

HAAS

Heythrop Association of Alumni and Staff

Edition Nine

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From our President

WORKING FOR A UNIVERSITY

and being the President of the Heythrop Association of Alumni and Staff is a life combination that continually reminds me of the yearly student cycle.

Recently a new cohort of students arrived at Heythrop College- not without trepidation I'm sure - but hopefully they will quickly settle in to University life and take advantage of the opportunities they have been granted. I hope the privilege of studying at Heythrop still remains as a feeling inside all of us. I suspect I am not the only person who, walking along the High Street in Kensington with friends, colleagues or acquaintances, points out Heythrop College with a sense of pride, and, as I begin to explain what Heythrop *is*, how it *works*, and the experiences I *had* as a student there, a sense of passion overcomes me - although my time as a student has *been*, it *is* always with me.

Although we are an association of past students and past staff, current and future students are our next generation. From their perspective, it will not be long until they join us, and so with this in mind, we are conceptually 'family'. It was particularly pleasing, therefore, that when Heythrop organised their May 2011 Careers Dinner for current students that we could provide such a wide range of expertise to attend the event as table speakers- spanning journalism, finance, ordained ministry, advertising, education...and many more industries. These alumni volunteers kindly offered their time, and in return met fresh faced second and third year students, many of

whom have very well planned career journeys. Often the students wanted to know answers to fundamental questions such as 'what salary will I start on?' , 'Will I need to do additional training?' or 'how many hours a week will I be expected to work'? But I also heard people question how philosophy and theology have helped find employment. My own feeling is that I didn't study Philosophy as a means to an end, but it happened to be a very transferrable degree which I have benefited from!

How are you using your Philosophy and Theology skills in your life, and in the work place?

Keep an eye out for HAAS on LinkedIn and Facebook, as we will shortly be creating pages to better keep in touch.

Chris Kendrick

BA Philosophy 2005 - HAAS President

"Come to the edge."

"We can't. We're afraid."

"Come to the edge."

"We can't. We will fall!"

"Come to the edge."

And they came.

And he pushed them.

And they flew.

Guillaume Apollinaire; 1880-1918



A.G.M.

By the time you receive this magazine the HAAS Annual General Meeting will have been held, and a new committee (probably resembling the former committee to a large extent!) will be in place. Please watch out for further information about forthcoming events - details of which can be found on page three.

Library Matters

Chris Pedley SJ, Heythrop College's Librarian, is delighted to announce that borrowing from the College Library will now be available for Alumni. He writes:

"We are launching a Library borrowing scheme for Heythrop Alumni. At present all Alumni can use the Library for reference and this will continue.

However, for a payment of £50 per annum, Alumni will be able to borrow up to five normal loan books for ten weeks. Short Loan, one day and one week loan books are not included because of the need to ensure these books are available for current students. This scheme is in line with the kind of provision made by other Colleges in the University.

Further details and an application form are on the Library and Learning Resources section of the College web site: <http://www.heythrop.ac.uk/about-us/library-and-learning-resources/access-to-the-library.html>

The Sacred in the Secular

Anna Wheeler considers the role of Puppetry as Deity in 'War Horse' and other art forms

The idea for this piece of writing came from watching the extraordinary stage production of *War Horse* at the New London Theatre last year (currently being made into a film by Stephen Spielberg starring Benedict Cumberbatch), followed by a lecture at Central School of Speech and Drama with the South African Handspring Puppet Company (HPC) - the people behind *War Horse* when it originally played at the National Theatre.

Adrian Kohler and Basil Jones, founders of the HPC, believe puppetry has something particular to offer to a contemporary audience. Most people acknowledge that the moment Joey the horse walks on stage in *War Horse* is a moment of awe, enchantment and often making them cry. Kohler and Jones discussed the philosophy of this - why does an inanimate object make us emotional? How is it that puppetry is so perceptive? Because a puppet is a lifeless object longing to live. An actor strives to die on stage (since the state we are in when on stage is one of living) but a puppet strives to live on stage. It is an inanimate figure trying to live - and actually although we are not dead, we too do this - we are living on and off stage, but we often lose our presence and immediacy. 'Absence of being in the moment' in life could be described as not exactly living.

A puppet's struggles are essentially the same as ours - we live but we need to be authentic to be truly ourselves. The puppet is in fact a verb, not a noun. Topthorn (Joey's companion in battle for so long) dies - is this a puppet or a dead horse? That puppet has already lived and we now believe this, and have been living its world with it, so it has transformed itself and our imaginations. The audience works to make this meaning - the audience is the author. The most interesting aspect of HPC's philosophy is 'Puppet as Deity'. There is a religious aspect of puppetry. Although there is a lack of belief in God around these days, there is a religious impulse which resides in puppetry. Kohler and Jones comment that theatre does in this in general anyway, but puppetry does

this in disguise. The puppeteer is a priest to the horse in the way that the puppet is used to illustrate the situation (as a priest uses bread and wine to tell a continual story). It strikes me that puppetry is a search for an unknown language of emotions and the mystery of human nature (if you see *War Horse* you will understand) which faith also presents to us. It is no accident that Handspring Puppet Company came out of a culture where the need for a shared language was sought, and it was well received in South Africa where *human* language was not always uniting black and white.

Why is it that it was a boom year for theatre last year? People don't acknowledge it, but most of us seek something which we can't name. What we can't name can, by default, feel unreal - so therefore, should we bother to seek it? Well, yes. It is my firm belief that there is more truth in the *perceived* unreality of make-believe than there is in the hard reality of life. Whether we like it or not we all have imagination and this is not an accident - this is the thing which makes us human. The artist Chagall says: 'All our interior world is reality - and that perhaps more so than our apparent world. To call everything that appears illogical, 'fantasy', fairytale, or chimera - would be practically to admit not understanding nature.' Years later, Salman Rushdie says the same: 'If you grow up in India, you grow up surrounded by magic being a normal aspect of literature. You realise that kind of writing is just as capable of getting to serious, truthful human realities as realistic writing is' (The Metro, 13.10.2010). You find that most actors have something to say about the meaning of their job (Paul Schofield did not but he was a rare actor for this and it didn't dilute the power of his acting so no matter!). Kevin Spacey's dedication to the Old Vic (rightfully gaining him a CBE) is because he believes culture is 'the magic of life' - a generator of economic as well as spiritual wellbeing (The Evening Standard, 4.11.2010). The artist Paula Rego says that she tries not to 'do art' but rather 'tell a story'. Like any good acting, the intention behind it

is what makes it truthful: one acts the situation, not the emotion. And like the actors, it seems the audience feed off the stories - why has 'The King's Speech' been such a hit (other than Firth and Rush being terrific)? Because it is a story of the obstacles which we all have within ourselves which we think will stop us achieving and being the human we want to be. The arts have this capability of being completely universal in meaning. 'It's important for society to be able to reflect itself through storytelling.' (Benedict Cumberbatch, The Guardian, 7.11.2010).

What is tangible is not always what *is* and it is not always the solution to our living well. There were a series of talks last year at St Paul's Cathedral on Death, Happiness, Love and Suffering. In all four, similar themes came out: we are fixed on having, not being. The USA and the UK spend more on advertising than any other country in the world; we also have the most cases of mental illness. Revd. Mark Oakley, on one of the occasions, talked about the 'perversion of Descartes' which is 'I'm *seen*, therefore I am' (rather than, 'I *think*, therefore I am') - he established something very disturbing: 'we spend money we don't have on things we don't need to impress people we don't like.' Who benefits? Nobody. We are in a world of instant information - everything is graspable - which means nothing is graspable because once we have something we realise we don't need it and it doesn't make us happy. There was a case in the press recently of the man who had 541 friends on facebook but not one of them realised he was dead. As George Eliot said, the texture of wisdom is different to that of information, yet it is the former we lack.

When we see or feel realness, we feel a jolt: we are out of the zone of information and in the zone of deeper wisdom where something we can't pin down has got to us. It's not for nothing that Frieze Magazine in Contemporary Art and Culture brought out a complete

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issue last November entirely devoted to Religion and Spirituality (Issue 135). Its opening article, 'Believe It or Not' by Dan Fox brings together a lot of the above: 'Art is a faith-based system. Religious conviction is taken to be a sign of intellectual weakness, and yet meaning in art is itself often a question of belief. Appeals to the immaterial are buried deep within the everyday language of art too: words such as 'spiritual', 'transcendent', 'meditative', and 'sublime' frequently occur in exhibition reviews, press releases and gallery guides. Why does the search for some kind of spiritual fulfilment in secular art persist? Is the idea that art has nothing to do with faith or religion just a lie we tell ourselves to hide the fact we crave something to believe in?' (pg.15).

But nor do I believe that we create something because we 'crave' for it. I think the 'something' is already there - it is the thing we can't pin down so tend to think it doesn't exist since it's not tangible. The arts are a way of manifesting what doesn't easily come to the surface naturally. I mentioned 'The King's Speech' - *explicitly* it's about a public man who stammers - but *implicitly* it's about an obstacle that makes him feel inadequate. I can think

of many paintings and sculptures that display explicitly a scene, but actually are *about* a bigger universal theme. I think of Vaughan Williams' music and it so vividly describes the English countryside as it was (and still is if we look after it) but it reaches further also to evoke a time of great loss of life and heritage (i.e. two world wars) which will never be tangible again. The people and that way of life are gone.

Call art, music, dance and drama: signposts; but I think they are more as they *contain* meaning as well as pointing beyond. Likewise I think the way we illustrate faith is very similar. Unfortunately belief about God is more complex (and I actually find talking about faith much harder as everyone gets so offended these days) but if you think of the bible stories, yes they are about something, but always point beyond to a larger theme. Every good sermon does this. 'We still rely on artists, curators and critics to act as interpreters of contingent meaning, aesthetic creeds or art world 'ethics', just as rabbis, imams and priests do. People go to galleries on Sundays instead of churches. Appeals to the immaterial are buried deep within the everyday language of art too: words such as 'spiritual', 'transcendent', 'meditative', and 'sublime' frequently

occur in exhibition reviews, press releases and gallery guides' (Dan Fox, Frieze Magazine, pg. 15).

In conclusion, I come back to War Horse and puppetry. Joey and Tophorn are many things: lifeless objects with no emotion until moved by a human, living beings which move humans to tears and not only taking us back to a catastrophic time in human history but reminding us of our vulnerability and our own capacity for evil. The puppets move, and work with our imaginations to make us feel compassion for all the horses that received horrific injuries and died. So, quite clearly our imagination in this instance is not to make something magical into a truth - it is the reverse - portraying something truthful in a magical setting (the stage). We need these arenas that the arts provide therefore - to do precisely this: present something which is truthful, in a truthful way (i.e. story) through the medium of imagination to show us that just because something isn't immediately graspable, doesn't mean it is not there: it is probably more likely that it is for that very reason.

Anna Wheeler
BA Philosophy 2003

Forthcoming Events

HAAS Study Evening

Thursday 23 February 2012
6.30pm (with refreshments from 6pm)

A Study Evening to be given by Dr Stephen Law, of Heythrop's Philosophy Department, looking at a current philosophical issue, and with a Question and Answer session at the end of the Evening.

More details - and the Evening title - will be circulated after Christmas, but put this date in your diary now.

Wednesday 16 November
Public Lecture - 6pm
Professor Roger Scruton:
Real Presences
Email f.ellis@heythrop.ac.uk to register

Centre for Eastern Christianity Heythrop College University of London

Seminar and Conference Programme Autumn 2011

Wednesday 2 November - Seminar
(with Centre for Christianity and Interreligious Dialogue) 4pm-6pm
Charles Miller, Rector of Abingdon, Oxfordshire:
Return and Renewal:
Themes in 20th-century Orthodox Theology.

Wednesday 16 November - Seminar
(with Centre for Christianity and Interreligious Dialogue) 4pm-6pm
Martin Ganeri OP, Director, Centre for

Christianity and Interreligious Dialogue, Heythrop College, University of London:

Against or For the Gentiles? Thomist approaches to theological engagement with non-Christian religions and its relevance for contemporary Christian encounter with Asian religions.

Wednesday 30 November - Special guest lecture and seminar 4pm-6pm
Sebastian Brock, Reader Emeritus in Syriac Studies, Oriental Institute, University of Oxford:
The Syrian Orthodox Church and its Diaspora: modern history and contemporary challenges.

There is no charge for attendance and registration is not required

For further information about any HAAS events, or to update your contact details, please contact Simon Gillespie, Vice-President, on simon@nottinghamcatholic.com - please note this new email address

What I have learned as a Theologian

Dr John McDade SJ, retiring Principal of Heythrop College, gave his Valedictory Lecture on Friday 1st July 2011 in front of a crowded Faulkner Hall. Here, with thanks for his generosity, we reproduce the text John presented on that night

To start, I offer you these photographs of a theologian climbing on the Forcan Ridge on a mountain called the Saddle in the Western Highlands, if only to make the point that if you want to do theology you should make sure you have careful footwork. Don't move your foot unless you know exactly where it is going; if you want to move, make you have three points of contact with the rock. It's not a good idea to be a theologian in space.



I thank you for your kindness in coming to this lecture and I share your wish to have a glass of wine before too long. I'm grateful to Simon Gillespie and the Heythrop Association of Alumni and Staff for the opportunity they have given me to behave badly and to Annabel Clarkson who has organised this event. She's done so much over the years for me and the College that it's impossible to thank her enough. It's good to see my successor Michael Holman here, and Jim Sweeney who will look after the shop until Michael takes over in January. I'm delighted that Caron is here this evening - she was my first PA when I became Principal in 1999 - and it is good to welcome too her husband Francis who served on the Governing Body of the College.

Never give a podium to a theologian and expect things to go well. You may well judge that, given the title, this will be a short lecture. And with good reason: we perhaps learn not very much; we forget much more and the little that remains we call 'wisdom'. What we learn is usually a set of simple things that can be summarised very easily and probably will take you back to the simple teachings that gave you warmth and direction when we were young. But if you are an adult, that will seem far away. But as Margaret Miles points out, 'We never feel as grown-up as we expected to feel when we were children.' (M.R.Miles, *Reading for Life: Beauty, Pluralism and Responsibility* (Continuum, 1997), 146). Does our sense of self really change? Do you really feel very different from when you were young? And what has this to do with theology?

My good friend Eamon Duffy told me that he took Seamus Heaney to visit the grave of John Clare. On Clare's tomb are the words, 'poets are born not made'. When Heaney signed the Visitors' Book in the Church, he wrote his name, and then added the words, 'born and made'. What of theologians? Are they born or made or both? I think I have always been a natural theologian. As a very small



child I was a Platonist before I knew about Plato.

I remember, as a small boy, telling my parents that before I was born I had been in heaven and had chosen them, John and Agnes McDade, to be my parents. My father laughed heartily at this. I never forgave him. He was clearly an Aristotelian, having no truck with pre-existent souls. But one of my first bits of advice to you is 'If you want to be happy, choose your parents well: it pays off both when you're a child and all the way through your life.' Put this together with the advice that Peter Gallagher commends to the parishioners of Wimbledon: 'You're never too old to have a happy childhood'.

I have no idea where my childish fantasy came from: it may be a common idea

among devout children to think that they were somewhere *before* they come to be here, to project a previous life that had substance and heavenly reality because children cannot really imagine the world without their being part of it. How could there be reality without me in it? I suppose this is the driver for my childish idea. I've always loved the natural self-absorption of children, it's a quality which is insupportable only when it lasts into adulthood when it can become the besetting sin particularly of clerics. As we get older, we are to find goodness and God, not ourselves worthy of unlimited attention. For one thing, self-absorption is a serious error of judgment: no one is that interesting.

It may be the case, as I imagined as a small boy, that my first entry into heaven was before I was born, but I no longer hold that idea. But heaven, I think, is not simply future: perhaps I have been in heaven because whenever God has acted in my soul, that has been heaven; when in the Mass I have felt supported by saints around me, that has been heaven; when I have seen grace work in others, that too has been heaven; where love has been fruitful in the lives of others, when charity has flowed through me, that has been heaven and will be heaven because that is the life of God enfolding us. And it starts even now. The difficulty is not that we can't see what it will be like after death; it's that we now only haltingly know what is going on now.

In retrospect, there was an inevitability that when later I came to do a doctorate in theology at the University of Edinburgh, I did it on pre-existence language in Christology because Christ had been in heaven too when I was there and we had discussed my parentage, at some length, I remember. When I had my viva, my external examiner was Rowan Williams, as brilliant then as he is now. I do think he is a theological genius and an outstanding thinker and writer. When I was speaking one day to Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Rowan's name came up, and I said that when he was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury, the newspapers said he had a brain as big as Basingstoke. Quick as a flash, Cormac said, 'And Basingstoke is a very difficult place to find your way round'. I've found thinking very hard, a discipline I have to work at. The French author Joseph Joubert wrote in 1805: 'Once we have tasted the juice of words, the mind can no longer pass them by. We drink thought from them.' Indeed so: perhaps

like a good Bordeaux, the secret is to swill the words around in our minds before we drink thoughts from them. I muse more and more on the significance that the word 'God' has for human beings, and find myself drawn towards what I hope is a proper and reverential agnosticism about the mystery of goodness that lies beyond the horizon of our thoughts. That theologians should claim to know so much about God astonishes me as much as does the speed with which some of our modern atheists reject the word, as though it has conceptual boundaries clear enough to merit instant dismissal. I've always liked Herbert McCabe's remark that Aquinas thought that theologians don't know what they're talking about. Because they're talking about God. Theology, I tell my students, is about nothing: = no thing. Nicholas Lash writes sharply that 'what is wrong with so much that passes for theology, ancient and modern, is its fundamental irreverence; its habit of using the term *God* as if it were a pawn, with a clearly defined conceptual content, in a game of intellectual chess' (*His Presence in the World*, 16). A lesson that also needs to be learned by the atheists who crowd the airwaves these days and by over-confident theologians.

People used to say that God let Karl Barth live so long so that God could find out more about himself. 'What do we know then so precisely about God?' an exasperated Karl Rahner said in an interview, referring to the confidence with which those German Trinitarian myth-makers, Moltmann and von

Balthasar, treat the inner life of God; they devise complex dialectics of separation among the divine Persons, involving rupture, division, pain, pathos, dereliction; they transform the life of God into a Gnostic drama in which divine hypostases come to be separated from one another, before being reunited, and the oneness of the Godhead restored, in a transcendent Hegelian *aufhebung*. I spent many years at Heythrop teaching this kind of material, but I did not realise then how these post-Hegelian ideas about the 'suffering God' are reworkings of ancient mythical patterns of God wrestling with monsters in the waters of chaos, engaged in a divine *agonia*, a wrestling with nothingness in order to conquer death. The effect is to make God simply the biggest suffering thing around, and what good is that to us if God is locked into his own struggles and stands in need of completion?

Myth has its place in religion, of course, but it is not good to allow our doctrine of God to be determined by an ontology based upon mythical imaginings, nor to use the doctrine of God in order to teach a lesson about how human beings should live together. Sermons are regularly given on Trinity Sunday and at other times which present the triune life of God as a model of the perfect human community: the message is of three 'persons' living in harmony, establishing a transcendent unity as a product of their regard for one another, and this is the way we should be. Suddenly the model of the Holy Family as the model of human love is transposed to the inner life of God, and the consequence is, I'm



afraid, tritheism. If you want to promote socialism as a goal for human society, you should not use the doctrine of God to do so because to construct a version of God in order to achieve certain human ends is idolatry. I have to tell you that I would never describe the Trinity as a 'community' because if I do so I think I have deviated from the foundational Jewish monotheism that holds that God is beyond composition, change and multiplicity. Internally, as part of my 'composition of place' as Ignatian spirituality labels it, or as the context of my theological *mise-en-scène*, I try to do Christian theology in the presence of Jews from whom, according to Christ, salvation comes to the world (Jn 4.22; but see 4.42). There are alternative Trinitarian theologies that avoid the tritheistic chasm and that respect more faithfully the Jewish roots of Christianity, but that is a lecture for another evening.

Much better to be a theologian on a bike and this is where I do my theological thinking which may explain my earlier confession that I find thinking difficult. My other bike is a racing bike; all I will tell you is that it is Italian, fast, and Ferrari-red. It is too cool to be useful for theology, too exhilarating, too edgy to be a 'thinking place'. But it is fun and it has its place in my life.

Every academic, even the mountain biking and climbing ones, must feel accused by the comments that George Eliot makes in her novel, *Middlemarch*, about Casaubon, the scholar who devotes his life to finding the key to all mythologies. A very arid character indeed, and when he finally dies halfway through the novel to everyone's great relief, the narrator says this about him:

For my part I am very sorry for him [Casaubon]. It is an uneasy lot at best, to be what we call highly taught and yet not to enjoy: to be present at this great spectacle of life and never to be liberated from a small hungry shivering self -- never to be fully possessed by the glory we behold, never to have our consciousness rapturously transformed into the vividness of a thought, the ardour of a passion, the energy of an action, but always to be scholarly and uninspired, ambitious and timid, scrupulous and dim-sighted.

– George Eliot (*Middlemarch*) chapter 29

Indeed so. Too often theology has been conducted by 'highly taught' Casaubons in order to breed the next generation of

Casaubons who don't enjoy their lives any more than their teachers. (There is a study to be done on self-replication among theologians.) But good theology has a bearing upon what is life-giving, religiously and humanly, and one of the things I have come to see is that you cannot separate what is religiously meaningful from what is humanly meaningful. A religion and a theology that keeps us at the level of 'a small hungry shivering self' will eventually be cast off by people in favour of an identity outside the Church. Human meaning is religious meaning, and religious meaning has to be very sure that it is at the same time human meaning. For Karl Rahner, there is only one mystery: that of the self-giving God, and this is at the same time, the mystery of the God-receiving human person. 'Man,' he says, 'is the event of God's self-communication.'

Theology is about how to think in ways that enable us to live the mystery of God. That's what I think it is and what it should be: how to think in ways that enable us to live the mystery of God. I've come to see, and this would be my next message to you, that 'the truth of God cannot be thought - it can only be lived.' Which is why it is the person and life of Jesus Christ that conveys the truth about God. Jesus does not conceptualise God - he would have made a useless modern German theologian - but he lives out a life so completely dedicated to God and those who need God that he actualises God with us and for us. He is the performative utterance by which the divine irrupts savingly within our time. When Karl Rahner came to Heythrop in 1984, he listened to John MacQuarrie

give a lecture about his wonderful, complex theology, and all during the lecture Rahner said his rosary and then through his interpreter, George Vass, asked the most devastating questions. MacQuarrie was given a painful tutorial by Rahner and enjoyed every minute of it. When a sceptical person once said to Karl Rahner, 'I've never had an experience of God,' Rahner simply replied, 'I don't believe you; I just don't accept that. You have had perhaps no experience of God under this precise code-word God but you have had or have now an experience of God - and I am convinced that this is true of every person.'

Every person? Indeed so, if you believe that God has an immediate presence in relation to his creatures. So can you have an experience of God without knowing it to be such, without using the code word 'God'? Yes, it's called being a human being, and it's what you've been doing it all your life. A little story to make Rahner clear, and if I say that this story could be called 'Rahner for Dummies', I hope you won't be offended. It is meant to help the person next to you, not you:

There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way who nods at them and says, 'Morning, boys, how's the water?' And the two young fish swim on for a bit and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and says, 'What the hell is water?'

The water is God, the liquid atmosphere of goodness and gift in which we live and



breathe. And becoming an old fish, a mature theologian, means getting to know the water *as* water, and God as God in whom we are. I like the story about the little girl who hears music for the first time and cries out 'It's God speaking to us'. (Quoted by Joseph Joubert) For some months, I have taken delight in the words of Vincent van Gogh who said, 'The best way to know God is to love many things'. Why don't commentators bring out the deeply religious nature of his artistic work? Is it possible that van Gogh in his paintings was learning to love God?

That God is not seen in the painting is important because God is not an object within the world, not a 'fact' alongside other facts. Many of our new atheists seem to be rejecting a view of God as a thing in the world alongside other things, one cause among other 'secondary causes', but the theological principle is surely the simple one that 'God does not wish to be everything'. 'To say that God created the world for his glory is to say that he created it not for his sake but for ours.' (B.Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 116). That is why in the world there is people as different as Annabel Clarkson and Lady Gaga, one gifted with generosity of heart and the other, as they say now, 'differently gifted'; and there is the Rhone and the stars and the boats and the man and woman in the foreground of the painting with their back to the night time theophany, looking at us, perhaps on their way back home to bed, seemingly unaware of the divine glory that the painter sees, like the two young fish swimming along unaware that they are in water.

By moving towards what is true and good and valuable, through the powers or virtues that take shape in personhood, you 'latch on to' God, and when you latch on to God, you're in the only place where you can *be*. If God is reality, what Aquinas calls *ipsum esse*, being itself, simply 'the real', then being in God is the only place where we can *be*. Outside that reality we simply stop. I no longer believe in hell: if someone does not 'latch on to' goodness, truth, generous and sacrificial loving, a defining 'care for the world and its creatures, and refuses these things in an unimaginably definitive way, then in their death they simply stop. They don't 'go' anywhere because there is no 'self' that can go or be at all. If you empty the self of goodness, you empty the self of the capacity to be. Goodness is existence; if you step completely outside goodness,

you cannot be. The other side of this is that in every aspect of your personhood, your ordinary, God is loving you into wholeness and when that process is complete, it is what theologians call 'resurrection'.

If you are wondering what Purgatory is all about, I refer you to my article, 'Judgment and Purgatory' on my webpage. But I should tell you about Therese of Lisieux, the Little Flower, on her death bed. I have a particular devotion to the Little Flower because I was healed of glandular trouble by Canon Taylor at Carfin. Every time I needed something done in the College and I didn't know how to do it, I lit a candle at the Carmelite church in Kensington Church Street. When the Quality Assurance Agency inspectors came to Heythrop for the first time, they didn't realise that the room they were in had various pictures of the Little Flower concealed in cupboards, under carpets, stuck under tables in the room they were using. The prayers were always answered. Remember that I had been in heaven before I was born and things were negotiated and sorted out there a long time ago. That this College has recently done so well is not accidental.

You will probably be surprised by the words I used a few moments ago: I spoke about 'latching on to' God. What is my authority for this phrase? Well no less a person than Pope Benedict. I want to look at a passage from a speech he gave in the Czech Republic, and I find it extremely interesting, with consequences for what the Church might do, what this College is about and perhaps what theology ought to be about.

Here I think naturally of the words which Jesus quoted from the Prophet Isaiah, namely that *the Temple must be a house of prayer for all the nations. Jesus was thinking of the so-called 'Court of the Gentiles' which he cleared of extraneous affairs so that it could be a free space for the Gentiles who wished to pray there to the one God, even if they could not take part in the mystery for whose service the inner part of the Temple was reserved.*

(Comment: this acknowledges that there can be a differentiated closeness to God, with some having access to the heart of the Godhead in proximity and communion with God, but others having a different form of

access proper to them. Notice that Benedict says that Jesus wanted there to create a free space for Gentiles to contact God in ways not identical with Israel's worship, but related to it.)

A place of prayer for all the peoples: by this he was thinking of people who know God, so to speak, only from afar; who are dissatisfied with their own gods, rites and myths; who desire the Pure and the Great, even if God remains for them the 'unknown God' (cf. Acts 17: 23). They had to pray to the unknown God, yet in this way they were somehow in touch with the true God, albeit amid all kinds of obscurity.

(Comment: notice how Benedict speaks respectfully of those who know God from afar, who are detached from the myths and assumptions of their own culture but experience a movement within them towards Goodness and unrestricted love. It is a movement towards God, although God is and remains unknown. There can be a significant movement towards the unknown God that takes a non-religious form. Why should we assume that only religious forms are how people connect to God and 'latch on to him'? Benedict's assumption is that there are important movements towards God from within agnosticism and this is caused and supported by the God who draws all men and women to himself in ways that they do not express in formally religious ways.)

I think that today too the Church should open a sort of 'Court of the Gentiles' in which people might in some way latch on to God, without knowing him and before gaining access to his mystery at whose service the inner life of the Church stands. Today, in addition to interreligious dialogue, there should be a dialogue with those to whom religion is something foreign, to whom God is unknown and who nevertheless do not want to be left merely Godless, but rather to draw near to him, albeit as the Unknown."

I find this very interesting. What Benedict proposes is the creation of a place of serious conversation in which the Church talks and listens with unbelievers, Gentiles, those who are stand in the covenant that God made with all human beings and all living things through Noah. No one is outside the covenant: that is what is important

in Benedict's statement, and agnostics and unbelievers have a connection with Christian faith. They are simply in a courtyard within walking distance from where we stand. You don't need me to remind you, do you, that Thomas Aquinas held that 'we are joined to God as to one who is, as it were, unknown' (*quasi ignotum*). And 'ignotum' is like the Latin equivalent of 'agnostic'.

There are circles of closeness and ignorance around the sacred presence which partly overlap with one another, and it is a deep mistake to treat nonbelievers as outside God's action - you do believe, don't you, in a doctrine of creation in which God is directly active in the lives of all? - and a mistake to think that they stand in a completely different place from us. There is a continuity among all human beings in relation to God. (The story about the Presbyterian church where there is a visiting preacher.) Well if Benedict told jokes as part of his theology, he would tell this one but I'm afraid he is German. 'Where would we be without a sense of humour?' Willie Rushton used to ask. 'Germany', he would say. Well a doctrine of creation means that everyone is in the parish: part of our trouble theologically is that we don't take this doctrine seriously and invest too much energy on issues of salvation. I'd like to see a form of Christianity that promoted the primacy of a doctrine of creation, rather than the salvation-centred style of religion and theology that's been dominant since the Reformation. I suspect that creation is the doctrine that we need in order to commend the Gospel in this culture.

I come more and more to think that the mode in which Christians communicate with others best is through conversation, dialogue, witness and a sense of shared inquiry among adults. If there is one thing I want for the Church it is to foster a culture of study and shared inquiry as a condition of conducting our mission. The strength of Catholic tradition is the way in which religious truth is articulated philosophically. Augustine was quite clear that there wasn't one thing called 'religion' and another thing called 'philosophy': for him religion was philosophy. The Church has become preoccupied with a strangely monological form of teaching, but we do not have to be in the mode of instruction all the time because then you never hear the person you're speaking with and never learn the things you need to learn from those who are different. And if we are not mature

in our self-criticism and self-evaluation, in reshaping our identity - the signs surely of responsible living - why should anyone take us seriously?

'Religions get lost, as people do,' Franz Kafka remarked. And I think that each religion has its own way of getting lost. Jews do it in their way. I don't think that Muslims have begun to ask that question seriously. It's important for Christians to ask 'What is the way in which Christianity might get lost?' I suspect we haven't really begun to explore that question. But we need to, I think, and Benedict's words seem to me to have radical consequences for how we construe the Church and its mission. Cardinal Martini, the Jesuit Cardinal in Milan some years ago, organised discussions in the Cathedral with unbelievers - a famous one with Umberto Eco was on the theme of 'hope' at the heart of human life. Rowan Williams a few years ago wrote a book introducing Christianity, and the whole opening section was on the theme of 'trust'. You cannot presume any more that the word 'God' means anything at all to people. It evokes probably no response, and sometimes if there is a response, it is based on a mistaken idea of God. Speak to people in humanly significant ways; genuinely respect them because everyone is in the family, in the parish; don't have anything to do with social power - theocracies, even modest ones, at the level of diocese and parish, are bad for everyone and a counter-witness to the Gospel; begin to understand why people don't trust us, think we need to be de-contaminated and have real anxieties about whether human questions can be properly addressed religiously.

I want to suggest to you that the Church in the years ahead will be taken through an experience analogous to the experience of the Jewish community through nearly 2,000 years of Christian Europe: marginal to the main currents of cultural development; called to bear witness without power; needing to address the question of how to define and maintain an identity which will allow a distinct voice to be heard; in many ways an underground culture whose central energies, although marginalised, still come to enrich everyone. What Jews have been in the Europe of the past, we Christians will be in the future. What Jews and Christians might do together is keep the space for God open in a society which, because of the demands of capitalist pressures, makes

people subject to manipulation, lies and degradation of the soul.

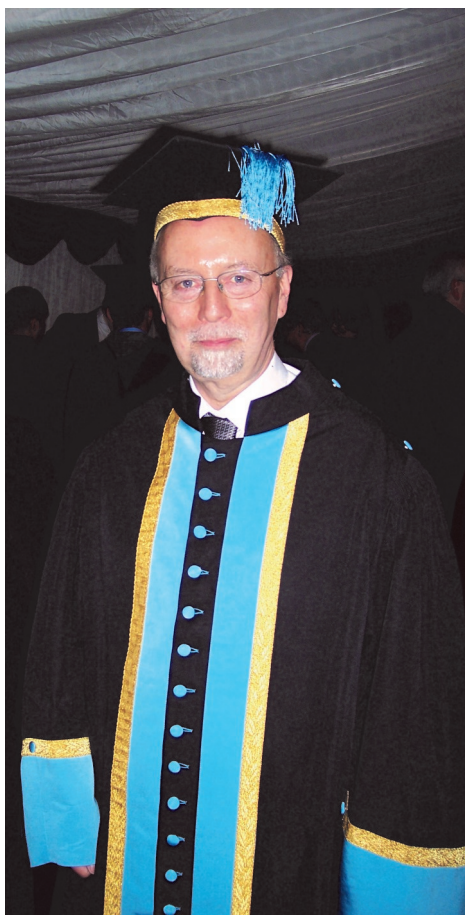
We have to keep the way open to nothing less than the good, to nothing less than ultimate meaning, to nothing less than the full dignity of persons, to nothing less than the divine mystery that can encompass and transform brutality and malice. This is what many Jews today call *tikkun 'olam*, 'healing the world', and it is a religious vision in which Christians can share, with the distinctive energies and spiritual experiences of Christian faith. I've always loved Pope John Paul II's description of the Christian mission: 'we are to be a blessing to the world', and if Jews and Christians are to be a blessing to the world, we must first be a blessing to each other. A shared witness to God's transcendence and love; to religious values which alone can promote authentically human values; and to mutual enrichment of our common vocation to serve and bear witness to God and to look for the coming of the Messiah in glory and the life of the Age to come. My task as a Christian is to act always in ways that are good for Jews and strengthen them in their mission from God. Rabbi Jonathan Gorsky on the staff here seems to me to be doing this in a remarkable way, always acting in ways that bring blessings on the Christians and Moslems he teaches.

In my soul I've been deeply affected over the past few years by the writings of the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, 'To know God', says Emmanuel Levinas, 'is to know what must be done'. 'Doing good is the act of belief itself', he also said. In Peperzak's summary of Levinas, 'The good cannot be contacted or approached directly, but only through dedication to good in the world'. If 'the good' is God, then we do not go directly towards God, but always love God through our accepting responsibility for goodness in the world. That seems to me to be the true religion that brings out the best in us: it is why a religious identity is the only satisfactory way of being human. A commitment to the unrestricted good of humanity is how we access and are shaped by the goodness that is God himself. This is, I suspect, the only proper response to the kind of atheism that dismisses religion as delusion. The Dominican Herbert McCabe used to say, 'If you don't love, you'll die, and if you do love, you'll be crucified. Make your choice.' A great man with a holy mind.

I share Rahner's concern that our present form of the Christian religion might not be adequate for our mission and might contribute to the marginalisation of Christianity, consigning God to the status of the ancient gods of Greece and Rome: mythological figures but irrelevant to our human project. What is needed in the Church is a culture of study and inquiry, open and respectful, a model of how human beings might work together towards the goal of a shared lasting human good. This seems to be a vital quality of the Church's mission, and I find it strange that as the culture increasingly is finding it difficult to relate to Jesus Christ and his Gospel, we're concerned with whether girls can serve at Tridentine masses. If you won't let them exercise a simple lay ministry, don't baptise them. In my final report to the Governors last week, I said:

The distinctive role of Heythrop, bridging philosophy and theology, holding together, on the one hand, the Jesuit educational tradition and, on the other, the identity of a College set up by Royal Charter within the University of London, refusing to set in opposition the demands of Catholic identity and ecumenical diversity, deliberately setting for itself an intellectual engagement with the issues in critical modernity, taking seriously a Catholic Christian philosophical/theological tradition and at the same time offering hospitality and dialogue with other religious traditions. If you wanted such a place, you could not simply whisk it out of the air. But it is the kind of College we already have, and are already building, and it is worth fostering. I know that Governors will not allow it to become something less worthy than what it is already.

In many ways, Heythrop is already a 'Court of the Gentiles' with pathways between Christians and non-religious people, between Christians and Jews and Moslems, between the monotheistic faiths and Asian religions, with a lively group of research centres covering Philosophy of Religion, Religious Life, Eastern Christianity, Interreligious Dialogue, the Heythrop Institute. We conduct our life with a graced sense of working together on something important, in many ways echoing the words of John Henry Newman: 'Truth is wrought out by many minds, working together freely...this has ever been the rule of the Church till now'. (J.H.Newman, to Robert Ornsby, an editor of *The Tablet*, in *Letters and*



Diaries xx, 426). The Church is not a citadel but a school of truth in thought and action. You can only belong to it by being a learner, by adopting the yoke of truth-bearing with integrity.

'Truth is wrought out by many minds': the key words are 'many minds' and 'freely' because you cannot study and engage in inquiry without pluralism and liberty. Newman knew that point in the extremely repressive Church of Pius IX; we forget it still at our peril. Theology, *sacra doctrina*, like truth itself, is a self-correcting and self-implicating discipline, and it flourishes only in a Church that values truth above pragmatism. Religious truth is not established by decree, but is reached through dialogue, inquiry, shared study, a body of scholars working in a context of free inquiry into the truth that the Church needs for its mission. That is the ideal of theological study within a properly functioning Catholic Church that Newman presents and a passable version of this has been developing at Heythrop. All I have done, I think, as Principal is enable something valuable to take shape here that might be of service to Christ's Church and God's world.

Finally, I want to read a poem with you so that the last words you hear this evening will not be mine, but those of a great Polish poet, Czeslaw Milosz. I remember being on the Tube with Robert

Murray who looked at a picture of, I think, a wonderful Amazonian Indian, probably a chief, with a great display of feathers on his head. Robert looked at him and said, 'I bet he's in touch'. Robert didn't tell me what he thought this Indian was in touch with, but I think he meant that he was in touch with the real, with God. Milosz in this poem is, I think, 'in touch' with God clearly, but also, I suspect, with Rahner. Milosz may have been an 'anonymous Rahnerian'. There are a lot of them around and they are not wrong. The poem fits me very well at this stage of my life, and you may well judge that it fits you too. I hope so.

Late Ripeness - Czeslaw Milosz

*Not soon, as late as the approach of my
ninetieth year,
I felt a door opening in me and I entered
the clarity of early morning.*

*One after another my former lives were
departing,
like ships, together with their sorrow.*

*And the countries, cities, gardens, the
bays of seas
assigned to my brush came closer,
ready now to be described better than
they were before.*

*I was not separated from people,
grief and pity joined us.
We forget - I kept saying - that we are
all children of the King.*

*For where we come from there is no
division
into Yes and No, into is, was, and will
be.*

*We were miserable, we used not more
than a hundredth part
of the gift we received for our long
journey.*

*Moments from yesterday and from
centuries ago -
a sword blow, the painting of eyelashes
before a mirror
of polished metal, a lethal musket shot,
a caravel
staving its hull against a reef - they
dwell in us,
waiting for a fulfilment.*

*I knew, always, that I would be a worker
in the vineyard,
as are all men and women living at the
same time,
whether they are aware of it or not.*

*Translated by Robert Haas
From New and Collected Poems 1931-2001 (Penguin, 2006)*

Working with VSO

In this article Cath Ball, who graduated in 2005, speaks about the experiences she's had working with Voluntary Services Overseas

I am currently sat in Bakau, on the “smiling” coast of West Africa, the Gambia. Having come to the coast for a three month review meeting and education workshop run by VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas), the organisation I am working with, I am enjoying the last couple of days of socialising other volunteers before doing the 7 hour plus journey back upcountry to where I am living and working, Janjanbureh.



The main street in Janjanbureh

Janjanbureh (also known as Georgetown and McCarthy Island) is a lovely town/ island in the middle of the Gambia river. I cannot walk down the street after living here for three months without being recognised and greeted, and I am pleased to say I have just about mastered the latter in the local language of Mandinka! I am very fortunate to be

living on a compound where the family look after me well and always invite me to share their meals when I am at home. The majority of these are fish and vegetables with rice and a sauce, local specialities including domoda (a spicy peanut based dish), benechin (tomato paste fried rice) and yassa (a spicy onion sauce). I always look forward to the evenings when we have groundnut rice porridge - it is so sweet and filling! The times of meals out here took some getting used to - breakfast is between 10.30am and 11am, lunch between 2pm and 4pm, and dinner between 8pm and 10pm! Breakfast is normally my break from rice as tapalaapa (baguette style bread with a filling, my compound grandmother offering a type of bean stew or fish balls with thin spaghetti) is sold for 10 dalasi, about 25 pence.

I feel well and truly immersed in the culture due to spending a lot of time with my family. They have given me my Gambian name, Tida Sanyang, which everyone in Janjanbureh calls me. I feel privileged to be named after my compound leader's mother and find it very entertaining when he calls me “my mother” and I respond with “my son” (especially as he is in his seventies)! I have helped my family with doing laundry by hand, cutting onions without a



One of the food bowls my family has given me

chopping board and pounding using a giant mortar and pestle - the latter being a constant source of hilarity as their technique and arm muscles are far better than mine! Many evenings are spent sitting with the grandmother or the young women (who are currently studying at the local senior secondary school) chatting about everything and anything. Sometimes language can be a barrier but their English is so good it puts my Mandinka to shame!

My real reason for being here, however, is to work! My “job title” is Primary Cluster Teacher Trainer for Regional Education Directorate 5 and I am based at their office. The country is split into 6 regions and I am working in one of the largest, the Central River Region. The region is then split into 11 clusters, groups of schools, with a cluster monitor who works with the school to improve their standards. To begin with, I was networking, getting to know headteachers, teachers and cluster monitors. I have been visiting various schools (on my motorbike!), observing some lessons, doing some training needs analysis and supporting current workshops (training sessions) which are happening in the region. I have also worked with teachers one-to-one planning and modelling lessons and this has been a real success area. Re-visiting a teacher and seeing them use a suggestion you made or modelled is the most satisfying reward!



A view of the river in Janjanbureh

Continued on page 11



The view of my compound from my front door

There is a big push from the Ministry of Education at the moment to train teachers in learner centred methodologies (which they see as teachers supporting the pupils when they are working, including group activities in lessons, using open ended questions, catering for different learning styles and effectively using teaching and learning aids). I am now planning to concentrate on Early Childhood Development (children tend to be between 2 and 7

are few resources for the teachers to use and the children rarely actively participate in the learning. To get an idea of what the trainee teachers are taught on the ECD course at the Gambia College, I am hoping to lecture on this course when it happens over the summer holidays.

There are so many other things I could write about - in terms of the culture, the people, everyday life and other areas of the Gambia I have visited but space does not allow! Overall, I feel privileged to be out here sharing an experience with people who have shown me hospitality and generosity I have not experienced before. A lot of people say these experiences are as much about learning and developing as a person, as they are about sharing skills and I feel that has been the case over the past three months. Here's to the next year and a half!



Trying my hand at 'pounding'

years old in these classes) and continue the work of previous VSOs in the region. I will run some workshops in clusters and carry out follow up visits to schools to support them in implementing the training. I have become increasingly aware that using songs and rhymes with this age-group is the style to concentrate on as ECD classes can be so large, there

VSO is an international development charity that works through volunteers. Its vision is a world without poverty in which people work together to fulfil their potential. Their philosophy is not to send aid in the form of money or material goods but to send professional people who share their skills with local counterparts. The aim is for the work to be sustainable as local people will continue their work with the new skills they have developed. Since 1958, more than 30,000 volunteers have been sent overseas in response to requests from VSO's overseas partners. At the moment around 1,500 people are working in placements.



Cath on her motorbike

If you would like to find out more about VSO, please visit www.vso.org.uk. If you would like to keep up to date with my time in the Gambia, please visit my blog cathingambia.blogspot.com. If you would like to support VSOs work, please visit my just giving page www.justgiving.com/Catherine-Ball0.



Armitage Senior Secondary School in Janjanbureh

The Film - The Way

Unfortunately we were not able to arrange for HAAS members to see a screening of The Way, but various alumni saw the film individually, and this account is one former student's reaction to this remarkable film

Some films have those 'one-liners' in the script that aren't lived up to by the rest of the film's contents; 'The Way' is certainly not one of those films. "You don't choose a life. You live one" is the quote on the film's poster and said in the film early on by the character Daniel - played by the film's Director Emilio Estevez - son of Martin Sheen in the film and in real life. (Martin Sheen's real name is Ramon Estevez - he is half Spanish, half Irish, with an American accent). Sheen plays Tom, an eye doctor in California, but is called to walk The



Camino de Santiago (The Way of Saint James) after some tragic news. The film starts out as Tom's painful journey but quickly becomes the journey of all who join him - including those in the cinema audience - their pain, their search for themselves, their frustration with each other. Tom's 800 kilometre walk to reach the cathedral is also the walk of many other pilgrims - some who join and stay with him - much to his annoyance at first. There is the overweight, excitable and ever supportive Dutchman Joost, the depressed, sensitive and empathetic Canadian Sarah (who herself has a tragic story which she realises is not so far away from Tom's) and the very talkative, seemingly scatty (he is far from scatty) Irishman Jack who has writer's block (James Nesbitt). And I think 'seemingly' is an important word here - all the characters are quite private (apart from maybe Joost the Dutchman who appears uncomplicated) about why they are on the pilgrimage - they discover bit by bit about each other and in turn learn why they themselves might be there. What binds them is their kindness to each other and the fellowship they share - often unknowingly. The journey they end up doing together

is none other than inspirational and very moving. Accompanied by an amazing soundtrack featuring Coldplay, David Gray, James Taylor and Alanis Morissette it quickly makes you feel lucky to be alive because of the unusual sense of 'realness' the film creates. These four travellers (I call them seekers) are not on the surface religious and don't talk about God very much but visibly display enough sense of inward emotional struggle with themselves and their purpose in life to make the viewer feel that they are everyman. Most of all the unbreakable chain of friendship that grows between them is hugely moving. Tom pushes them away as he struggles with his pain and self-blame but they never desert him. They stand by him, often coming to his rescue. By the end, the introvert Tom tells Jack (Nesbitt) to write his book truthfully - tell it as it is - something Tom would never have said at the beginning.

The film is a fable of journeys lost and found, of fractured lives being rebuilt and of understanding that although we are all unique people, we share the same tears, fears and need for a listening, non-judgemental ear. At one point, Jack the Irishman says to Tom that he (Jack) needs to get back to the real world - Tom's reply indicates that he himself is now questioning why this journey is not the real world or at least why it cannot be part of the real world? Just because it has been labelled a 'religious' journey - it has been no less a journey, and we

each make those every day of our lives. You get the feeling that after they have reached the goal - the awesome Cathedral at Santiago - they go their own separate ways. It seems a shame, but reinforces another of the film's messages that it is the fleeting experiences in life that often mean the most - the challenge is to take the feelings created by them and the people that helped you and lived with you during those fleeting moments, into the rest of life.

You feel that whatever the pilgrims were searching for, they found it - just look at the expressions on their faces once at the Cathedral (particularly Nesbitt's). If they thought they were searching for nothing, they were given something unexpected. An Oscar winning actress recently said that the arts are where people go to when they need their broken hearts mended (Thandie Newton) - this film is an example both in its art form that does this and in its subject matter. Whether or not you believe in God, I'd urge you to see the film - it is a tapestry of honest human experience and preaches nothing other than making the most of what you have, who you have around you and to laugh with them (the film made me laugh and cry in equal measure). Another of the people Tom meets along his journey says that what he is participating in is nothing to do with religion, but something beyond. By the end of the film, you understand what this is.

Anna Wheeler

