price has to be paid. A friend of mine who played a prominent role in the 'old' *OH* recently said to me that *Open House* was no longer 'Open'. I sincerely hope he was wrong.

Joe Fitzpatrick. Ilkley.

Dear Editors

I was most honoured - as well as a little surprised - that my letter regarding the objectivity of religious truth should elicit detailed responses (*Open House*, 188) from both John Haldane and Paul Fitzpatrick. Since the December issue seemed an inappropriate one for contentious matters, and I was unaware that there would not be a separate January issue, I postponed my response, and will try to keep it as brief as possible.

As already stated, I am not a philosopher, and in any case to deal with such a detailed and contentious matter demands a different forum from the Letters column of a learned but popular religious magazine. I have to state - and leave it as that - that while I am most grateful for the viewpoints of both gentlemen I remain unconvinced. Perhaps that is inevitable, given our different denominational antecedents, though there are thinkers in the Protestant tradition far better equipped than I to engage with bonny philosophical fencers like Haldane and Fitzpatrick.

I might however briefly comment on two points in Professor Haldane's letter. My own careless language leads him to believe that I consider the true sense of "heretic" to be one who holds beliefs in conflict with the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church. I should of course have said "heresy" rather than "heretic". The Greek word *hairesis* basically means "choice" (derived as it is from the middle verb *haireomai* "I take for myself"), and while undoubtedly it came in time to denote wrong belief, and hence something to be opposed and indeed suppressed, I was referring to the original and neutral sense. As a fairly radical Protestant, I choose *what* I believe, since I believe the content of doctrine to be relatively unimportant compared to *in whom* I believe, namely in Jesus as *kurios*, with the ethical and behavioural implications of that confession. This would be "heresy", not only to traditional Catholics but also to many in the Protestant denominations, my own Church not excluded. It is the demonisation of heresy by churches of all traditions that I personally both lament and reject.

Secondly, Professor Haldane states as his opinion that "such doubts seem more common among scripture and religious studies scholars than among philosophers." I am sure he is correct, though that may say something about philosophy as well as other disciplines. As a biblical critic, I acknowledge the objective and indisputable fact that there exist bodies of religious writings, particularly, for Christians, the two collections which constitute the Bible. That these writings are (or contain) the Word of God can only in my thinking be a subjective truth.

With that, I am happy to leave any continuation of the debate to those better qualified than I, and to wish all who contribute to and read *Open House* a very happy New Year, coupled with the hope that 2009 will see Roman Catholics and other Christians coming closer together in understanding one another, if not reaching actual agreement on many matters. I shall continue to peruse the magazine with great pleasure and a genuine expectation of enlightenment.

Yours sincerely,

The Reverend J. Ainslie McIntyre, Glasgow.

---

Dear Sirs,

**Response to Tom Fitzpatrick's letter in February Issue :  
Post-Modernism**

Every form of writing requires a different way of labouring with and organization of the words one wants to put together in order to form well-phrased sentences. This holds also for the audience one (thinks he) is writing for. I am thus very grateful to Dr. Fitzpatrick as his comment on my earlier letter enables me to try and express myself in some more detail.

If I understood the letter of Dr. Fitzpatrick correctly, then there seems to be just one point of further elucidation. The issue (and a fundamental one) concerns a further 'definition' of Modernism. To facilitate the almost impossible task of 'defining an era', I think it necessary to specify the problem a bit more. Trying to define Modernism *an sich* would most probably lead us away from the specific problem at hand - what is the meaning of Modernism in the concept 'Post-Modernism'?

In trying to respond to this question I have to say that the supposition made by Dr. Fitzpatrick is partially wrong (even though I am intrigued by the possible effects of his daring interpretation). Post-Modernism, at least the philosophical form of this 'movement', was indeed a reaction against the 'essentialist' principles of the past philosophies but not a reaction against the philosophical tradition "starting with Plato and coming to an end with the Enlightenment". In fact, it was a reaction against the *meta-narratives* of liberation, progress and emancipation that had inspired 'thought' in the West ever since the Enlightenment.

It thus does not follow that another name for Post-Modernism is Existentialism. Jean-Francois Lyotard (the 'pope' of Post-Modernism) would definitely not have accepted that. Existentialism was in fact one of those *meta-narratives* that are now, in the Post-Modern era, over and done with. It had no longer any meaning as (and this might seem a bit contradictory) even Existentialism can be seen in Post-Modern terms as an 'essentialist' philosophical movement.

Kristof Vanhoutte, Rome.

---

Dear Sirs,

Your February editorial "Death on the Tube" shows an amazing lack of sensitivity to the plight of the people of Gaza. "The families who have to live there are hostage to the misfortune of trying to eke out a livelihood on a guerrilla faultline . . . an embarrassment . . . to Israel . . . also to Egypt and Syria to whom they have appealed in vain for help." On the contrary, those who have to live there are hostage to Israel's illegal occupation. Most of them are families of refugees who were driven there from their homes in 1948. You also say (how could you know?) that Hamas is not interested in running a country. How patronising can you get?

The UN allocated 22% of the country to Palestine in 1967, but illegal Israeli settlements, military installations and connecting roads have cut this down to 12% - so far. Numerous UN resolutions have been passed over the years

establishing the illegality of the occupation and the settlements on Palestinian land, but Israel simply ignores them, while the world turns away. Even the Arab countries turn a blind eye most of the time - not because the Palestinians are "an embarrassment", but because they know that anyone taking their side will share their pariah status.

Ever since 2002 Hamas has offered to recognise Israel within the borders laid down by the United Nations in 1967, but it appears that they must recognise this greatly extended Israel and its illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories before the West will engage in negotiations with them. Why? What other country can defy the UN with such impunity? Why do we side with the oppressors against the oppressed? UNRWA reports that between January and November last year - i.e. before the start of Israel's invasion - more than 500 Palestinians, including 73 children, died as a result of the conflict, compared with 11 Israelis.

The causes of the current situation in Gaza date back 60 years, to the foundation of Israel as a "Jewish State" from which the indigenous Muslims and Christians were to be "discreetly and circumspectly" evicted. (Theodor Herzl, founder of Zionism, had advanced this idea in 1895, and it is still Israeli policy - the evictions, that is, not the methods!) In 1948 the Israeli army drove out 75% of the Palestinians, destroyed their homes and built over them: 80% of the 1? million people crammed into Gaza are the families of those refugees. In 1967 Israel occupied Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In 2002 they started to build the 8-metre-high wall and fence inside these territories, with check-points manned by young Israeli soldiers, cutting the people off from each other, from their farmland, their schools and hospitals, etc., controlling every aspect of their lives.

Finally, 18 months ago they imposed a blockade on Gaza. Surrounded by walls and fences, subject to Israeli air strikes, army incursions and shelling from the sea, their water and power cut off at a whim, essential supplies of food, medicine, spare parts etc. denied entry - Gaza has become "the biggest open-air prison on earth". There are no refugees from the recent conflict because there was no escape. And still Israel is denying entry to reconstruction materials and other essentials. The firing of home-made rockets is a direct response to the intolerable conditions under which the Gazans are living: it is certainly not "unprovoked", as Thomas Gallagher claims in his letter on page 15 of the same issue. Although used as a pretext for a well-planned and brutal invasion, to say it was the cause is to ignore the facts.

Last summer Hamas agreed to a ceasefire on condition that Israel would open the borders, and for 4 months they ceased firing rockets. But Israel did not open the borders, and made it quite clear that it had no intention of doing so. On 4 November, US Election Day, the Israelis killed a number of Palestinians, and gradually the ceasefire broke down. When the best-equipped army on earth invaded Gaza, these home-made rockets were cited as the cause. The "war" ended just in time for President Obama's inauguration. Can anyone deny that the operation had been carefully planned to fall within these dates? I put "war" in quotes because that would imply a certain equality between the protagonists.

I am aware of many Jewish voices opposing Israel's actions, longing and working for a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians. May they be heard above the clamour.

Anne Rado, Arran.

## YOUR LETTERS

(continued)



Dear Sirs,

In Issue No. 189 Michael L. O'Neill's article refers to the Florida bishops' apparent inconsistency in stating that Catholics are not single-issue voters but nonetheless highlighting exclusively the issue of abortion. Perhaps they prefer to build from the bottom up, unlike Michael L. O'Neill who seems to prefer to build from the top down.

God's command given long before the Decalogue was to "increase and multiply".

The gift of life is surely the most fundamental of God's gifts and the deliberate extinguishing of life in the womb the deepest expression of nihilism.

Thank God for the clarity of moral guidance given by the Florida bishops.

James Scanlan, Glasgow.

# THE GONZAGA LECTURES 2009

**17th MARCH**

*How liberal is Labour?*

*Liberalism, New Conservatism and New Labour*

Baroness Williams of Crosby

(Shirley Williams is one of the best known politicians of her generation and is a highly respected commentator on political matters)

**24th MARCH**

*The Virtuous Astronomer:*

*How Studying the Stars is shaped by Faith, Hope, and Love*

Bro Guy Consolmagno SJ

(Guy Consolmagno is Curator of Meteorites at the Vatican Observatory, and is a world-renowned astronomer and writer)

All Lectures take place in St. Aloysius' College Hall,  
45 Hill Street, Glasgow, G3 6RJ,  
commencing at 7.30 p.m.

Entrance is free

## OPEN HOUSE

**Web Site: [www.open-house-scot.co.uk](http://www.open-house-scot.co.uk)**

**WE ARE VERY GRATEFUL FOR THE DONATIONS SENT IN THE PAST MONTHS.**

### CONTACTING OPEN HOUSE.

Please contact any of the following team with articles news, reviews and letters.

**IAN WILLOCK** [i.d.willock@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:i.d.willock@dundee.ac.uk)

**WILLY SLAVIN** [willyslavin@googlemail.com](mailto:willyslavin@googlemail.com) • **MICHAEL TURNBULL** [corbie41@hotmail.com](mailto:corbie41@hotmail.com)

**JAMES ARMSTRONG** (*Publisher*) [armstrj567@aol.com](mailto:armstrj567@aol.com)

Address: 26 Torridon Ave., Glasgow G41 5AU. (*phone Publisher on any issue re Open House*)

### SUBSCRIBE/RENEW FOR ONE YEAR

Send cheque for £20 made payable to Open House to Alison Whitton, Administrative Secretary,  
Clematis Cottage, William Street, Carnoustie, DD7 6DG [o-house@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:o-house@hotmail.co.uk)

One monthly edition of Open house costs just over £900 to produce and post.

Please also send donations by cheque payable to Open House to Alison Whitton at the aforesaid address.

### EDITORIAL BOARD

Jim McManus; Rev. Ian Fraser; Michael O'Donnell; Elizabeth Kearney; Maeve McGlynn;  
Rev. Leith Fisher; Jennifer Stark; John Cooney.