



# Leadership Renewal

ICS ANNOUNCES RESULTS OF SUCCESSFUL PRESIDENTIAL SEARCH



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**T**he Rev. Dr. Thomas Wolthuis and Ms. Dawn Wolthuis have been appointed to the position of President of the Institute for Christian Studies. They succeed Mr. Chris Gort on Jan. 1, 2013. “We went into this search process in a posture of faith and discernment, not really knowing what would happen,” said Bob Sweetman, a faculty representative on the search committee. “What happened is rather remarkable. Tom Wolthuis brings to ICS a grounding in the Kuyperian theological and worldview tradition, an entrepreneurial can-do ethic to be seen in a past life as a church planter, an easy manner with people that allows him to communicate effectively across a broad religious and intellectual spectrum, and last but not least – a wide

*(continued on page 2)*

(continued from page 1)

open embrace of the adventure laid before him. Dawn brings an energetic, forthright and systematic mind and imagination, a history of business and marketing experience (and enthusiasm) now focused on using her academic training in mathematics and computer science in service of academic institution building.

“Together, they combine a range of abilities one couldn’t reasonably

expect to find in a single applicant. The chance to have all that talent and energy in ICS’s corner just had to be an answer to our prayers.”

ics and computer science at Calvin College. She’s currently President of Tincat Group, a consulting company. The appointment of the Wolthuises comes as ICS actively explores new institutional collaborations in research and teaching with academic partners in North America and Europe. “Tom and Dawn’s vision and experience in promoting Christian higher education, and their excitement about active involvement in the Canadian context will be clear

assets as they contribute to the strengthening of institutional partnerships, support the ICS’s teaching and mentoring of students in interdisciplinary philosophy

and theology and engage in public outreach,” said Henriette Thompson, Chair for the ICS Board of Trustees.

Tom describes his goal as “helping people and organizations grow in the Gospel and ministry in the world by inspiring them to envision possibilities and develop new ways to serve.” Dawn has “a passion for identifying patterns that help anticipate future trends...and to help organizations direct their partnerships and projects toward the future.”

ICS’s appointment of Tom and Dawn as President is the result of an extensive search process that began in August last year and was conducted by a search committee of eight. “Committee members had the privilege of talking about the ICS and its educational mission with several people who were interested in the position,” said Aileen Van Ginkel, search committee chair. “Our conversations with them about a strong and vital role for ICS into the future encouraged us to believe in the importance of that mission and

the community that supports it.”

The Wolthuises begin their orientation for the presidential role on Oct. 1 with Chris Gort. In the fall, they will begin to meet faculty, students, staff, senate and board members, supporters and academic partners in Canada in preparation to assume the presidency in the new year. Tom and Dawn have two grown daughters and two grandchildren residing in the U.S. ●

*“Tom and Dawn combine a range of abilities one couldn’t reasonably expect to find in a single applicant. The chance to have all that talent and energy in ICS’s corner just had to be an answer to our prayers.”*

As professor of theology at Dordt College, Iowa, for the past 10 years, Tom served as department chair and taught a range of courses from biblical foundations and Christian perspectives to worship, youth ministry and spiritual formation. He previously taught New Testament theology at Northrise University in Ndola, Zambia, and religion and theology, as well as communications arts and sciences, at Calvin College, Michigan. Tom is also an ordained pastor in the Christian Reformed Church. He has a PhD in religion from Duke University, a Master of Theology and a Master of Divinity from Calvin Theological Seminary. Dawn is an experienced information technology and higher education consultant with more than 20 years experience. She has a master’s degree in mathematics from Michigan State University and taught mathemat-

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# New Director, Steady Direction

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RON KUIPERS TO CONTINUE THE WORK OF  
FOUNDING DIRECTOR LAMBERT ZUIDERVAART

ICS is pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Ron Kuipers as Director of the Centre for Philosophy, Religion and Social Ethics, and Dr. Allyson Carr as Associate Director. Ron takes over from Dr. Lambert Zuidervart, who served as founding Director from 2010 to 2012. Ron is Associate Professor of Philosophy of Religion at ICS.

Together, Ron and Allyson plan to build on the success the Centre achieved under Lambert's direction, continuing to promote dialogue in various contexts at the boundaries of philosophy, religion and social ethics. "The Centre got a really strong start under Lambert's leadership and achieved some really successful events, including the Social Justice and Human Rights conference last spring and also the Interfaculty Colloquium with faculty from the University of Toronto and the Toronto School of Theology," Ron said. "There are a lot of initiatives that have been started and have momentum, and I want to continue that. In general, I don't see a huge shift in the direction, rather a continuing of the momentum we've already achieved."

The Centre is dedicated to research at the intersection of interdisciplinary philosophy, inter-religious dialogue and social ethics. It organized the recent conference on Social Justice and Human Rights, and it plans to sponsor major collaborative research projects in the future. "The CPRSE was established in order to honour the fact that for ICS faculty, a big part of their job is as a research faculty," Ron said. "It's a way of packaging, honouring and

recognizing that aspect of what the ICS has been traditionally.

"But at the same time, it's also meant to be a new way of describing the research activity of the faculty and of ICS, and an attempt to explore new opportunities for mobilizing the research component of the faculty for greater service to the larger community. Our hope is that we're poised and positioned to encourage dialogues between academics and non-academics, so that it's not just an ivory tower research centre. What we want to be able to encourage at the Centre is reflective practice in the service of social justice."

One of the projects the Centre is working on is a collaborative initiative between various CRC offices, agencies and ministries and the Centre for Community Based Research. The overall purpose of this research project would be to inform and advance the CRC's justice mobilization efforts to encourage and enable members and congregations to embrace justice as mission. The project would also be action-oriented, mobilizing congregations for justice throughout the process of knowledge production. ●



Ron Kuipers

Photo: Kevin van der Laek

*"What we want to be able to encourage at the Centre is reflective practice in the service of social justice."*

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## Q&A: What's the place of religion in the public sphere?

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SIMONE CHAMBERS AND RON KUIPERS SIT DOWN WITH PERSPECTIVE TO DISCUSS ISSUES OF THE USE OF RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE, RELIGIOUS VIEWS AND RELIGIOUS IDEAS IN SOCIETY

*Simone, you recently presented your paper “Universally Accessible Language” at the American Political Science Association annual meeting in Seattle. I’d like to ask you about its reception, particularly if you noted a higher prominence of religious language in political dialogue in the U.S. compared with Canada?*

*Simone:* I did actually. One of the things I argued was that we shouldn’t just have a blanket exclusion of religion from the public sphere.

*“All human beings have their deepest views about meaning of life – what makes life good and rich, what’s desirable and what they care about most deeply.”*

– RON KUIPERS

There are many different ways people introduce religion, religious arguments and religious speech into the public sphere and political debate, so we should have a more fine-grained assessment of what is acceptable and what is unacceptable.

In the American context, people were resistant to that, mostly because I was talking to an audience of political scientists who tend to be centre-left. When they think of religion in the public sphere, they associate it entirely with conservatism, extremism and fundamentalism. They almost always think it’s a bad influence and we should be finding ways of excluding it. The examples brought up were always very extreme ones of people who would be saying really hateful things and couching

them in religious terms.

In Canada, people are less nervous about religion in the public sphere because it doesn’t enter as much. We already have regulation against hate speech – so we have ways of excluding things that are unacceptable – and it’s just not as present. There’s a different reaction among Americans, particularly American academics, to religious speech, and it’s more polarised. People are either really for it or really against it. In Canada, people tend to say, ‘Well, it’s not really a problem, so let’s not worry about it.’

*Ron and Simone, behind most speech there exists assumptions that are casually, or more often uncon-*

*sciously, presumed to be universally held, and which therefore go unchallenged. While we exclude religious arguments on the ground they aren’t universally held or accessible, is there not a case to be made for their non-exclusion on the basis that at least with religious arguments the places where we cease challenging assumptions are apparent and openly acknowledged?*

*Ron:* That’s usually a secularist view of someone who holds a religious point of view – that they hold their religious views and beliefs uncritically. Even if they’re critical about a lot of them there is – at the core, at the foundation – something taken on faith. And whether it flies in the face of evidence or not, it’s just kind of uncritically accepted, and everything

is built up on that irrational foundation or non-rational foundation. That’s the view of religion I’d like to contest.

But what I think you’re getting at, and this is something I do agree with, is I that the tacit acceptance of unexamined foundation beliefs doesn’t occur only in religion or religious views. All human beings have their deepest views about the meaning of life – what makes life good and rich, what’s desirable and what they care about most deeply. They usually don’t have a rational justification for them. They’re couched in the terms of what the secularist philosopher Richard Rorty calls a “final vocabulary.” Once you’ve expressed your deepest motivations or aspirations you’ve gone as far as language can take you, and then you do have a certain sort of faith-like acceptance of that orientation.

That doesn’t just characterise a religious view, but also most of what John Rawls would call “comprehensive conceptions of the good.” There are a lot of different phrases to name what we’re talking about here. Recognition of this commonality can be a basis for levelling the playing field. We need no longer accept the idea that religion has this quality to it but a secularistic or scientific view doesn’t. We can say we’re all on the same plane. Epistemologically, you level the playing field and then you can start talking.

*Simone:* Well, I agree and disagree. I do agree as a psychological or even an empirical fact that most people haven’t really thought through the foundations of their beliefs and values. This is true for both religious and secular views. But I don’t think this is an epistemological fact. Even though most people don’t really think through them, there’s an epistemological difference between basing something fundamentally on a religious claim and on a non-religious claim. It’s an epistemological position, not really a political position.

I do agree that for 99 per cent of our debates, we don’t get to that final buck-stopping foundation, and religious statements can be investigated, criticised and argued just the way secular statements can. Religious



statements and secular statements are more analogous than people think. But I also want to add that even though most people don't question their beliefs all the way down, and it's not possible for us to make all the background assumptions transparent at any one time, I do believe that everything is up for grabs so to speak. It's not really credible to think there are views that are, in principle, unquestionable.

**Ron:** I agree with all of that, so I would have to qualify my answer in that direction. I shouldn't have said that everybody, in principle, has something unexamined that's impossible to be examined. I agree with the claim that anything, in principle, can be examined, though not everything all at once. That's really a sound, philosophical position, because psychologically you just can't be that sceptical about what you're standing on. A beneficial feature of modernity is that we've become more critical and we do explore more and don't accept things simply on "blind faith." As Charles Taylor suggests, there are positive aspects to what he calls our "age of authenticity," a time when more and more of us feel compelled to put things through a personal, critical grid and see how they sit with us. We do that a lot more than previous Western societies have done.

It's this self-critical process that a lot of these political philosophers value, through which implicit, unacknowledged, or tacit assumptions are made explicit and available for discussion – again, not everything all at once. So I agree that this process happens all the time. For me, it's important for religious people to think about this possibility, because I'm always trying to advance or promote what I call "critical faith," which is a faith that's able to undertake this effort as part of its orientation.

*Despite the rejection of welcoming religious language into the public sphere, we see religious ideas from many sources leaking into dialogue between people, in public, around the table – native spiritual ideas, words like "karma," and so on. There seems to be a public will to include such speech despite our presumed*

*secularism.*

**Simone:** If you look at the big picture, secularism arose out of a particular historical context, which was the Wars of Religion in Europe. Liberalism comes out of the ashes of that war and religious toleration is the foundation or rock of liberalism, so the push for secularism was tied to how politically destructive were these religious arguments. But now we live in a different world.

It was true in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries that there was a certain type of religious pluralism represented by the growing versions of Protestantism on the one hand and the Catholic Church on the other. But now we have a religious pluralism that's much broader, which includes not just the Abrahamic traditions but also Buddhists, native Americans, native Canadians and all sorts of different kinds of things. Within the West these contemporary religious traditions are less tied to political power than the clashing religions of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. We still have to deal with religious pluralism and the danger of majority religions, without realising it, imposing their views on minorities. We have to navigate religious pluralism and be a little vigilant about the way religion enters the public sphere, but we don't have to be so worried that it's going to lead to religious wars in western democracies, so we don't need the same secularist watchdogs on what we do. But I do think there's room for the potential for conflict around religious differences and religious pluralism – look at Switzerland banning minarets. These are cultural/religious questions of accommodation and freedom of religion. They're still there, and they're tied to the language we use.

**Ron:** We might not have to worry about a religious war, but we definitely have to worry about

polarisation, and violence that can emerge from that. One of the other things you're noticing, though, is something Taylor tries to describe in *A Secular Age*. There he tells a completely different narrative of secularisation than the one many Westerners have become accustomed to. In a broad way, he agrees that from 1500 to 2000 Western civilisation moved from a period in which not believing in God wasn't an option or even thinkable to a point where, even if you are a religious fundamentalist, you recognise that this is in part a choice and that there are several other spiritual options out there. So instead of seeing a decline in religion and spirituality over this period, Taylor sees people's

*"We have a religious pluralism that includes not just the Abrahamic traditions but also Buddhists, native Americans, native Canadians and all sorts of different kinds of things." – SIMONE CHAMBERS*

spiritual lives become less corporate and more individualised, and as a result there is a proliferation rather than a narrowing of livable spiritual options. In the context of our age of authenticity, then, you find more people experimenting with this plurality of religious options, and that is why you notice the different religious terms and insights you mention now finding their way into public discourse.

The one thing Taylor insists on is that this is just the way it is. This proliferation of spiritual options along with the popular emergence of the value of authenticity are not developments simply to be lamented or praised; rather we have to realise this is where we are. ●

*Simone Chambers is Professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto. Ron Kuipers is Associate Professor of Philosophy of Religion at ICS.*

# Social Justice and Human Rights Conference Wrap-up

ACADEMICS AND NON-ACADEMICS SHARE IN THE SUCCESS OF THE LATEST CPRSE CONFERENCE



**A**s the first full academic year that the Centre for Philosophy, Religion and Social Ethics had been in existence drew to a close, CPRSE was in full swing, co-hosting the Social Justice and Human Rights confer-

ence *Forever be at Odds?*”

Looking at the breadth and depth of the presenters and panellists who took part, it’s no surprise the Centre reached its registration target. Opening morning lectures by the two keynote speakers Nicholas Wolterstorff

and Melissa Williams gave a good touchstone for the days’ discussions. Following those discussions were panels on issues such as children’s rights, aboriginal rights,

disability rights, women’s rights, the environment, poverty and immigration. Other speakers presented on such topics as different understandings of justice, forgiveness and rights, and on the tension between justice and other norms. A plenary panel on the first day with speakers Abdulaziz Sachedina, Michael Stroh and Lois Wilson explored justice and rights talk in an inter-religious context among the three Abrahamic faiths. On the second day, there was a practitioners’ networking session

that brought together advocates from the many different justice and rights-oriented groups at the conference to encourage possibilities for co-ordinated efforts.

The conference was an ambitious undertaking. It required a significant amount of planning – not to mention finding enough funding to make it happen – and co-ordination to bring presenters and participants from across Canada and the United States together in an environment designed to foster discussion among people of different backgrounds. The conference was co-sponsored by Emmanuel College and received funding from the Priscilla and Stanford Reid Trust as well as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Since the topic is such a vital one for society today, a video that combines elements of the conference as well as discussions of social justice and human rights is being produced and will be available soon – one more way to continue the work of the conference.

Events like this are important occasions for professional development and networking for academics and practitioners. But for a conference to have a lasting positive impact, it must go beyond those goals. It must foster collective development, understanding and right action within and across communities. The Social Justice and Human Rights conference did just that. As one participant put it: “The concept of the conference was a significant one, i.e. to construct a conference that was interfaith, interdisciplinary and brought together both theorists and practitioners. I also found that the net effect of the conference was a remarkable feeling of hope despite the layers of complexity added to the various issues raised by the conscious interdisciplinarity of the conference.”

The Centre is already hard at work planning its next projects, and we’re grateful to all those who worked to plan and run this conference, which was such a resounding success. ●

*Allyson Carr is Associate Director for the Centre for Philosophy, Religion and Social Ethics*

*“The concept of the conference was a significant one, i.e. to construct a conference that was interfaith, interdisciplinary and brought together both theorists and practitioners.”*

ence. The event brought together a wide range of people: advocates for justice, aid workers, academics, judges, lawyers, pastors and anyone else interested in the topic. The event stretched over two days in late April and included a public lecture on the first evening by one of the keynote speakers – renowned Reformed scholar Nicholas Wolterstorff. The conference reached its goal of 150 registrants, and an additional 93 people registered for the evening public lecture, “Must Love and Jus-

# 2012 Convocation



*Samson Makhado*



*Fred Reinders*

On May 12, the ICS community gathered to recognize and celebrate the academic achievements of nine of its junior members. Master of Worldview Studies degrees were conferred upon Bill Dyck, Chung Yan Lau and John-Harmen Valk; Master of Arts to Nathan Bonney, Kevin Huinink and Jeff Morrissey; and conjoint PhD (ICS/VU) to Michael DeMoor and Peter Lok. Allyson Carr became the first doctoral candidate to graduate with our “ICS-only” PhD. Samson Makhado (MWS 1994) and Fred Reinders (former Chair of the ICS Board of Trustees) received Honorary Doctorates. Samson and Fred also gave convocation addresses titled “The Need of Defining the Identity, Role and Status of Christianity in Africa” and “ARE YOU SERIOUS?” respectively. It was a wonderful afternoon of celebration. ●

## UPCOMING EVENTS

The 2012 Art Talks! is coming quickly, and this year's topic is sure to grab your imagination – because this time the topic *is* the imagination. The event will take place in the Isabel Bader Theatre at Victoria University on Oct. 13, 2012. It will include a lecture and discussion about the imagination as well as a dramatic performance of several short plays and poems from the 66 Books Project, which refers to the 66 books of

## SATURDAY | OCTOBER 13

the Bible. The project was initiated by the London-based Bush Theatre in response to the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible translation. The dramatic performance and other lectures and panels at Art Talks! all intend to get a conversation going around re-envisioning the role of the arts and imagination in philosophy and religion. In addition to the performances, scholar Richard Kearney will give a public lecture tentatively titled “Narrative Imagination and

## ART TALKS!

Catharsis.” Kearney will build on his suggestion that an ethically centred narrative imagination urges us to continue our involvement with, and reinterpretation of, larger narratives like those in the biblical account. It's narratives such as these that have historically called us to re-imagine ourselves. We hope you will come and be part of this engagement between philosophy, religion and imagination.

# Membership Form



Perspective can now be viewed online. See [perspective.icscanada.edu](http://perspective.icscanada.edu)

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Thank you.

**Reminder** to all ICS members to renew their membership for voting at the 2012 AGM scheduled for November 2012.

You can renew online at [www.icscanada.edu/support](http://www.icscanada.edu/support) or by completing and returning the membership form on the left with your cheque or credit card information to ICS (for Canadian members) or FICS (for US members).

*Thank you for your supporting this vital work of equipping scholars and leaders who will graduate and take up leadership across North America and the world — in universities, churches, and social agencies.*

*Perspective is the newsletter of the*

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We invite questions, comments, story ideas, book and film reviews, as well as any general feedback you may have on *Perspective*. Please email the editorial team at [perspective-editor@icscanada.edu](mailto:perspective-editor@icscanada.edu).

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*Editor:* Ronnie Shuker  
*Contributors:* Allyson Carr, Simone Chambers, Daryl Kinsman, Ron Kuipers  
*Design:* Kevin van der Leek Design Inc.  
*Printing:* United Graphics

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*Affiliate member of the  
Toronto School of Theology  
at the University of Toronto*

Publication mail  
Agreement no. 105244  
Rg. No. 2091  
ISSN 0847-0324

Channel 229 News is a twice-monthly source of news related to ICS.

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