

Aberdeen Divinity and Religious Studies
ALUMNUS NEWSLETTER

May 2018



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Master's Notes 2018



The way of the heart: Some reflections on cultural change

Life in Aberdeen is as interesting as ever. We've had the worst snow for years, staff strikes over pension cutbacks, student sit-ins, new staff coming in, present staff being promoted ... the list goes on and it is only April! 2018 promises to be eventful. But it is an exciting time for us all in different ways. Times of change are very often opportunities for innovation and new thinking. Recently I have been thinking about Paul's challenge in Romans 12:2. The NLT offer an interesting way of articulating the passage: "Don't copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." As an academic I live in a world where a particular way of thinking reigns and intellectual knowledge is assumed to be the key to truly meaningful life. I'm not convinced. For much of my early life I spent my time with people living with profound learning disability and those living with dementia and other intellectual and cognitive disabilities; people whose lives are not necessarily guided by standard assumptions about intellect and reason, but whose experience and perspective is deceptively rich and vital for church and society. I learned very quickly that there are another ways of looking at life and being in the world.

The way of the heart

Jean Vanier has described the experience that we (all of us together) learn from those whose lives are not ruled and determined by the intellect as *the way of the heart*. The heart Vanier suggests is the seat of affectivity; "the deepest most fundamental aspect of the human being that is touched and transformed by the Spirit." In this way of thinking, the heart is the point of relationship. All of us build up barriers and blockages that prevent us from engaging creatively and lovingly with one another. But behind all of these barriers lies the heart. Vanier says: "The heart is capable of receiving and giving love, of living in communion with another person and with God, capable of being a source of life for others. In the designs of God, it is the heart that inspires all human activities." For Vanier *the person is the heart*.

This profound and really quite beautiful insight pushes us to reconsider many things. Part of Vanier's point is that damage to the brain does not mean damage to the heart. In reminding us of this countercultural perspective he releases us to think again about what is essential about a human being. But his observation has wider implications. The intellect is not the most important aspect of who we are and how we should be even if it feels that way culturally. If we accept this, such things as love, care, community and belonging bubble to the surface and offer a challenge and a solution to our vision of what it might mean to live well as human beings within God's creation. I have been at Aberdeen University for over 30 years now. I don't remember hearing many lectures that reminded me of this. And yet, probably, most of us around the university long to be loved, cared for and held in heart filled relationships. So where do we go to learn the beautiful "secret" of the way of the heart? A "secret" that offers a loving challenge to the world of the brain and invites us into the strange new world of the heart.



Aberdeen University's Friendship House

In 2016 I invited Jean Vanier, founder of the L'Arche communities and the theologian Stanley Hauerwas to the University for a series of conversations around disability issues which resulted in the book *Living Gently in a Violent World*. During the conversations both Jean and Stanley stated that they felt that there should be a L'Arche community in every university, (an intentional community where people with and without intellectual disabilities live together in the Spirit of the beatitudes and the friendships of Jesus), the implication being that in a place where people think a lot about what it means to be human, sometimes it is necessary for students and staff to see and experience different ways of *being* together. Alongside of the many things we should be learning at the university, such a community would teach all of us that *living humanly is more than thinking quickly and cleverly*. Vanier and Hauerwas offered us a powerful challenge. Some of us decided to take it up.

Moving from theory to practice

In my last Master's Notes I mentioned that we were forming a Friendship House within the University where people with intellectual and cognitive disabilities can come together and develop meaningful Christ like friendships that can enable all concerned to flourish. Well, the students who will form the core of the community are here and very soon we will be able to see if Vanier's way of the heart and Hauerwas's peaceable community is actually possible within a space of learning that often forgets what and where the heart is. It will be fascinating to see if and how this unusual worshipping community affects the university and what changes emerge from its simple presence. From small things great things emerge. It has always been my view that the task of Christians is not to change the world (that is God's job). Our task is to be faithful to the calling that is given to us and in so doing reveal the coming Kingdom through small gestures of hope. Friendship House is one such gesture.

So if you could keep us in your thoughts and prayers as we move on that would be wonderful. These are unusual times for the world, but hope remains. Oh! And if you have a spare house that you could give to us that would also be helpful ...

Rev Professor John Swinton

Master of Christ's College and Professor in Practical Theology and Pastoral Care

Christ's College Divinity Lectures



Since the last newsletter two more lectures have taken place both with great numbers in attendance. You can view them on the Christ's College YouTube site Go to www.youtube.com and search for 'Christ's College Grant Macaskill' to hear his lecture entitled "The Bible and Autism: Beginning a Conversation". Search 'Christ's College Tom Greggs' to hear his lecture, "Be Transformed by the Renewing of your Mind. What is Theology and how should we do it? - A particularly Methodist view." On that site you will also find the Christ's College Divinity Opening Lecture delivered in September 2017 by Dr Leon van Ommen "Life after Brokenness: A Liturgical Portrait of Suffering and Hope".

News of Alumni

2017

Rev John P Renton formerly of Kemnay died in January

Rev Eleanor J. McMahon was inducted to Glasgow: Govan and Linthouse in February

Rev Robert B Milne retired from Broughton, Glenholm and Kilbucho linked with Stobo and Drumelzier linked with Tweedsmuir in March

Rev William Logan Kirk formerly of Dalton with Hightae linked with St Mungo died in March

Rev Graham Deans retired from Aberdeen: Queen Street in April

Rev Alison I Swindells translated from Edinburgh: Greenbank to Barthol Chapel linked with Tarves in May

Rev Malcolm Cuthbertson translated from Glasgow: Baillieston Mure memorial linked with Glasgow: Baillieston St Andrew's to Rutherglen West and Wardlaw Hill in May

Rev P Jill Clancy demitted from Annbank linked with Tarbolton in June see page 7

Rev Susan J Sutherland translated from Dundee: St Margaret's Barnhill to Aberdeen: Mastrick in June

Rev Anita Sutter translated from Birse and Feughside to Applecross, Lochcarron and Torridon in June

Rev William D Watt formerly of Aboyne-Dinnet died in June

Rev Ivor Gibson formerly of Stepps died in July

Rev Carol Anne Parker demitted from Alloa: Ludgate in August

Rev Jonathan De Groot demitted from Glasgow: Sandyford memorial in August

Rev Elspeth McKay translated from Echt linked with Midmar to Cumbernauld: Old in August

Rev Murdo M Campbell translated from Brightons to Strathblane in August

Rev Jared Hay retired from Edinburgh: Priestfield in September

Rev Grahame Bell retired from Glasgow: Carnwadric in September

Rev Robert W C Galloway formerly of Cromarty died in September

Rev James M MacDonald formerly of Kilmarnock St John's Onthank died in September

Rev A Barrie translated from Inverness: Kinmyllies to Wick: Pultneytown and Thrumster in November

2018

Rev Shuna Dicks translated from Aberlour to Aberdeen: Cults East in January

Rev Ronald Gall demitted from Aberluthnott linked with Laurencekirk in January



New Undergraduate - Amy Bender

In some way you could say that Aberdeen has been a part of my life from the beginning, though I grew up thousands of miles away on a farm in Tennessee where my Grandfather raised Aberdeen Angus cattle. I had my share of corn planting and hay baling and I can even claim to have successfully driven a tractor.

I moved away from that home when I was 18 to attend Furman University. I studied to be a teacher and completed nearly four years of liberal arts education there. My first post was in a small town called Travelers Rest, South Carolina and I quickly learned that I was not wise enough yet to be a teacher. I went to graduate school at the University of North Carolina to study Educational Psychology, and there met up with a friend from Furman called Keith Bender. We married in 1993 and as he had ties to Scotland, he accepted a Leverhulm fellowship in Aberdeen. It was a daunting but exciting time as I had never been across the ocean. We rented a flat on Bedford Road, and learned about life in a new country. I volunteered at Sunnybank Primary until Aberdeen City Council allowed me to be put on the supply register. I would often meet my husband and other economists in the senior common room and I loved walking through the campus. Then I thought I would love to study at the University, but since we were still paying for student loans from our doctorates-that wasn't realistic. The University did hire me as a tutor for a psychology class which I enjoyed.

We had intended to stay in Aberdeen only a year, but that extended into 3. We returned to the US in 1997 and lived in Alexandria, Virginia where our first daughter was born. Once again work required a move, and my husband accepted a position at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. I also worked for the University there teaching future teachers. We had a sabbatical year 2006-2007 and chose to return to Aberdeen, because we did really love it here. At the end of our year, we returned to Milwaukee, a third daughter was born, and a few years later my husband learned of an opening for a Professor in the Economics Department in Aberdeen. We decided it would be a permanent move this time. I again taught for Aberdeen City Council at Mile End and Heathryburn Primaries.

We settled into active membership at St. Stephen's and I was encouraged to attend the vocations conference in 2013 and then entered into the period of discernment with the Church of Scotland. It was a time of exploration and for the first time I had the feeling we might be in Aberdeen for me rather than for my husband's career. What a privilege after all this time to be studying at the University, learning with and from amazing individuals.

I also have been welcomed by both the Chaplaincy Centre and Christ's College. Both are a great support to me as I prepare at this time in my life to undertake an unexpected role in ministering for God. I can see the crown of the college from my home and it is an inspirational reminder of the learning and excellence that I am now able to share.



Amy seen here with the Right Reverend Dr Derek Browning, the Moderator, during his visit to the University.

Graduate Catch-Up

After 17 years as a **Parish minister Jill Clancy** demitted her charge in June 2017 and started a new ministry as a Full-Time Prison Chaplain within Barlinnie and Bowhouse Prisons. She is the only Female Chaplain in both prisons. In 2017 Jill wrote "This is a calling that seems to have been growing in me since 1992 when I first went to visit the Chaplain at Saughton Prison in Edinburgh as a Church of Scotland Training in Evangelism student. We sat with a prisoner for coffee and a blether in the chaplaincy department. During that same year I visited Glenochil Prison with Prison Fellowship.



When I was in my first charge in Gourock I applied to become a part-time chaplain at HMP Greenock but sadly as I was on holiday my application was late and therefore not accepted. And so I immersed myself again in parish ministry until 2013 when I applied for the part-time post at HMP Kilmarnock. I was accepted for the post and so also felt that I should move parish to Ayrshire, which is where I am from as my father by that time was in a nursing home and I needed to be a little closer. So while being minister in Annbank l/w Tarbolton I have loved being part of HMP Kilmarnock and felt it was starting to take over and so when the post at HMP Barlinnie came up I felt very called to apply and I was accepted.

I look forward to this change, buying my own home and commuting every day to work. God has been at work in me to prepare me for this ministry and it is such a privilege to share the gospel in word and action to men that many in society would love to throw the keys away and forget about.

When I was being called to the ministry back in 1993 a friend said to me that being a Church of Scotland minister would open doors for me, would give me a key that not many others would have. Well she was certainly prophetic as I now have keys around my waist at all times and will be able to open doors that even those behind them are unable to do."

The Lord listens to those in need and does not forget his people in prison. (Psalm 69:33, GNB)

An update from Jill is that everything is going well. She has recently baptised a prisoner and conducted a wedding.

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Professor Chris Partridge

"Reflecting on my time at Aberdeen brings to mind those evocative words at the beginning of L.P. Hartley's *The Go-Between*: "The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there."

I arrived in Aberdeen almost 30 years ago in 1989. Howard Marshall was the Professor of New Testament and one of the main reasons I chose to travel further north than I had been before. I had already spent three years at theological college, enjoyed New Testament Studies, and had read several of Howard's books.

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However, while I valued his friendship and remember him with great fondness, shortly after my arrival I shifted my focus to Systematic Theology and Religious Studies. My interest in the latter was stimulated by discussions with both Dave Burgess, a wonderfully generous and amiable scholar of religion, and Jim Thrower, the Professor of the History of Religions, whose breadth of knowledge was inspiring. However, while they were to prove formative, it was theology that primarily occupied my mind during my years at Aberdeen. Having completed a BD, I was delighted (and still consider myself fortunate) that Trevor Hart agreed to supervise my doctorate. I finally settled on researching H.H. Farmer's theory of religion. Although my interests have followed a rather different trajectory since the 1980s, the discussions, the reading, and the work I did at Aberdeen have shaped my thought and, in many respects, my life.

I am now Professor of Religious Studies in the Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion at Lancaster University. Almost since leaving Aberdeen and taking up my first lecturing post at the University of Chester, I have been interested in interrogating the significance of what many consider to be irrational and profane ideas in modern Western societies. In particular, I have pursued an interest in what I like to think of as our 'haunted culture'—a culture fascinated by the possibility of enchantment (ghosts, aliens, energies, angels, psychic powers, miracles, and so on).

Of particular interest to me has been the significance of popular culture as a resource for the enchanted imagination. This has led me, on the one hand, to engage with work done in sociology and cultural studies, with a particular focus on popular music and, on the other hand, to the analysis of modern mystical and esoteric currents. Indeed, to assist my research I studied for a second doctorate at Liverpool University's Institute of Popular Music.

I fully recognize that it is difficult to ignore the force of the arguments and the evidence marshaled in support of widespread secularization. It is, for example, irrefutably the case that traditional forms of Christianity in Western liberal democracies are experiencing a significant decline in power, popularity and prestige. However, within this apparently secular environment, where modernization seems to be highly corrosive of religion, there is a widespread and vibrant interest in the paranormal, the pursuit of experiences of transcendence, and the development of some form of inner-life spirituality. There is good evidence of what I refer to as an influential 'occulture.' From the advertising of everyday products that claim to promote wellbeing to the TV series, films, books, and songs that explore experiences of the supernatural, there is a steady flow of discourses antagonistic to secularization. It is this haunting of everyday life that, as a scholar of religion and culture,

I want to understand.



While my time surrounded by the beautiful buildings of King's College does seem like "a foreign country," I am grateful to have been there. Those who I was fortunate to meet set me on the path to a future of teaching, supervising, and researching that I have enjoyed enormously. I hope I am able to do the same for my own students at Lancaster."

Christ Partridge

Honorary Graduates

Professor Stanley Hauerwas held a part-time Chair in Theological Ethics in Aberdeen and commented afterwards, 'One of the highlights of my academic life was to be appointed the Chair in Ethics at the University of Aberdeen. The Department of Theology really does theology in a constructive and collaborative process; I miss my stays with my former colleagues. Theology is alive and well in the far north of Scotland.'

He was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity, *honoris causa*, in June 2018. The laureation was delivered by Dr Michael Mawson, Senior Lecturer in Theological Ethics.

'Professor Hauerwas is the most important theological ethicist of the last forty years. Indeed, he stands among the most important public intellectuals of our time. Having written and edited over fifty books on a wide range of topics, he has decisively shaped the nature and direction of modern theology. His work continues to be read and discussed by theologians, pastors and Christians, by political theorists and activists, ethicists, and by many others seeking to understand and engage the challenges of modern life.

There are three areas where Professor Hauerwas' work has had a particularly significant impact.

First, in the 1970s and 80s, Prof Hauerwas undertook early and pioneering research into virtue-based approaches to ethics. Drawing upon parallel developments in moral philosophy, and engaging Catholic moral thought, Prof Hauerwas almost single-handedly shifted the focus of Christian ethics away from rules and first-principles, and toward richer and deeper questions about character and formation. This turn to virtue has been the most important development in theological and philosophical ethics in the last half century.

Second, over recent decades Professor Hauerwas has been a leading defender and advocate of non-violence. Drawing on radical Protestantism, especially the Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder, he made a compellingly case that a deep Christological, commitment to non-violence must be at the heart of contemporary Christian identity. Just as importantly, Prof Hauerwas has shown that such non-violence must never be an abstract commitment or a withdrawal from the pressing problems that face us. Rather, genuine non-violence must involve and lead to concrete and engaged forms of witness and response.

Third, Prof Hauerwas has undertaken pioneering work on issues of disability and suffering. Drawing on the work of L'Arche communities, he has put persons with disabilities at the centre of ethical discourse. This in turn helped open a space for reframing issues and debates in medicine and bioethics. Rather than taking able-bodied, autonomous individuals as normative, Prof Hauerwas has shown how attending to embodied, vulnerable beings can change core priorities in medicine.

In all three of these areas of research, Prof Hauerwas has drawn attention to the distinctive character the church: its virtues, peaceableness, and openness to vulnerability.



Finally, it should be noted that Prof Hauerwas has been a significant interlocutor for many of us here at Aberdeen University. A number of staff and postgraduate students in the Divinity department have benefited from his intellectual vision, as well as from his friendship and generosity.

The Theological Ethics Department

From L to R Dr Michael Laffin, Dr Brian Brock, Professor Stanley Hauerwas, Dr Michael Mawson



Also receiving an Honorary Degree was Mr David Strachan.

Dr Amy Brezgel, Senior Lecturer in Film and Visual Culture was his promoter.

“David Strachan is a DRS alumnus graduating BD in 1974 and gaining a Diploma in Pastoral Studies in 1977. He was active in the University Staff Student TV Production Group, which led to him becoming a freelance presenter on Grampian Television. He was ordained in 1978 and served as a parish minister in Perthshire for six years, after which time he returned to Aberdeen and set up

Tern TV. It now employs about 70 people in Aberdeen, Glasgow and Belfast producing Songs of Praise and coverage of the General Assembly for many years along with a number of other documentaries, including a Templeton funded series on Science and Religion.

“As a graduate of the University of Aberdeen, David Strachan has gone on to do what we lecturers hope our students will do: combine their passion and knowledge cultivated during their studies and turn this into a fruitful and dynamic career. David has done this by bringing together two seemingly disparate pursuits: religion and television. With a Bachelor of Divinity degree and broadcast experience with the university television service under his belt, he grew his Community Channel for Aberdeen Cable into a fully-fledged production company, Tern TV, and then harnessed the power and reach of broadcast media to produce Songs of Praise and other religious programming. In a city that boasts a number of bars, pubs and clubs located in redundant churches, David found an alternative solution to bring the substance of his ministry to the people.

But this outward-reaching dedication to service extends beyond the mere range of the satellite beam. David has demonstrated his commitment to providing opportunities for others. For example, Tern TV’s Songs of Praise programme has commissioned new music and new arrangements of traditional music, utilising talent which would otherwise not have been seen had it not been for this platform. Furthermore, Tern TV provides very cleverly titled In-Tern Internships to recent graduates in media at the University of Stirling, insuring that the newly minted have plenty of opportunities to succeed.

Lastly, David’s commitment to Scotland and in particular the Northeast of Scotland is admirable. Instead of going off to seek his fortune in London as many others have done, Tern TV is headquartered right here in the heart of Aberdeen, on Crown Street, with offices in Glasgow and Belfast. As a member of the Board of Directors of the Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television, he worked to prevent independent production shifting to London, remaining dedicated to the great creative talent and potential to be found right here in Aberdeenshire.

Indeed, it is rare to excel in one area, let alone two, and David Strachan has spread the power and faith of the ministry using his talent in television production, all with a dedication to the Northeast of Scotland and Aberdeen, taking care to provide a legacy for future generations.

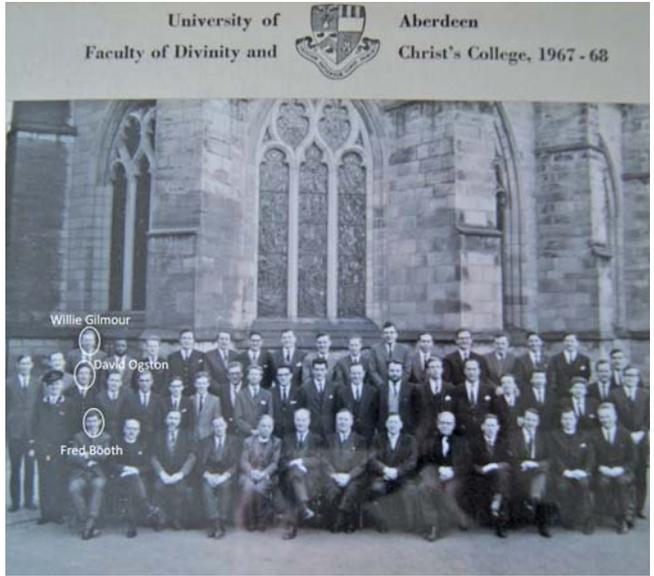
His contributions are thus of a significance and magnitude that I ask you, Pro-Chancellor, to award the degree of Doctor Honoris Causa to David Strachan.”

Both Stanley and David had their degrees conferred upon them by the Pro-Chancellor, former member of the Divinity staff and Master of Christ’s College, The Very Reverend Professor Iain Torrance who received his own award in the Queens New Year’s Honours list and now adds ‘Sir’ to his titles.

College memories by Fred Booth

Fifty years have passed since this 1968 photograph was taken, and how things have changed, although I'm sure the warm heartbeat of "Christ's" still beats on. The main change of course is that the fifty alumni are all male, with only the Sacrist capped, so maybe us men were slow learners!

Memories flood back of this mixer-maxter who felt drawn to life's greatest vocation: journeying with Christ and honoured every week to share His story and every day to try to share His love – what can beat that?



Here are just four of the treasured memories: Willie Gilmour, as devout as they came, was a demon at table tennis, taking no prisoners. David Ogston, master of the Doric, was a blur on the football field with his stockings round his ankles. Professor Graham, former Lord Provost of Aberdeen, gazing out of his classroom window at Kings, gave us this remembered definition of Grace (given to his students by Professor Reinhold Niebuhr, under whom he had studied at Union Seminary, and who like him combined faith and politics): "Gentleman" Niebuhr had unforgettably said, "this is the grace of God: to encourage us to go into the grey of civic responsibility, emerge for rest, and return to it next day!" I'm sure Christian politicians Theresa May and Angela Merkel would love that quote.....; Finally, Professor Cairns, an Associate of the Iona Community was keen to get his students interested in new ministerial developments, encouraged myself, Matthew Robertson and Brian Donald to go down to Port Glasgow and Greenock to experience industrial chaplaincy in the shipyards – I also experienced a bonny "Portonian" and married her the same year as this photograph: a marriage made by "Christ's"!

So this year Ellen and I will be "Golden", and at toasting time we'll raise a hearty glass to that journey south which began at the College at Holborn Junction and ended on the South banks of the Clyde and began a ministry which took us with Kirsty our daughter, to Bo'ness, Stirling's Raploch, Jamaica, Grand Cayman and Helensburgh. Now, thirteen years into retirement (which, because of ministerial shortage doesn't really happen, I now re-spell retirement as retyement and just get re-shod when needed for distant locumships), I have for ten years of their twelve year vacancy been helping at Kilmarnock-Gartocharn on Loch Lomondside. C'est la vie, but it's a great "vie".

Thank you "Christ's" for all you were and are, and thanks to all you modern quines who bring equality and enrichment to the ministry of the church.



Malawi Update

Last September Prof Andrew Clarke and Rev Dr Ken Jeffrey travelled to Malawi to deliver the first module of the MTh Ministry Studies programme at Zomba Theological College. After a 26 hour journey, they were warmly welcomed by the principal of the College, Rev Dr Takuze Chitsulo, and members of staff. They taught an intensive five day course on Leadership with classes from 8.30-11.30am and from 1-4pm. There are fifteen students taking the course, including twelve from Malawi, two from Zimbabwe and one from Mozambique. In February, Ken returned to Zomba where he taught a course on Spiritual Formation that included classes on the Desert Fathers, Benedict, Julian of Norwich, Thomas a Kempis, Ignatius of Loyola, John Calvin, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Henri Nouwen. It was well received by the students. Meanwhile, three staff from the College have begun their doctoral studies. They



Photo shows Ken and Andrew relaxing in Blantyre.

include Rev David Kawanga who is working with Prof Paul Nimmo, Rev Thomas Nyangamah who is working with Dr Mike Laffin and Rev Brian Theu who is working with Dr Ken Jeffrey. Ken's next visit to Zomba will take place in September when he will teach a course on Preaching. In the meantime, conversations have begun with further institutions in Kenya, South Sudan and Zambia in order to explore opportunities of developing the work of the Centre for Ministry Studies across Africa.

Forthcoming events in the Centre for Ministry Studies

Calvin for Pastors

This day-long workshop invites you to engage in reflection and lively conversation with Aberdeen faculty, interested ministers and students about the abiding impact and contemporary importance of the life and work of the Genevan reformer. The day's worship, seminars, lectures and fellowship promises to be a time of renewal, provocation and inspiration. *Saturday 12th May 10.00 – 16.30, Craig Suite, Sir Duncan Rice Library, Old Aberdeen.*

Summer School

Exploring transitions in life, the local church and the world. How do we navigate the various seasons and transitions in the journey of life and ministry within an ever changing world? Bible studies, visits, worship, seminars, talks and fellowship.

20th – 24th August 2018, Craig Suite, Sir Duncan Rice Library, Old Aberdeen.

For more information on the above contact clare.davidson@abdn.ac.uk or visit www.abdn.ac.uk/sdhp/centreministrystudies

New Initiatives

Sophia is a new initiative that seeks to create a supportive environment for female post-graduate students and staff within Divinity and Religious Studies. The Greek word 'sophia' (σοφία), as well as the Hebrew equivalence 'hochma' (הַחִמָּה), means Wisdom and is often personified as a feminine figure. We chose the name 'Sophia' for our initiative in order to represent the collective 'wisdom' that can be provided by the DRS Women's network when female scholars come together to share ideas and experiences.

Both the academy and the Church need qualified women leaders and role models. In light of the historical and present underrepresentation of women in theology and biblical studies particularly, this forum aims to encourage women in the Divinity and Religious Studies Department in their personal and career development.

www.abdn.ac.uk/sdhp/divinity-religious-studies/sophia-drs-womens-network-1657.php

Aberdeen Centre for Protestant Theology was inaugurated in the autumn of 2017 on the the 500th anniversary of the European Reformation. The ACPT hopes to promote advanced research that critically examines the historic forms, developments and implications of Protestant theology, as well as engages constructively in wrestling with its most pressing contemporary tasks in relation to church and world. Working ecumenically with other scholars and institutes, we are ambitious for the Centre to foster debate about the viability, integrity and fruitfulness of distinctively Protestant orientations, emphases, and trajectories in Christian theology as part of a vibrant research programme. While centred in the area of systematic theology, the Centre will regularly collaborate with colleagues in church history, biblical studies, theological ethics, and practical theology. As befits work in the Protestant tradition, questions concerning the centrality of the doctrine of grace, as well as concerning the authority, interpretation, and application of Scripture, provide important points of concentration for our common work. Professors Paul Nimmo, Tom Greggs, and Philip Ziegler serve as co-directors of the ACPT.

<https://aberdeencentreforprotesanttheology.wordpress.com>

The Centre for the Study of Autism and Christian Communities has just been given approval to go ahead. This Centre will host interdisciplinary research into the blessings and challenges associated with the presence of persons with autism in the Christian church. It is easy to assume that autism can be considered in isolation from the faith commitments at work in our society, and that those who have to deal with a diagnosis of autism can process it in simply clinical or scientific terms. Communities of faith, however, always process and understand their experiences in ways that are shaped by that faith, which is itself formed by their traditions and sacred texts. The centre's research will help foster positive Christian understandings of autism, drawing on scripture and theological traditions, and sometimes challenging the misuse of these. In the first instance, this is intended to help churches to respond well to the pastoral reality of autism. Beyond this, however, it is intended to facilitate the sharing of such experiences with other communities of faith, associated with other religions and traditions, and with the medical world itself, as its own engagement with persons of faith develops. The website is under construction so in the meantime contact grant.macaskill@abdn.ac.uk

Follow us on Facebook! The School has recently launched a new page for Divinity and Religious Studies, which is open to current students, alumni, staff, and anybody interested in the work of the department. Learn more about upcoming events, staff publications, and funding opportunities, as well as university-wide news. Our page can be reached at:

<https://www.facebook.com/UoADRS/>.



New member of Staff



"I'm delighted to be writing here, as I recently joined the department as the Christ's College Teaching Fellow in Practical Theology.

I grew up on the West Coast of Scotland, but did my undergraduate degree at the University of St. Andrews (my choice had quite a lot to do with the endless sandy beaches and fudge doughnuts from Fisher and Donaldson!) I didn't intend to take theology at all. It just so happened that I was few credits short in my first term of studying Modern History, and so I decided to give theology a chance. My first class at St Andrews was a beautifully mind-bending journey through the fundamentals of systematic theology. I left completely exhilarated, with far more questions than answers.

In time, I changed my degree so that I could be a full-time student of theology. It wasn't until my third year of study that I first encountered practical theology. All at once, the questions we had been exploring about doctrine and Church came to life and walked off the page. I began to think of theology differently- not just as an academic subject, but as something which has a vital place in contemporary conversations about society and the human experience.

At the end of my four years at St. Andrews, I decided to carry on learning about practical theology, since it had so strongly piqued my interest. I completed my master's degree here at the University of Aberdeen, before taking a year out to work and decide what to do next! It was during this time that I first heard about the Sunday Assembly (on the radio, on my way to work, as it happens!) They are a 'secular congregation,' but they draw deeply on the structures and practises of the Christian Church. I began to wonder how theologians might interact with such a group, and saw potential for a longer study.

I applied for PhD funding and began my doctoral studies in Aberdeen in late 2014. I chose to look at the way in which people discuss God and religion in times of suffering. Rather than centring my study on classical theology, I used the Sunday Assembly as a small-scale example of shifting attitudes to religion and spirituality in modern-day Britain. I spent three years visiting congregations in London and Edinburgh, and exploring questions about belonging, community experience, and responses to suffering.

I passed my PhD in February 2018, taking one small step from College Bounds to Kings College, and one giant leap into my first academic job! I'm delighted to be staying on to work in Aberdeen. It's where I met my husband Peter (back in our Masters days), and it's a place in which I have grown so much, both as a theologian and as a person. I feel very lucky to be part of such a lively, supportive, and active community of thinkers, and I'm very much looking forward to what the following three years here will bring for me!"

Katie Cross

(Katie takes over from Dr Leon Van Ommen who was promoted to full time member of staff in the Practical Theology Department)

New Graduates

from 2017

BACHELOR OF DIVINITY

Mary Whittaker

Honours

Jennifer Bell
Simon Dennis
Daniel Macdonald

BACHELOR OF THEOLOGY

George Paul
Alan Routledge

Honours

Sarah Mclellan
Katja Schroder
Sarah Ward

HONOURS DEGREES - DIVINITY

George Frost
Jessica Longrigg Love
Katherine Schulga
Jack Stewart
Adam Wilkinson

DIVINITY - POLITICS

Baxter McRolston

DIVINITY - PHILOSOPHY

Heather Poulter

RELIGIOUS STUDIES - PHILOSOPHY

Joseph Quinn

RELIGIOUS STUDIES - HISTORY

Sarah Rivers

RELIGIOUS STUDIES -

Amanda Duggan-Clark
Cara Nicholson
Isla Scott-Pearce

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY - DIVINITY and RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Karen Graham
Suhaimi Yosof
Stefan Bosman
Jeffrey Hamm
Chunku Kang
Darren Konz

MASTER OF THEOLOGY- MINISTRY STUDIES

Jennifer Adams
Keith Ross
David Young

THEOLOGICAL ETHICS

Oscar Hyde

Picture Shows the first cohort to graduate with the MTh Ministry Studies. (L to R, Jenny, David, Keith)



New Graduates



College Voices...

... the story of Christ's College told through its people - is finished! As D.S. Cairns wrote in 1929, 'The history of any institution is colourless indeed unless it takes into account the personalities of those who have built their lives into the structure.' *College Voices* does just that and its colourful history is told through its people from the first benefactor to the current Master. Along the way we meet Principals, Teachers, Masters and students, famous and infamous, who formed the life of the College. There may no longer be a building but there is still a College and now there is a lasting history in *College Voices*. The 250 page illustrated book is currently in production with St Andrew Press. Christ's College will be offering a discount to Alumni and friends so please drop me an email so that I can send you details on publication.

Divinity Library

In December 2017, Librarian, Ina Strachan, retired. Having been employed by the College for nearly 32 years she became the longest serving member of staff, paid or unpaid in the history of Christ's College since its foundation in 1843. Many students will remember her friendliness, helpfulness and also her strict running of the Library. Definitely the end of an era but not the end of the library which is now beginning a new chapter under the watchful eye of Alex Mason.

Alex is in his second year of PhD exploring a Reformation-era theory of resistance to authority called the doctrine of the lesser magistrate. He says, "My purpose for this project is to excavate a theological/ethical understanding of submission and resistance for faithful Christian living in post-Christian societies. In a time when the ideas of resistance and revolution are discussed with increasing frequency, I hope this project will be helpful to anyone who seeks to think carefully and biblically about these issues."

Alex is already deep in the process of digitalising the Library Catalogue using 'Librarika'. "This software will enable the library to implement a modern, simple, and user-friendly cloud-based electronic catalogue and circulation system. Librarika will empower Christ's College Divinity Library to enter the digital age while remaining a beautiful and historic study and learning space in the heart of King's College."

Alumni Lunch

Wednesday 23rd May 2018 from 12.30 – 2pm

The annual General Assembly reunion lunch for our alumni and friends will again be held in the Augustine United Church Centre, 41 George IV Bridge, Edinburgh on the Wednesday of Assembly week. It is always a happy occasion and I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible *All Welcome.*

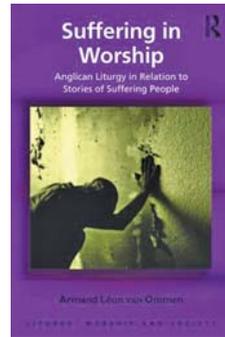
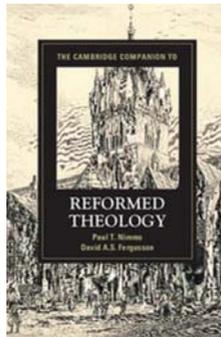
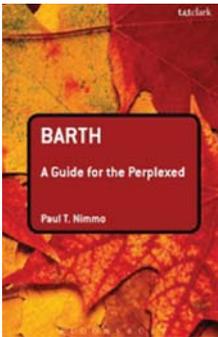
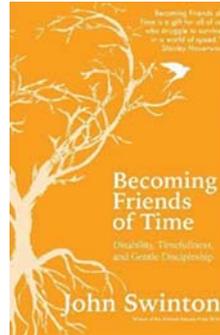
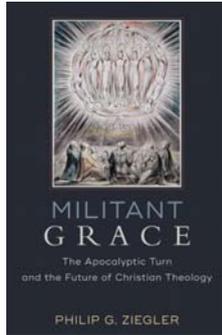
Clare Davidson clare.davidson@abdn.ac.uk





Recently published books

Divinity and Religious Studies staff are busy as ever not only with teaching but with researching and publishing. The following is just a selection of recently published books.



And still to come!

