

perspective



J U N I O R   M E M B E R   I S S U E

*Institute for Christian Studies*

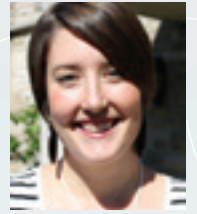
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“What is truth?”





*Héctor*  
*Acero-Ferrer* MA



*Ruth*  
*Bott* MA

# Junior Member

## 4.

### Editorial

**O**bscurity in academic conversations, particularly those that concern philosophy and theology, is an enduring challenge. For my own part, ignorance, fear, and pride tempt me to hide behind academic jargon. Obscurity and insecurity make it difficult to demonstrate the value of the philosophical and theological work happening at ICS. Unless we remember those we intend to serve, the ones we are called to love, our neighbours, the near and the distant, all of this work is in vain.

In that spirit we Junior Members at the Institute, are excited to share ideas regarding truth, culture, and the future of society in an approachable manner, one that (hopefully) speaks to those outside our small group of colleagues. In this edition of *Perspective*, you'll find a group of young scholars aspiring to live up to the tradition of ICS, a tradition characterized by reformational giants, such as Kuyper, by the work of past and present ICS members, and by the lifspring of a community, to which you—the reader—also belong.

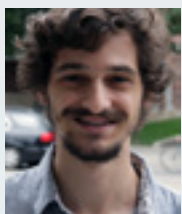
While researching for this edition we were pleased to discover *Vanguard* and the Wedge Publishing Foundation in the archives. I hope our work maintains the feisty and constructive spirit found in those publications.

**CALEB RATZLAFF** lives in St. Catharines, Ontario with his wife and 8 month old son.

### SOME TRUTHS ABOUT CHRISTIAN PRAYER

**ETHAN VAN DER LEEK** is currently in the second year of the MA program. He received his BA in English from The King's University in Edmonton and has come to ICS with a desire to deepen the rich education which began at King's. Ethan also has an interest in pastoral ministry and has served as a pastoral intern in a number of congregations: Christian Reformed in British Columbia, Anglican in Yukon, and Mennonite in Ontario. His current research examines the relationship between Christian theology and contemporary philosophy with an eye to how such a relationship can serve the church.





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Dettloff MA



Josh  
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Ben  
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# 5. 6. 13. mber Issue

## CYNICS IN THE FACE OF APOCALYPSE

**DEAN DETTLOFF**, 24, is from Michigan, where he studied at Cornerstone University in Grand Rapids, and now lives in Toronto with his wife, Emily, and cat, Nona. He is currently in his second year of the MA program at ICS. Besides studying, he has a keen interest in comic books and an amateur interest in marine life. Upon completing his program, he intends to create, with friends, an alternative adult-education program in Michigan and possibly pursue hospital chaplaincy.

## EVOLUTION: FROM SCIENTIFIC TO RELIGIOUS DEBATE

**JOSEPH KIRBY**, 33, is in his 5th year of the PhD program at ICS. Hailing originally from Ottawa, he graduated with a BA in Humanities from Carleton University and then went to Japan for two years to study Japanese history. After this, he returned to Canada to get his MA in philosophy at the University of Toronto – whereupon he discovered ICS, a school that left such a good impression on him that he decided to do his PhD there. When he completes his studies, he would like to become a philosophy professor.

## WHEN THE FAITHFUL MEET THE WRONGED

**HÉCTOR ACERO-FERRER** is currently in the second year of the MA program and works as a research assistant for the *Centre for Philosophy, Religion and Social Ethics*. Originally from Colombia, Héctor holds a Master of Divinity and a Bachelor of Sacred Theology from the *Toronto School of Theology, Regis College*. Parallel to his studies, Héctor has worked for several non-profit, faith-based organizations dedicated to social justice and education including, *Fontbonne Ministries*, *Scarboro Foreign Missions*, and the *Newman Centre Catholic Mission*. Héctor's research interests include philosophy of language, the intersection of faith and society, and current trends in Latin American theology.

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# Some Truths about Christian Prayer

by ETHAN  
VAN DER LEEK

**P**rayer is the posture of a decentred self,” says contemporary philosopher Merold Westphal. Though short, it is certainly a complex phrase, and questions quickly emerge: What is a “self”? And how is it “decentred” by a “posture” of prayer? Is this an appropriate way to describe what takes place in prayer? I think our desire to call ourselves authentic Christians demands an engagement with these questions.

his followers to begin by centering their prayer *outside* of themselves: “hallowed be *your* name. *Your* kingdom come. *Your* will be done.” Asking for our daily bread and for forgiveness of sins in the Lord’s Prayer comes only in the context of opening ourselves to the worship of God, to God’s kingdom, and God’s will.

So surely for Jesus prayer was not only about speaking; it was about *listening*. The gospels tell us that Jesus often stole away to lonely places to pray, and this was not primarily in order to *speak*, but to *listen* and be open to the life of the Father within his body, mind, and emotions, to be decentred in a posture that embraces and accepts our prior belonging to God. Jesus Christ

is not isolated, but belongs to his Father in heaven and to his Father’s good creation.

Such an acknowledgement of belonging to God is not abstract; it does not seek to pull us away from our history, from creation, and from the particularities and contingencies of our experience. To believe that a relationship with God pulls us away from these things is to again fall into the trap of isolating ourselves; there is no listening here, only worshipping a God of our own creation and setting ourselves apart from our reality as creatures who exist in a physical and temporal world. To belong to the Father is to belong to a good creation. Encountering God is to also encounter the world, for that is how God speaks to and creates relationship with human creatures, through, though not restricted by, the particular history and context in which we find ourselves.

This does not mean that we

should engage the world naively or uncritically. By finding ourselves in a porous relationship with God and God’s good creation we may take on a critical edge of resistance to oppression and injustice, just as God through Moses challenges the oppressive and tyrannically autonomous power of Pharaoh over the Israelites in Egypt, or through Jesus challenges the power of law and death in teachings, healings, and the resurrection. But we do not critique these instances of humans resisting relationship with God from our own self-founded power. Instead, we critique them from a posture of prayerful decentredness, challenging the Pharaohs of our own world to surrender their desire for self-founding and enter into creative friendship with God.

Though prayerful listening is not anti-intellectual, it is surely pre-intellectual or perhaps hyper-intellectual; the intellect is brought to limitation or frustration as we let go of the critical tools of analysis and critique, which are often a scholar’s instinctive way of encountering God and creation. If we are humble enough to release those critical tools from time to time, I suspect we may be surprised at the ways in which the spirit of the risen Christ emerges in our scholarship, in our lives, and in our world. ●

*“Encountering God is to also encounter the world, for that is how God speaks to and creates relationship with human creatures, through, though not restricted by, the particular history and context in which we find ourselves.”*

Among many other things, Jesus revealed to the world fresh ways to pray; and so to imitate Christ is (again, among other things) to attempt to *understand* and *experience* such prayer for ourselves.

Philosopher Paul Ricoeur once wrote that “listening excludes founding oneself.” It is this notion of *listening* that is one of the keys to understanding prayer for Jesus and also for us. Both Westphal and Ricoeur are illustrating a conception of selfhood that does not centre on an isolated individual. To be sure, we can *try* to be self-sufficient or absolutely autonomous creatures, but that is not the way of Jesus. These claims about listening, prayer, and decentredness are making a certain normative statement, suggesting a possibility for how we *ought* to understand and discover God and ourselves through prayer.

When Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, we should notice he invites

# Cynics in the Face of Apocalypse

In 1983, philosopher Peter Sloterdijk published *Critique of Cynical Reason*, which became a bestseller in Germany. Contrary to the typical picture offered by Critical Theory, which suggests society is blinded by ideology and average individuals are simply unenlightened, Sloterdijk posits that culture is not plagued by ignorance but cynicism. “Cynicism,” writes Sloterdijk, “is *enlightened false consciousness*. . . . It has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it has not, and probably was not able to, put them into practice. Well-off and miserable at the same time, this consciousness no longer feels affected by any critique of ideology; its falseness is already reflexively buffered” (5).

Contrary to the narrative of Critical Theory, then, solving society’s ills will not come from better education, or explaining to workers their situation, or making provocative art. The cynic already knows that something is deeply wrong with the world, and that each step is a compromise. As Slavoj Žižek writes, “The most elementary definition of ideology is probably the well-known phrase from Marx’s *Capital*. . . ‘they do not know it, but they are doing it’ . . . . The formula, as proposed by Sloterdijk, would then be: ‘they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it,’” (*The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 28).

Cynicism poses a particular problem for Christian apocalypse, an event not unlike the unveiling of ideology critique. Indeed, the book of Revelation can be read as an ancient form of ideology critique, revealing to early Christians the injustices of Rome. More broadly, *apocalypsis* (literally, “un-covering”) reveals something otherwise hidden from everyday life, whether it be exposing power structures or forecasting impending doom or future healing.

Cynicism, however, threatens to reduce these revelations to impotent

facts, rendering any political or existential change impossible. This is especially evident in Western societies saturated with the Christian story. Exposing the realities of global capitalism or predicting the end of the world, whether by divine fire or human negligence, is usually met with a frown and a shrug.

To combat modern cynicism, Sloterdijk suggests returning to the figure of Diogenes, emblematic of the ancient philosophical school called “*kynicism*.” While Plato ran an academy of the mind, elevating humans to the world of airy forms through reason, *Diogenēs* (literally “dog-like”) took baths in the middle of town and requested Alexander the Great to stop blocking his shade. Diogenes’ kynicism contrasts bodily wisdom to theoretical insight, challenging structures not by unveiling their hidden injustices but by embracing one’s embodied life over which no authority has ultimate power. Kynicism does not take itself too seriously; Diogenes is known for his satirical laughter in the face of authority.

Kynical individuals in an age of cynicism challenge a paralyzed (perhaps by guilt or seemingly insurmountable odds) and politically impotent (by being immune to the full weight of apocalypse and critique) knowledge with a free, subversive, alternative activity. The mistake of ideology critique, according to Sloterdijk, is assuming the battle must be fought within the mind. Instead, he suggests, consciousness is no longer in need of enlightenment. Rather, the fires of action need to be kindled; in religious terms, one needs



a change of heart.

Diogenes is a potent foil for modern cynicism, but he is not the only ancient candidate for body-wise replies. Consider the prophets, whose writings contain such events as Ezekiel’s theatre of critique or Isaiah’s naked wandering (Isa. 20:1-6). When God speaks to the Israelites, it is done not through arduous treatises on the nature of capital (useful as those are) but radical bodily messengers. The very revelation of Jesus is God’s Incarnation, literally God’s becoming-bodily.

In Jesus the kynical impulse, being in-touch with one’s fleshy life as well as being at home in the world, is obvious. Both Diogenes and Jesus take cues from wild animals to embody a self uncontainable by political authority (Sloterdijk, 162). Ascetics and mystics, too, seem to employ a religious kynicism (281), leading to monastic resistance to empire and authority in the early church and mystic resistance in medieval Europe.

Kynical threads in Christianity, despite being heartily spun directly from Jesus and before, are clearly minority threads. In an age of cynicism, however, picking up these threads once again and continuing to weave them is crucial. Without an embodied faith, one not only loses a deeply Hebraic and Christian disposition, but the revolutionary apocalypses revealed in history and in personal life might as well have stayed covered up. ●

by DEAN  
DETTLOFF

# Evolution: From Scientific to Religious Debate

by JOSEPH  
KIRBY

In the final pages of the 1984 edition of *Man's Search for Meaning*, holocaust survivor Victor Frankl describes life in the concentration camps in terms of two bifurcating spiritual possibilities:

Sigmund Freud once asserted, "Let one attempt to expose a number of the most diverse people uniformly to hunger. With the increase of the imperative urge of hunger all individual differences will blur, and in their stead will appear the uniform expression of the one unstilled urge." Thank heaven, Sigmund Freud was spared knowing the concentration camps from the inside. His subjects lay on a couch designed in the plush style of Victorian culture, not in the filth of Auschwitz. There, the "indi-

vidual differences" did not "blur" but, on the contrary, people became more different: people unmasked themselves, both the swine and the saints. And today you need no longer hesitate to use the word "saints": think of Father Maximilian Kolbe who was starved and finally murdered by an injection of carbolic acid at Auschwitz and who in 1983 was canonized.

the saintly people Frankl remembers, those "who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread." In fact, although human beings are always faced with this choice, the final stakes only become clear at the extreme edges of suffering. For those of us who live within the veil, the choice will manifest not as a direct and unbearable choice, in the face of death, between swine and saint, but as a choice between which account of the edges we are generally going to place our bets on: Freud's or Frankl's. Religion, in this context, would be a mode of speech trying to help us choose the latter option, the divine path, Frankl's understanding, to freely choose freedom over necessity.

In *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard cites a passage from Plato's

*Phaedrus* to describe what he calls "The Absolute Paradox," the frontier to which thinking cannot help but arrive but also cannot possibly solve: "Am I a beast more complicated and savage than Typhon [the king of monsters], or am I a tamer, simpler animal with a share in a divine and gentle nature" (*Phaedrus*, 230a). In the original context, Socrates posed the Paradox as part of an argument for why he has no time to waste trying to refute ancient stories in terms of the latest scientific discoveries. In my short essay, "Evolution and Emergence: Freedom and Paradox on a Saturated Beach," on Ground Motive, I make a similar argument with regard to the theory of evolution and its relationship to religion: both sides of the contemporary debate tend to agree that the theory of evolution solves the Absolute Paradox in favour of the beast, that evolution proves Freud's vision over Frankl's. I argue that this point of agreement is a mistake. The theory

of evolution does not prove the beast. Unfortunately, it has been hijacked by a culture that has made the wrong choice in the face of the Paradox, as a way of asserting that there was never a choice to be made, that freedom was always nothing more than a pious illusion. In my essay, I present a way to accept both the theory of evolution and the idea that humans remain as they have always been, free to choose how they will become no matter how terrible the circumstances. ●

Read Joe's article "Evolution or Emergence: Freedom and Paradox on a Saturated Beach" online in Ground Motive – [goo.gl/o16jdi](http://goo.gl/o16jdi)

*"The theory of evolution does not prove the beast."*

vidual differences" did not "blur" but, on the contrary, people became more different: people unmasked themselves, both the swine and the saints. And today you need no longer hesitate to use the word "saints": think of Father Maximilian Kolbe who was starved and finally murdered by an injection of carbolic acid at Auschwitz and who in 1983 was canonized.

Freud and Frankl both agree that beyond the veil of civilization, law, abundance, human beings are forced to become what they "really" are. The two men differ, however, in what they see this "reality" as being. Freud asserts that when the veil of civilization is removed, human beings become amoral beasts concerned only with their own survival. Frankl, by contrast, asserts that at the limits of hardship, beyond the protection of law and custom, human beings are faced with a choice: they can either become the amoral beasts that Freud anticipates, or they can become like



## BLOGROLL

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A RELIGIOUS GROUND MOTIVE HAS "A CENTRAL COMMUNAL CHARACTER AND GIVES EXPRESSION TO A COMMON SPIRIT... IT LIES AT THE FOUNDATION OF A COMMUNITY OF THOUGHT, INSOFAR AS IT GUARANTEES ... MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING EVEN BETWEEN PHILOSOPHICAL TRENDS WHICH VEHEMENTLY COMBAT EACH OTHER."

— HERMAN DOOYEWEERD, 1961



### LOVE AND JUSTICE: OPPOSITES OR OTHERWISE? [07 AUG 2014]

DEAN DETLOFF, *Junior Member*

● In this essay, Dean Detloff cogently summarizes Paul Ricoeur's dialectic of love and justice. Ricoeur, says Detloff, sets them on a spectrum which both opposes love to justice and places them on equal footing. But Detloff takes up Søren Kierkegaard to argue that this should not be so. In philosophical terms, love both precedes justice and transcends equal distribution. Thus, it is love that should have revolutionary priority in Christian thinking – and justice that follows from it.



### DISABILITY THEOLOGY: WHEN MIRACLES ARE PART OF THE PROBLEM: A GUEST POST BY CHARIS ST. PIERRE [08 JUL 2014]

CHARIS ST. PIERRE, *Administrator, Anglican Diocese of Edmonton*

● Charis St. Pierre takes the image of a wounded, risen Christ as a serious admonition to those who insist on "fixing" the disabled. Writing viscerally from experience and astutely from Scripture, St. Pierre argues that the perfection of Christ just might include those we are tempted to heal today. And if that is so, then those we call disabled may hope for a society that does not, through ignorance or neglect, continue to disable them.



### CELEBRATING LIMITATION [26 FEB 2014]

SHANNON HOFF, *Senior Member*

● A family Christmas tradition spurs Shannon Hoff to thoughtfully employ Hegel's views on freedom. Openness and focus form a fundamental dialectic in human experience; we may follow Hegel in considering the tension between opportunity and action or the universal and the particular. Because of this structure of living, freedom is only sometimes being able to do anything we want. More often, as we mature, we instead find freedom in doing one thing we want very well.



### TRADING HELL FOR HOPE: AN INTERVIEW WITH NICHOLAS ANSELL [07 FEB 2014]

NICHOLAS ANSELL, *Senior Member*

● In a candid interview with Ground Motive, Professor Ansell discusses his newest book, *The Annihilation of Hell*. In it, he proposes that Hell has a different purpose than we commonly believe. Rather than being the ultimate punishment, Hell is instead a penultimate "judgment unto salvation." Deftly reflecting on – and critiquing – the theologian Jurgen Moltmann, as well as closely reading texts from Genesis, Isaiah and Revelation, Ansell shows that his alternative is entirely in keeping with both the Bible and classical Christian hope.



### THE SEARCH FOR COLOMBIAN "Q": DISCOVERING THE HIDDEN SOURCE OF A SPIRITUALITY OF HOPE [04 DEC 2013]

HECTOR ACERO-FERRER, *Junior Member*

● Hector Acero-Ferrer shares a refreshing perspective on the surprisingly non-Christian sources of the very Christian faith of his native Colombia. Far from solely taking their cues from Roman Catholicism, Colombians also incorporate "radical Christian theologies, different forms of mystic spirituality, and an ongoing, insistent call to social transformation." And they have developed their own traditions emphasizing motherhood, the power of ritual, and building God's kingdom. Regardless of ethnic background or affiliation, Colombians continue a rich, fluid, and vital interchange about their Christian faith.

# Truth and Goodness Intersect

"PHILOSOPHY BEGINS WITH THE DEMAND THAT TRUTH AND GOODNESS COINCIDE."

—SUSAN NEIMAN, *EVIL IN MODERN THOUGHT*



by LAMBERT  
ZUIDERVAART

Susan Neiman's book tells a gripping new story about how modern philosophy took shape. Philosophers usually say questions about knowledge have driven philosophy from Descartes onward: What can we know? How can we know it? How certain can we be about what we claim to know? Granted, worries about knowledge are significant in the history of modern philosophy, Neiman says. Yet the larger story—

remember that these distinct questions belong together. We cannot separate true knowledge from right action and proper hope. If action and hope are interlaced ways to resist evil and pursue what is good, then we can say that, at bottom, truth and goodness intersect.

Surprisingly, this understanding of philosophy resonates with what Jesus says about himself when Thomas asks, We don't know where you're going, so how can we know

the way? Jesus replies: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6a). In other words, to truly know me is to follow me in hope—Thomas, you know the

way. Here, too, truth and goodness intersect, not in a professional philosophy, but in a true way of life.

Most philosophers today, including many Christians, would think Jesus' using the word "truth" to describe himself has little to do with "truth" as philosophers define it. They might argue long and hard about how to define truth and why truth is important. But they would regard Jesus' use of "truth" as irrelevant to their debates. Many of these same philosophers tell the standard story about modern philosophy, where questions about knowledge predominate—even philosophers who reject a preoccupation with knowledge. If, however, truth and goodness intersect, then the words of Jesus might be relevant to philosophical debates about truth.

For Jesus suggests that the truth of knowledge is intimately interwoven with right action and proper hope. To know the truth, we must walk on the right path and head in the promised direction.

It is one thing to say Jesus' words might be relevant and quite another to show in detail what this would imply for debates about truth in contemporary philosophy. Showing this is a provocative challenge for reformational scholars today, a challenge my colleagues and I took up in our *Truth Matters* book, and one I will continue to address in a new book on the idea of truth.

The challenge has two sides. One side has to do with what truth is. For the most part, contemporary philosophers agree that truth is propositional: truth in the strict sense is something only propositions or assertions can have. They disagree about what makes a proposition true and how to understand such truth. Simplifying, one can say that a proposition is the content of a declarative sentence. For example, when I say or write "The cat is on the mat" (a standard example in these discussions), I assert the proposition that the cat is on the mat. Is this proposition true or false? Why? How?

This common restriction of truth to propositions limits what can count as true knowledge. The restriction makes it extremely difficult to explain how the arts can be ways of truly knowing ourselves and the world we inhabit, as I have argued in my book *Artistic Truth*. It encourages very narrow views about the truth of religious experience and of sacred scriptures, as we can see in debates about how to interpret the first three chapters of Genesis. It also makes the words of Jesus about himself seem irrelevant for a philosophical theory of truth: since Jesus is not a proposition, when he calls himself "the truth," his usage of "truth" appears

*Like goodness, truth has been a central topic of Western philosophy throughout its history. So it might puzzle you to learn that a number of prominent contemporary philosophers doubt the importance of truth.*

the story that undergirds philosophy's epistemological concerns—is a modern struggle to come to terms with evil: Why do people suffer? Why do they inflict suffering on others? How can we make sense of a world where suffering is rampant? Moreover, such questions, and closely related ones about the meaning of life and our place in the universe, have motivated philosophy from the very beginning. Contemporary philosophy neglects them to its own detriment.

This suggests, in turn, that knowledge, conduct, and imagination have closer connections than the standard story allows. We might, like Kant, distinguish three central questions in philosophy: What can we know? What must we do? What may we hope? But we should





to fall outside the scope of truth as philosophers define it.

The other side to our challenge concerns whether and why truth is important. Like goodness, truth has been a central topic of Western philosophy throughout its history. So it might puzzle you to learn that a number of prominent contemporary philosophers doubt the importance of truth. They have various reasons for this. Some think claims about truth are simply a cover for power struggles. Others assert that having true beliefs can lead to worse consequences than not having them or having false beliefs. Still others claim that calling a proposition true simply means that we consider it justifiable in a specific context. In any case, truth is not what it was cracked up to be, and philosophers should get over their traditional preoccupation with truth.

Needless to say, this contemporary tendency to deflate the value of truth poses a challenge for anyone who thinks truth and goodness intersect.

It also reflects and reinforces broader trends in Western society, where people increasingly doubt whether it is either possible or necessary to pursue truth. Perhaps, for example, “truthiness” (the appearance of truth) is all we need. The long-term practical fall-out of such skepticism about the value of truth is not hard to foresee: scientists and other scholars will not need to worry whether their theories and findings are true; citizens will not expect their political leaders to tell the truth; and truth will not be an important consideration in the media and in our courts of law.

Contemporary skepticism about the value of truth feeds on the restriction of truth to propositions. By detaching questions of truth from questions of goodness, and by narrowing the scope of truth to what can be stated in propositional form, philosophers have turned the concept of truth into such thin gruel that it can no longer nourish substantive concerns. Why, then, would truth be important?

The only viable alternative, it seems to me, is to propose a much more robust idea of truth, one in which the correctness of propositions is just one mode of truth, albeit an important one, and in which questions of truth intersect questions of goodness. In the end, truth is not simply something we can state but something we inhabit and live out. It is in doing the truth—in being true to our word, being true to others, and truly doing what love requires—that we know what is true, including what is propositionally true.

Reformational philosophers have always aimed to align their theories with “the way, and the truth, and the life.” We also have wanted to bring about an “inner reformation” of scholarship, in conversation with the leading thinkers of our time. To do both of these with respect to the idea of truth is a provocative challenge of our age. We need to show in convincing detail that truth and goodness intersect. ●

*Ecce Homo  
(Behold the  
Man) by  
Antonio Ciseri*

# Welcome, President Bloomberg



by HARRY  
FERNHOUT  
Past President,  
1989–2005

**A**lthough Doug Bloomberg and I were both students at the Institute for Christian Studies in the mid-70s, I first ‘met’ him in the pages of his University of Sydney doctoral thesis, after I came to share his interest in philosophy of Education. It was a heavy tome with an even weightier title: *The Development of Curriculum with Relation to the Philosophy of the Cosmological Idea*. In plain language, Doug’s thesis explored the implications, for Education and Christian schooling, of the branch of Christian philosophy that has animated ICS since its founding. This project signaled not only Doug’s capacity for serious Christian reflection, but also marked him as a potential candidate for a faculty position at ICS. Little did I know that 20 years later I would have the privilege of welcoming Doug to ICS to fill the vacancy in Philosophy of Education created by my move into the president’s office.

What stands out in my experience of Doug over the years is his unwavering commitment to the project of developing an integrally Christian understanding of education or, in his words, “how schools might be restructured to better reflect God’s purposes for our lives.” How else do you explain his willingness, supported by Heather, to uproot from family and familiar surroundings in Australia to come to ICS, first as a visiting professor with few guarantees of a secure position? Doug has applied his talents to his project with dogged determination, and God has blessed his efforts richly, as his important books and other publications attest.

Another outstanding feature of Doug’s career is his gravitation to positions of institutional leadership. At Mount Evelyn Christian School he became a vice-principal. At the National Institute for Christian Education he served as Principal and developed a masters-level dis-

stance-based degree program, before distance learning became a ‘big thing’. At ICS his academic leadership was recognized in his appointment, in 2011, as Academic Dean. In the university world “administration” is often regarded as a necessary nuisance. Academics who recognize that “administration” is actually “educational leadership” are few and far between. Doug Bloomberg is such an academic; his appointment as ICS President is fully consistent with the trajectory of his career and capitalizes on the gifts recognized by various institutions along the way.

Doug describes ICS as his “spiritual home” because it “opened the Bible... as the good news of Christ’s comprehensive and radical sacrifice and rule.” It is fitting that this dedicated educational leader has now become the chief steward of his spiritual home. May God richly prosper ICS under Doug’s leadership and enable it to flourish. ●





## Faculty Spotlight: Nik Ansell

**N**ik Ansell's teaching and research focus on several areas of systematic and biblical theology, notably Christology, eschatology, Old Testament wisdom thinking, and the theology of gender. He has an ongoing interest in the phenomenology of revelation and "the spirituality of existence."

Nik is a theologian who works at the interface between biblical studies, systematic theology, and philosophical theology. This interdisciplinary orientation is evident in *The Annihilation of Hell: Universal Salvation and the Redemption of Time in the Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*, published at the end of 2013 by Paternoster in Europe and Cascade in North America. In his foreword, Moltmann refers to this work as "far-reaching and profound."

In recent years, Nik has developed the biblical studies side of his work, giving several papers at Society of Biblical Literature meetings on intertextuality in the Pentateuch and on OT sapiential (wisdom) motifs in Proverbs and Genesis. His work has been accepted for publication in two books: "This Is Her Body . . . Judges 19 as Test of Discernment" in *Tamar's Tears: Evangelical Engagements with Feminist Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed. Andrew Sloane (Pickwick, 2012), 112–70 and "For the Love of Wisdom: Scripture, Philosophy, and the Relativization of Order," an in-depth exploration of Proverbs 30:18–20, forthcoming in a collection of essays from the 2011 VU conference on creation order. Together with several of his SBL presentations, these studies will form part of a book on the implications of biblical wisdom thinking that will extend Nik's research into the NT.

In the 2014–15 academic year, Nik will be teaching the ICS Biblical Foundations course for the tenth time! In addition to "God/Sex/



Word/Flesh: Gender, Theology, and the Body," which develops motifs explored in his first book, *The Woman Will Overcome the Warrior: A Dialogue with the Christian/Feminist Theology of Rosemary Radford Ruether* (University Press of America, 1994), Nik will also be offering a new course: "Birthpangs of the New Creation: Judgment unto Salvation in the Book of Revelation." ●

*Nik Ansell, Assistant Professor of Theology, BA (Hons) (University of Bristol), MPhil (Institute for Christian Studies), PhD (VU University, Amsterdam). Nik is currently developing "Continuing Ed/ge," an innovative continuing education program in biblical studies, to be introduced during the winter semester.*



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# Revisiting Bathsheba and David: A Recuperative reading with Julia Kristeva

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CONGRATULATORY COMMENTS ON DIANNE BERGSMA'S  
DOCTORAL THESIS FROM MENTOR JIM OLTHUIS



by JIM  
OLTHUIS

**D**ianne's thesis is not the typical philosophical study comparing, contrasting, evaluating solutions to certain theoretic problems. Rather, in the conviction that philosophy is a spiritual exercise, a way of life, Dianne set out to explore the possible help the conceptual lenses of feminist philosopher-psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva could offer in revisiting the Biblical story of Bathsheba and David. Her goal was to discover if, employing Kristevan ideas, new understandings of an old biblical story would shed some light and insight on our efforts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to be women and men of integrity.

Two Kristevan ideas in particular were of great benefit in her re-reading of the story of Bathsheba and David. First, Kristeva's recognition that the semiotic is as fundamental

to language as the symbolic. That is, words do not only denote, identify, and distinguish conceptually, but resonate with affect, drives, and feeling, creating an ambience, a mood. Words are suggestive, allusive, evocative, reproving and censoring, creating an atmosphere often as much by what is not said as by what is said.

Second, Kristeva's emphasis on the importance, in reading, of bearing ethical witness to the unethical, and the imperative need for a her-ethics, or herethics, which goes beyond and through law to Love. The overarching need for an ethics of love is crucial because, even today, just as in the time of Bathsheba, an ethics based on law is often detrimental to women. Just as women in the biblical narrative were silenced, raped, dishonored, their subjectivity disregarded, their voices silenced, so even today sexual violation as a weapon of war contin-



ues unabated. Dianne's study again reminds us in no uncertain terms that we simply cannot sit silent while women are systematically subjected to sexual abuse.

I served as Dianne's promoter and Dr. Loes Derksen of the VU University Amsterdam was the co-promoter. The panel of examiners consisted of Prof. dr. Wouter Goris and Dr. Annemie Halsema from the VU, Prof. dr. Mieke Bal and Dr. Christa Stevens from the University of Amsterdam, and Prof. dr. Anne Marie Korte from the University of Utrecht. Congratulations, Dr. Bergsma! It was a pleasure to work with you. ●

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## Institutional Repository Update

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**O**n October 21st, the ICS institutional repository will celebrate its first year of operation. The repository, a digital archive of the intellectual output of ICS, is globally available through the internet at [ir.icscanada.edu](http://ir.icscanada.edu)

Updated on a continuous basis, collections in the repository include

faculty publications, masters and doctoral theses, conference papers, as well as past and current issues of *Perspective*. To date the repository has generated over 14,300 downloads, with viewers accessing the web site from South Africa, Indonesia, Ukraine, China, France and the Americas, just to name a few of the countries of origin.

*We are still searching for ICS alumni that may have a master's or doctoral thesis in our library collection and have not been contacted by our Research Assistant Ruth Bott or our Librarian Isabella Guthrie-McNaughton to have their thesis entered into the repository. If you are one of these alumni, or know someone who is, please contact [library@icscanada.edu](mailto:library@icscanada.edu)!*

# When the Faithful Meet the Wronged: In Search for the Truth about Justice

In his book *Journey Toward Justice*, Nicholas Wolterstorff describes how his life journey has had a significant impact on his current philosophical approach to the question of justice. Wolterstorff's experience with concrete human communities, he argues, has transformed his conception of justice in a way that would have been unlikely had he remained confined within the frontiers of academia. Wolterstorff concludes that his "encounter face-to-face with the victims of social injustice" (244) has significantly marked his current understanding of justice, enabling him to respond to John Rawls' conception of an 'ideal society' with his own theory of inherent rights.

Following Wolterstorff's simple but profound paradigm shift, we become "forced to think about justice in our actual societies, societies that are far from ideal, societies in which people are systematically wronged" (245). Once we shift our attention from Rawls' ideal society, and turn our attention toward our own, imperfect societies, we become capable of seeing that most of what we know about justice has been revealed to us through personal experiences of injustice—in particular, through our interactions with those whom Wolterstorff calls "the wronged."

Wolterstorff's analysis of the evolution of his own thought, as someone who has dedicated his life to thinking about justice, exemplifies an understanding of justice grounded in the language of a community. While some communities understand justice primarily as regulating individual relationships, other communities understand it as the robust structure in which those relationships might thrive and flourish. While some people understand justice as speaking to the reparation of broken relationships, others understand it to refer primarily to retributive judgment.

Following Wolterstorff, we can confidently assert that, although expressed differently, there is something universal about justice: it shapes the way in which we interact with others, how much we respect the world around us, and the role we set for ourselves within society. It serves both as a springboard and a finish line for our actions in the world. It opens possibilities for future agency, modifies present interactions, and evaluates past behaviours. In other words, our functioning-in-the-world is carefully shaped by what we make of justice.

Given the significance of justice in the context of human action, we are hopeful that a better understanding of justice can provide us with the necessary tools to improve society. Understanding the connection between justice and faith, especially, provides the key to deciphering the way in which our spirituality can serve as a vehicle for the positive transformation of our communities.

The latter conviction forms the impetus for the current major research project of ICS' *Centre for Philosophy, Religion, and Social Ethics*, entitled "Justice and Faith: Individual Spirituality and Social Responsibility in the Reformed Church of Canada." Pursued in partnership with the *Centre for Community Based Research* and the *Christian Reformed Church in Canada*, the research project attempts to elicit the way CRC congregants understand the connection between faith and justice. Conscious that a vital aspect of our engagement with the Christian tradition is the way in which it shapes our understanding of the matrix of relationships that constitute community, the "Justice and Faith" project

is tracking the different ways that members of CRC congregations in Canada think about justice in relationship to their faith.

Preliminary results, based on an analysis of key informant interviews as well as a statistically accurate congregational survey, have shown that congregants' definitions of justice can be grouped under different clusters, including themes such

by HÉCTOR  
ACERO-FERRER

*"The research project attempts to elicit the way CRC congregants understand the connection between faith and justice."*

as helping those in need, restoration of the created order, and retributive judgment. Opinions about the link that Christians should sustain between the exercise of justice and their faith practice also vary. While some argue that the church should be at the forefront of justice-seeking initiatives, others think that the Christian faith calls us to seek justice outside the context of the faith community.

Are we inclined to think that justice work belongs to the secular sphere? If so, what do we do with the call to seek justice in the Scriptures? Is the call to justice something we should fulfill outside of the confines of church? In retracing our answers to these questions, where opinions significantly diverge within our own congregations, we can return to a common ground, which Wolterstorff finds in the definite sense of injustice we feel when we encounter "the wronged." ●

*For more information about the "Justice and Faith" research project and to view preliminary results, please visit the Centre for Philosophy, Religion and Social Ethics website at [www.icscanada.edu/cprse](http://www.icscanada.edu/cprse)*

## Supporter Profile: Neal De Roo



*Neal De Roo is currently a member of the ICS Board of Trustees for Midwest Canada and United States, and Associate Professor of Philosophy at Dordt College. He has recently been named a fellow of the Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt, and serves as the Editor-in-Chief for [inallthings.org](http://inallthings.org), an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world, including all aspects of human living.*

### Perspective:

*How and when did you first come into contact with ICS, and what attracted you to it?*

#### Neal:

I probably first came into contact, broadly speaking, as someone who grew up in the CRC in Southern Ontario, but it didn't really come onto my radar until probably my senior year at Calvin. I was looking at graduate schools and Jamie Smith, who was a new prof that year, recommended that I look at the Institute as a place to go for graduate work.

*What did you take away from your time studying at ICS?*

That way of incorporating, looking at my faith differently, understanding Christianity differently, centrally, integrally, coherently, having that vision of the world fleshed out for me in the sort of uniquely reformational way; that I very much picked up when I was there. I finished with an MA in philosophical theology. I did a lot of courses with Jim [Olthuis] in that philosophy of religion/philosophical theology kind of camp. It gave me a really strong foundation in the continental 20th Century European tradition of thinking about what a person is and what religion is and how these things can work together. I did my PhD at Boston College and I'm now teaching at Dordt College.

There's a really vibrant subdiscipline within philosophy in this continental flux, with religion and the question "what are we doing when we're being religious?" I think that what I got at the ICS, what that reformational vision is, just has a lot to offer to those conversations: a really unique take on the way God interacts with creation and in creation, the roles of human beings as the creation of God and what that

might mean for the role of humans as religion is lived and practiced. All of those things were foundational and central to me. I wouldn't be where I am, doing the things I do, if I didn't have that base from the ICS.

*That body of thought that you got at ICS, and that you developed further when you went on to Boston College, is that something that has proven exciting to your students at Dordt College?*

A lot of the students here at Dordt have been to Christian grade schools, Christian high schools, Christian day schools all the way through, and they find themselves very jaded by worldview talk or very jaded by even Creation/Fall/Redemption and these kind of things. When I start teaching my CORE philosophy class one of the first things I do on the first day of class, is just say "what are the words you're tired of hearing? What are the words you're sick of talking about?" And they say, you know, "worldview", "creation/fall/redemption", sometimes even things like "shalom", "fulfillment", "kingdom". They just don't want to talk about that anymore so I say "okay I'll try not to talk about those anymore for the rest of the semester", and then try and flesh out what it is we're doing; the vision of Christianity that we're working with, where Christ is in all things, all things are in Christ and for Christ; to flesh this vision out in a way that doesn't fall back on these old categories that they have.

And they're very excited about it. It really opens them in a new way, to look at what they're doing with their lives, with their vocations and their calling, how they could be a Christian realistically and meaningfully in everything that they do, rather than that just being a sort of shibboleth that people say. People here at Dordt are very excited about that, and the possibilities that that opens up.



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## Supporter Profile: Neal De Roo, continued

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*So you are sort of between a larger community of faith and ICS. What role do you see ICS playing in the world then, and what is the importance of that role?*

When I started at Dordt College four years ago, I was surprised how many faculty members and administrators at Dordt College would pull me aside and talk to me one on one and say, “You went to the ICS, didn’t you?” I said yeah, and they said, “We need more people from the ICS working and teaching here at Dordt. That’s a place that gets it and they produce people that get what we’re about here and we need more of that here.” I think there is very much a sense of the ICS as a place where the reformational vision is alive and thriving and a place that

trains, if you want to say, the next generation of reformational scholars and Christian thinkers and Christian professors, who in turn then train the next generation of teachers and engineers and farmers and nurses and everything else. We’re sort of the ones who train the trainers.

In addition, I also think the ICS has a great role to play in terms of developing Christian scholarship, uniquely, and distinctly Christian approaches to philosophical problems, to religious problems, to social problems, to ethical problems. “How can religion

and specifically the Christian religion, be impactful for our society, in our society, for working towards the common good?” I think the ICS is really strongly positioned to have a voice in the kinds of conversations that are going to become increasingly central to the social and political discourse of North America. ●

*“It really opens them in a new way, to look at what they’re doing with their lives, with their vocations and their calling, how they could be a Christian realistically and meaningfully in everything that they do, rather than that just being a sort of shibboleth that people say.”*

# ART<sup>IN</sup> ORVIETO

29 JUNE – 24 JULY 2015



**A**RT in Orvieto is an advanced summer studies program in Orvieto, Italy, that offers an ecumenical exploration of Christian understandings of the arts. The program provides a four weeks residency designed for artists, writers, and graduate students, as well as others interested in the intersection of art, religion, and theology. It is a program of the Institute for Christian Studies in the Toronto School of Theology. ●

*The acronym ART represents Art, Religion, and Theology, the foci of the program. The program begins in summer 2015. For more information visit [www.icscanada.edu/art\\_in\\_orvieto](http://www.icscanada.edu/art_in_orvieto)*

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