

First Things: The Moral, Social and Religious Challenges of the Day

Text of lectures by Cherie Booth, Charles Moore, George Weigel,
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ISBN 9780 8601 2388 0

*Burns and Oates, London 2005, Published in association with the
Tyburn Community, £9.99*

These four essays are the texts of the first four annual lectures delivered at the Tyburn Convent of the Adorers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Montmartre, Order of Saint Benedict.

At this convent in Hyde Park Place in west London, as we are told in an advertisement at the end of this paperback, the nuns 'pray night and day ... to honour the 105 Catholic martyrs who suffered and died for their faith on the scaffold of Tyburn Tree between 1535 and 1681.' Cherie Booth, QC (the Prime Minister's spouse) in the opening paragraph of her lecture, put the history of Tyburn into perspective; giving the estimate that (p.45) 'some 50,000 people were put to death here over the 600 years that it served as a place of execution'. Ms Booth reminds readers that Catholics here and throughout Europe were not always the ones 'at the receiving end' of such denial of individual rights.

There is no definite statement about a specific remit given to the four lecturers but we can take it that it included the quotation from the Archbishop of Westminster given in the Foreword, 'It is important that the Catholic community contributes to the public life and discourse of our country, especially in relation to the moral, religious and social challenges of the day.'

Charles Moore, a journalist and political columnist, gave the first lecture (presumably 2001). He chose to begin with some historical details of Tyburn but used it to speak of the value of witness to truth not only in matters of faith but for human rights. In the second lecture, a former Member of Parliament, broadcaster, interviewer and biographer, regrets the loss of innocent play in childhood and links this to much adolescent crime and unsocial behaviour. It is possible the four speakers felt some restraint in the conditions of the lectureship but within those confines they have reflected what most would agree with.

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