

**INSTITUTE FOR
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PER SPEC TIVE





Gideon Strauss

ABOUT THIS ISSUE: A LIFELONG PURSUIT

THE WORSHIP SERVICES OF my faith community usually open with this statement: “Whether you are curious, critical, or committed, you are welcome here.” Lately, I have been thinking about the welcome this statement extends as I have been considering my colleagues at the Institute for Christian Studies this term. Most of the time, it seems to me, each of us are curious, critical, and committed, simultaneously.

In this issue you will meet some of our new Junior Members (which is what we at ICS call students in our degree programs) and Neal DeRoo, a former Junior Member and our newest Senior Member (or faculty member). You will also encounter several familiar voices, including Ronald A. Kuipers (our President, a former Junior Member, and a Senior Member of long standing), and some of our alums—each in their own way expressive of this posture of being simultaneously curious, critical, and committed.

An example of this posture that leaps out to me comes from ICS alum Carolyn Mackie: “If philosophy really is the love of wisdom, then it can only be a lifelong pursuit. Wisdom sets harder requirements for us than just acquiring knowledge or understanding—it also asks that we grow into that knowledge in such a way that we are living wisely. That takes time.” Which reminds me of one of my favourite statements, by the architect Léon Krier: “There is no short-term wisdom.” And which also reminds me of ICS’s mission: we are an interdisciplinary graduate school where the gospel’s message of renewal shapes our pursuit of wisdom.

I am delighted by a paraphrase of our mission statement by Ron Kuipers in this issue of *Perspective*: “We open hearts to desire walking on God’s redemptive path.” That path is a long walk, a life-long walk, and it is work full of wonder to be able to walk alongside one another on this path. It makes me happy when one of my students tells me that something they learned in one of my courses on one day they could immediately apply in their life and work the next day. It makes me even happier when I come across one of my students five, ten, twenty years after they took part in one of my courses, and they tell me that what they learned made a life-changing difference for them across the intervening years. What a joy, to be a school that encourages and enables wise living today for tomorrow, that affords so many students the opportunity of lifelong learning, and where learning might make a difference forever.

GIDEON STRAUSS is the Academic Dean of ICS and Senior Member in Leadership and Worldview Studies.





Ronald A. Kuipers

LEARNING OF MYSTERY

*Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time.
He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so,
people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.*

—Ecclesiastes 3:11

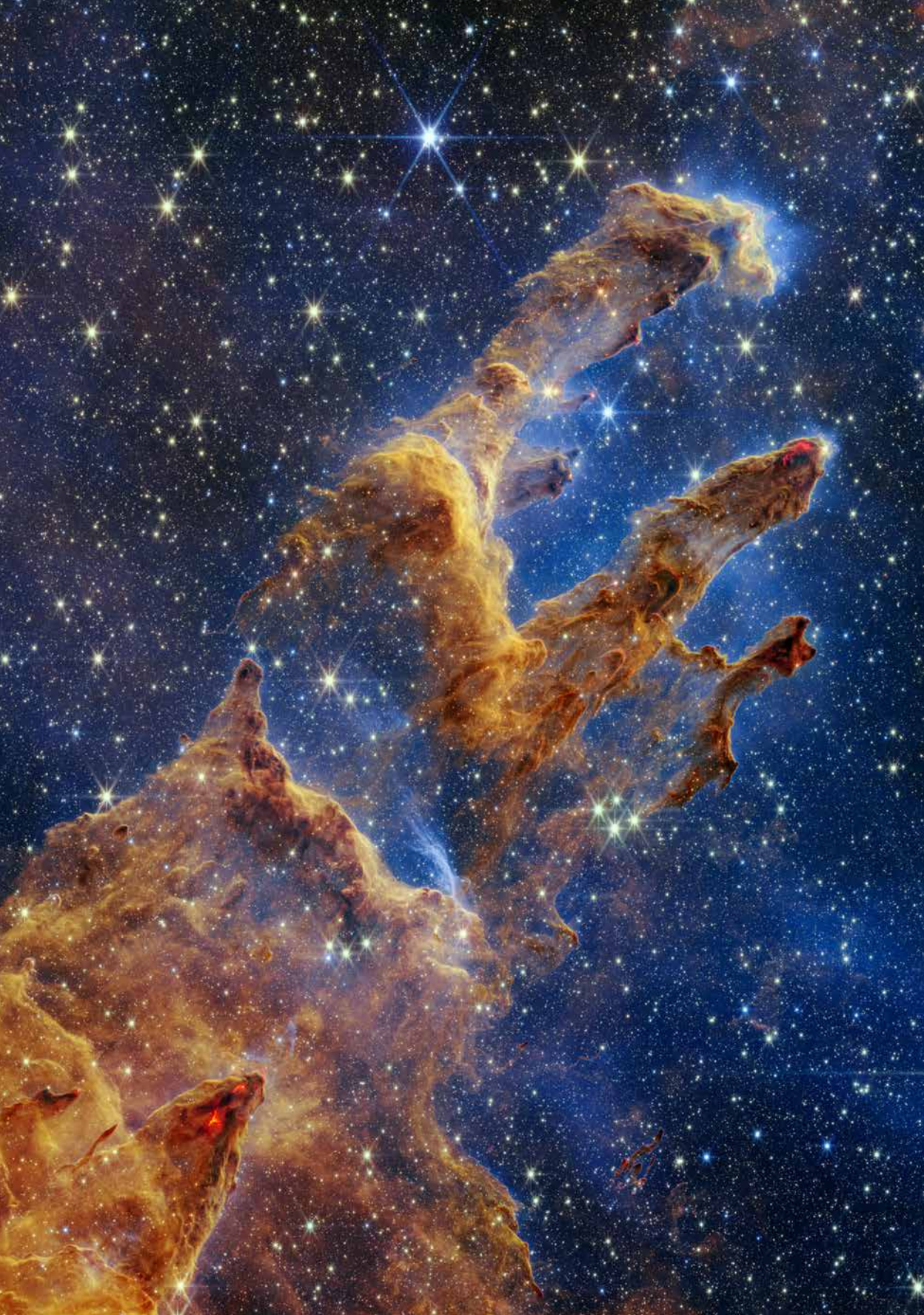
TODAY'S TECHNO-ENTHUSIASTS seldom tire of exalting the virtues of the “age of information.” The answer to any question we might possibly ask, they say, lies only a mouse-click away, just beyond the tips of our inquisitive fingers. They contend that the realm of the natural sciences serves as an all-encompassing oracle, the omniscient source from which we might draw every conceivable insight. In this fashion, they affirm, the stockpile of human knowledge will endlessly grow.

I'm not a fan of this understanding of human knowledge, because it reduces the profound human quest for wisdom and meaning to a crude pursuit of commodified facts, mere morsels for consumption. More distressingly, it understands these facts as isolated, disconnected islands without any inherent meaning or worth beyond what we might project onto them.

This portrayal of knowledge seamlessly aligns with our consumer-driven post-industrial era, where we treat the world itself as little more than a reservoir of pliable matter, with no voice of its own with which to respond to or resist our instrumental manipulations. In a similar vein, we reduce knowledge to a mere sum of facts, to be methodically shoveled into the hollow chambers of what we take to be vacant minds.

Yet if we listen to the whispers of our hearts, we can hear a subtle yet insistent resistance to this impoverished understanding of human knowledge. As Ecclesiastes teaches, our hearts are the custodians of God's eternal creation (or “the world,” as per the Hebrew *ha-olam*). Like our hearts, our minds are neither blank canvasses nor empty vessels waiting to be filled. Rather the chambers of our hearts are where we recognize the profound intricacies of God's handiwork, far surpassing the mere assimilation of consumable facts—profound mysteries we can never truly grasp or control.

Let me be clear; while not a fan of the modern West's understanding of knowledge, I still appreciate the importance of facts, and believe it is crucial for us to get things right in our attempts to understand and navigate our way through the intricacies of God's world. We need to know if, in fact, a bridge will support the weight we plan to place upon it, and we need to heed what climate scientists are telling us about the dangerous warming of our planet. But in order to follow our Maker's *shalom* way we need to ask more than just structural questions about the suitability of the proposed bridge, and in order to recognize and resist those misleading spirits that have tempted us into the current climate crisis we



need to consider more than just the facts of global warming.

Thankfully, God has created in us hearts that are open to the wider mystery in which God has placed us, between the unfathomable beginning God set in

motion and the glorious, everlasting finale God promises to bring into full effect. Our hearts feel the pull of our Maker's justice and peace, which Psalm 85:10 promises will one day embrace.

When we heed the testimony of our hearts, acknowledging that our shared existence in God's world is set within mysteries we can never hope to fathom or control, we open ourselves to a profound transformation. In this light, our search for knowledge, wisdom, and meaning ceases to be a quest for power and becomes instead a desire for harmonious and just relationships with our fellow beings and the Earth we share, our sanctuary.

The apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Colossians, hints at a similar sentiment when he speaks of "assured understanding": "I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:2-3, NRSV). Is Paul here proposing another fact to be mastered? Or is he instead telling us that true understanding comes from walking the path of *shalom* that our Redeemer has revealed to us? What if, instead of saying "believe this fact," Paul is counselling us to "walk this way?"

Throughout its history, ICS has steadfastly aspired to be a sanctuary for lifelong learners—a place where people can meet to immerse themselves in God's boundless wisdom, and walk the path illuminated

by our radiant beacon, Jesus our Messiah. While this path is indeed illuminated by that messianic light, it is also a path of unfathomable mystery, newness, and surprise. As Paul also reminds the church in Rome: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (Romans 11:33).

Accordingly, at ICS we measure the success of our endeavours not by the mere conveyance of information but by how effectively we open hearts to desire walking on God's redemptive path.

As I consider the idea of living with our hearts open before divine mystery, I am reminded of the lyrics to U2's "11 O'clock Tick Tock," a song which once captivated my teenage imagination. There, a young Bono reminds us: "We thought we had the answers; it was the questions we had wrong." Perhaps, then, in response to the contemporary posture of absolute knowingness, we should instead adopt a posture of humility and reverence as we seek out those paths that are "from, to, and through" our Maker

and Redeemer. Or perhaps we simply need to heed the simple words of wisdom that Mary Oliver offers in her profound poem, "Mysteries, Yes":

*Let me keep my distance, always, from those
who think they have the answers.*

*Let me keep company always with those who say
"Look!" and laugh in astonishment,
and bow their heads.*

RONALD A. KUIPERS is the President of ICS
and Professor of Philosophy of Religion.

*When we heed
the testimony
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AN INTERVIEW WITH ICS ALUMS





Joseph Kirby

How does learning continue to be part of your life after your journey at ICS?

It was the 7th day of a 10-day meditation retreat in the second year of my PhD studies at ICS. The meditation instructor was talking about how you can tell the nobility of a person's mind by looking at the quality of that mind at the moment of death—and I thought of Jesus and what a mind was he carrying! He is being tortured to death, crucified. And yet! There is not a trace of anger or hatred towards these poor people who are torturing him. Only love, only compassion: May they not be punished for their bad deeds! This was the first time I felt I intuited what the Christian gospels were getting at, in opposition to my secular/scientific upbringing, and it was on a Buddhist meditation retreat. This, I thought, is what religion and science should debate: not the existence of God, but whether it is possible to love our enemies even as they kill us. Since graduating, my interest has shifted. To wit, if I am ready to step outside of science with regard to morality, why would I presume it to be true with regard to much crazier lines of reflection: Is the world really cut into “subjective” and “objective” realms? Are the laws of physics actually universal? Are miracles possible?

Could you name one person in your life from whom you continue to learn and tell us why?

I'm a book guy. I learn from books. Right now I'm reading a fellow named Walter Brueggemann. I'm teaching a course on the Bible, and I find his perspective quite insightful. Then again, Brueggemann is working in a tradition very similar to that of ICS, so it probably stands to reason that his work would resonate!

What do you consider to be the connection between the practice of philosophy and lifelong learning?

My practice of philosophy is infused by my practice of meditation, which seems to be slowly, slowly unveiling the experiential reality behind a philosophical ancient claim: that Truth, Goodness, and Happiness are all ultimately the same. As a writer, my goal is to convey this startling vision in novel ways, ways that might hopefully help steer some people away from the craziness of our culture. I have noticed, for example, that a lot of meditation books are aimed squarely at secular/scientific audiences, trying to alleviate the discomfort a secular person might feel with regard to meditation. However, the same rhetoric that sells to a scientist would probably only exacerbate the concerns of people on the other side of the cultural divide, the pious, the religious. I'd like to help solve this problem, help to pave a path into meditation for the world's 2.5 billion Christians. As such, I'm planning to offer a Buddhist interpretation of the Scriptures: God is a consuming fire; all of us must wrestle like Jacob with an angel of the Lord on the far banks of the Jordan; the Fall occurs every moment we continue to hide from God; and God will only call off the apocalypse if and when the people of Nineveh repent.

JOSEPH KIRBY *got his PhD from ICS in 2018 and is an adjunct faculty member at Martin Luther University College in Waterloo.*



Carolyn Mackie

How does learning continue to be part of your life after your journey at ICS?

Learning has continued to be part of my life in both formal and informal ways. I'm currently working toward a PhD in theology. I'm very grateful for the opportunity to devote a lot of time to studying things that I care about, and I recognize that this is a privilege. But learning has always been part of my life whether I'm in school or not—through reading, talking with friends, learning from people on social media, etc. I'm not a big podcast listener, but for a while I was part of a podcast club—like a book club, but we listened to podcast episodes and discussed them.

Could you name one person in your life from whom you continue to learn and tell us why?

I know this is cheating, but I can't name just one. With each friendship in my life, I can think of ways I have learned from and been shaped by that friendship. I think learning from each other is part of the nature of friendship. I saw someone from my ICS cohort yesterday, and it was a reminder of what a gift my fellow students at ICS were. Peer relationships are one aspect of classroom learning that is not really under the teacher's control, but can have such a huge impact (for good or bad) on the learning experience. Throughout my postsecondary education, peer relationships have contributed to my learning in really significant ways.

What do you consider to be the connection between the practice of philosophy and lifelong learning?

If philosophy really is the love of wisdom, then it can only be a lifelong pursuit. Wisdom sets harder requirements for us than just acquiring knowledge or understanding—it also asks that we grow into that knowledge in such a way that we are living wisely. That takes time. Like Socrates, we should be quick to admit that we don't know everything, least of all ourselves.

CAROLYN MACKIE completed her MA at ICS in 2014 and is now pursuing a PhD in Theological Studies at the Toronto School of Theology.

If philosophy really is the love of wisdom, then it can only be a lifelong pursuit. Wisdom sets harder requirements for us than just acquiring knowledge or understanding—it also asks that we grow into that knowledge in such a way that we are living wisely.





Andrew Tebbutt

How does learning continue to be part of your life after your journey at ICS?

I'm originally from the Southern Ontario area (Niagara, and then Toronto). I completed my MA at ICS in 2013 and served as Research Associate at ICS in 2021-22, and I currently teach philosophy at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois.

In the strictest of senses, learning continued to be a part of my life after my studies at ICS in that I went on to complete a doctoral degree at the University of Toronto. But my learning hardly stopped there. In the seminars I have offered at ICS and in my work at Trinity, I have found that teaching is deeply interwoven with—indeed, demands—ongoing learning. At one level, effectively inviting students into the practice of philosophy requires keeping my own curiosities about the subject matter alive, and in this sense being a teacher means also being a learner. More importantly, though, teaching is an engagement with *people*, and each class creates an opportunity to get to know each of the students who are there and to discern how the unique dynamic of the group will take shape and unfold. In this sense, teaching is a practice of perpetual learning, since *what* we talk about in class depends in large part on *who* is there and what their questions and concerns are.

Could you name one person in your life from whom you continue to learn and tell us why?

Shannon Hoff was one of my mentors when I was a student at ICS, and I like to say that she introduced me not only to Hegel's philosophy (the topic of my doctoral work) but also to what philosophy should

be. I had taken many philosophy courses by the time I started the MA at ICS, but it was Shannon's teaching that brought philosophy "to life" for me in a way it hadn't been before, in making all of the ideas we discussed answerable to the lived realities we engage with in everyday life. I continue to rely on Shannon for advice about teaching and scholarship, and I am always learning from her model of what it means to live a philosophical life.

Teaching is a practice of perpetual learning, since what we talk about in class depends in large part on who is there and what their questions and concerns are.

What do you consider to be the connection between the practice of philosophy and lifelong learning?

I think philosophy relates to lifelong learning through the importance of these kinds of friendships for one's philosophical practice. So many of the most significant ideas and insights for me I encountered not in the classroom but in coffee shop conversations with friends or in informal reading groups. Philosophy is a practice of lifelong learn-

ing, then, because of the way one's philosophical practice is enriched by making learning a central part of one's friendships and relationships. This doesn't mean turning every encounter with one's friends into a philosophy class. Rather, I think it's something like the opposite: by keeping one's philosophical questions and concerns close at hand, one allows one's everyday engagement with others to be the real territory of philosophy, which in turn keeps one's "official" philosophical work—e.g., teaching and writing—close to the real things that matter to us.

ANDREW TEBBUTT *got his MA from ICS in 2013 and is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights.*



Neal DeRoo

LIVING LIFE, LIVING WORD, LIVING PHILOSOPHY

Our newest Senior Member delves into his family history with ICS, sharing how his own scholarship has been shaped by unassuming practices of everyday faith and life.

MY DAD'S DAD WAS A FARMER. He immigrated to Southern Ontario in the early 1950s with nothing. He and my Oma spent their honeymoon in separate men's and women's quarters on the boat on the way to North America. After a few years of working as a hired hand in poverty-level conditions to satisfy the requirements of his immigration sponsorship, he managed to borrow enough money to start his own farm. There's a video one of my dad's cousins shared with us recently of my Opa driving an early tractor on his farm, as my dad and aunts (mere children at the time) waved to him, and my Oma looked on, with my youngest aunt still in her arms. You could see etched on my Opa's face the pride he felt in his family and in his little corner of the "New World." He was not a rich man, in economic terms, but he was a good man. Solid. Down to earth. He was a farmer, through and through.

Like many people of his generation, my Opa did not let his lack of formal education prevent him from finding ways to think more deeply about his faith. When I inherited his books after my Oma's death, I found bible commentaries, catechisms, and high-level theology and philosophy books by thinkers like Bonhoeffer and Bavinck. These books were not pristine. They had not just come out of the wrapping. No, they were well-worn, with notes throughout and clear evidence of heavy use and close reading. My grandfather, the immigrant farmer, clearly made it a point to keep up with contemporary currents in Christian thought. He took time in his regular routines, despite the hours necessarily devoted to hard manual labour, caring for his family, and learning a new language, to be sure he was knowledgeable about what Christian scholars were saying about the best way to live the Christian life. His faith was a treasure to him, and he was doing his best to ensure that it remained the most important part of his life.

Many of the farmers and greenhouse growers I grew up with had similar convictions, and libraries in their homesteads. This often led to vigorous theological debates during coffee visits between church services on Sundays. Here were people who thought that following God must change everything in their lives—and saw, too, that they didn't have the time or training to figure out all the implications of that for themselves. So people like this started Christian schools to teach their children to think as Christians and Christian organizations (like the Christian Farmer's Federation of Ontario) to help them do their jobs as Christians. And they also started a center for Christian scholarship, supporting a few bright young men (and later women) with philosophical training to think through the vast implications of God's sovereignty over all of life. That center for Christian scholarship grew into the Institute for Christian Studies. Its task has always been to think both philosophically and concretely about what it means to follow Jesus in everything we do. That is the heart and soul of the Institute.

I share the story about my Opa to show you that this task is, quite literally, in my blood. It was quite clear early on that I would not follow in the farming footsteps of my dad and his ancestors (anyone who knew me as a kid could see that manual labor was probably not in my future). But their shared passion to both live and think in ways that showed their devotion to God in everything they do has never left me.

Already in high school I was constantly asking questions about my faith. I refused to simply take what I was told as obviously true. I needed to know *why* our church believed the things we believed, why *these* things and not others, and how we could make sense of it all (my poor Catechism teachers!). When I went to university the questions only persisted as I learned more about the theology and philosophy at the heart of the Reformed faith. What could it mean for God to change *everything*? How could my faith be expected to impact *all* parts of my life? I never lost the conviction that it must do that, if it was to be genuine faith at all (as I said, that conviction runs



thick in my blood), but I needed to know what that actually meant, practically and concretely.

I found a mentor and guide in these explorations in my last year of university, when the philosophy department hired a new professor named James K.A. Smith. He suggested that I would benefit from studying at ICS with his mentor, James Olthuis. At the Institute, I was exposed most explicitly to the systematic philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd, which fleshed out the Reformed worldview that I had grown up in. But I was also exposed to those currents in contemporary philosophy (mainly in France) that were dealing with similar questions from a very different background. During my PhD work at Boston College, I dove deep into those French philosophers (and their German predecessors) and became initiated into the ranks of “professional philosophers.”

But I never forgot my Opa, sitting on his farm reading Bonhoeffer and Bavinck and discussing them on Sundays with other farmers and growers. Many people tell me that such things are not possible any longer—that “regular” people cannot and will not read or engage with the work of philosophers. But I don’t think that’s true. It might be true that fewer people *do* engage with philosophy, but I think this is because philosophy, in general, has grown too far from its roots in the real lives of real people. And I think this is a mistake, both for philosophy and for society at large. Because I still see people of all types and all ages wondering about why we are here, what the purpose of life is, or how we should best live our lives. And I see more and more Christians struggling to find a way for their faith to be central to everything about how they live. They don’t want Christianity to be just a “show” that they put on to impress the neighbors or to look good for their parents and their parents’ friends. Everywhere I look, I see people acknowledging that “business as usual” is not good for them or for the world—and wondering what else could be done instead. That is to say, everywhere I look, I see people asking just the types of questions that Christian philosophy has been thinking about for centuries, the kinds of questions that have been

driving my own thinking and work for the last 20 years (if not longer). Now more than ever, people need good philosophy—theoretically precise, yet practical and existentially relevant.

As a newly appointed Senior Member in Philosophy at ICS, it is my sincere hope to provide people with the good philosophy they need. I am committed to helping Junior Members discover their philosophical passions, and nurturing in them the ability to do philosophy in ways that work well for other specialists and for general audiences. I aim to produce high quality philosophical scholarship, such as the SSHRC-funded project I am currently working on: “Material Spirituality: A Transcendental Phenomenology of Religion.” I hope to continue providing professional development on teaching “Christianly” to Christian day school teachers. And I want to help create spaces for Christian academics to shape and be shaped by the needs of the church. One thing I’m doing in that regard is helping organize, in partnership with Vision Ministries Canada and Martin Luther University College, an upcoming conference in April 2024 exploring the question of “What does the world need the church to be?” This conference will allow those engaged in the practice of ‘doing church’—from pastors to church planters to lay leaders—to learn from people like James K.A. Smith, Kristin Kobes Du Mez, and others in an in-person 2-3 day setting. More than anything, I want to ensure that ICS is walking with the church, helping it think philosophically about what it means to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in the world today.

I know that it is too late for me to help my Opa think through how to live and farm as a Christian in a new country. But I also know that there are many more out there like him today, wondering how God is calling them to live for Him. And I can’t help but think that he would be quite proud (and humbled) that his grandson has been chosen to take up the task of helping those people find what (and Who) they’re looking for.

NEAL DEROO is the ICS Senior Member in Philosophy, specializing in the intersection of phenomenology, spirituality, and religious life.

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Master in Philosophy

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- Participate online from wherever you are



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MA-EL PROGRAM



AMY BERGSMA
Ontario
MA-EL Program

I'M THE TYPE OF person who says yes to any opportunity that comes my way, regardless of my current level of preparedness. I have now been a high school vice-principal for three years, and am looking forward to growing my skill set through the MA-EL program in order to better serve my local and school community.

For the first time in my educational career, I'm excited about taking the courses—particularly the courses offered in this MA-EL program because of how useful they will be in my career. I consider it an honour to be part of administrative leadership in Ontario Christian schools at this specific period in history. There are rivers of blessing flowing, and it is a privilege to have the opportunity to speak into the future of what Christian education will look like. With that blessing flowing, I feel inspired to hone my skills to be ready to serve, to the best of my ability. I'm looking forward to developing and growing as an administrator as I begin this journey of a Masters in Educational Leadership—to God be the Glory! 🌸



HEIDI BLOKLAND
Ontario
MA-EL Program

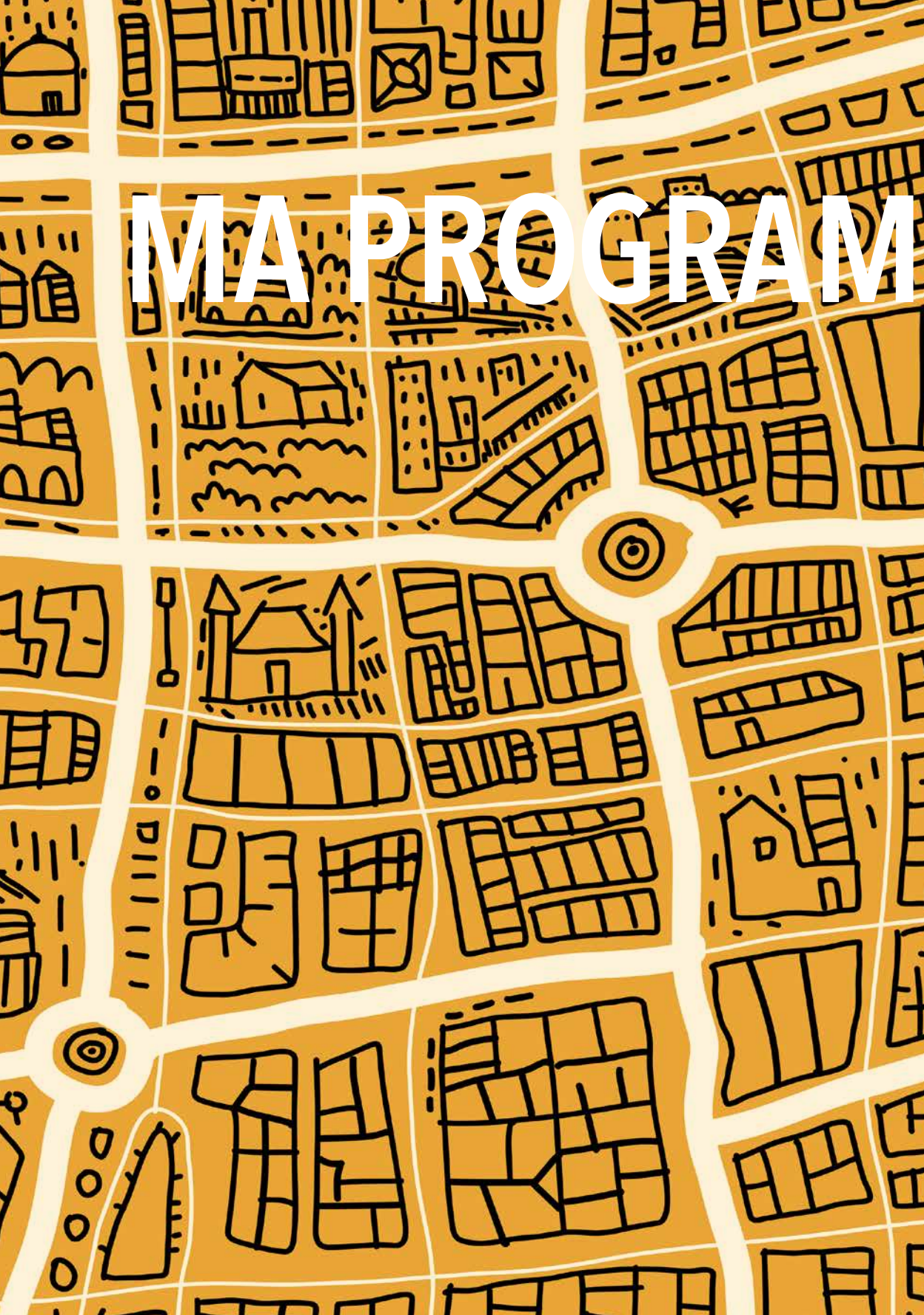
I'VE BEEN GOING TO school since I entered kindergarten many years ago. My life is lived according to the rhythms of the school year. September is full of anticipation and wonder. June is full of gratitude and contentment. Whether I have been at a desk, at the front of the classroom, or walking the school hallways, I have always been learning. One of the biggest things that I have learned is that I will never arrive at the point where I can stop learning. There is always something new to learn.

Beginning to take courses for the MA-EL program at ICS is a part of that lifelong learning for me. I am continually learning in my journey as a teacher, and now as school principal. The courses that I have taken so far have been both practical and reflective, allowing me to examine myself and my own particular context.

I've had the opportunity to read powerful texts that challenge me in my thinking and carry me further in my journey as a lifelong learner. Being able to interact with fellow classmates and other school leaders is another strong component of this program. It allows me to see that I am not alone in this journey, and I am encouraged by learning with and from others.

As I continue to grow and learn, I pray that most importantly I will learn to grow in love; that love for God and others will be evident in my practice. ICS is giving me the opportunity and the space to reflect on who I am as a leader and to grow in my capabilities to be the leader God has called me to be. 🌸

MAP PROGRAM



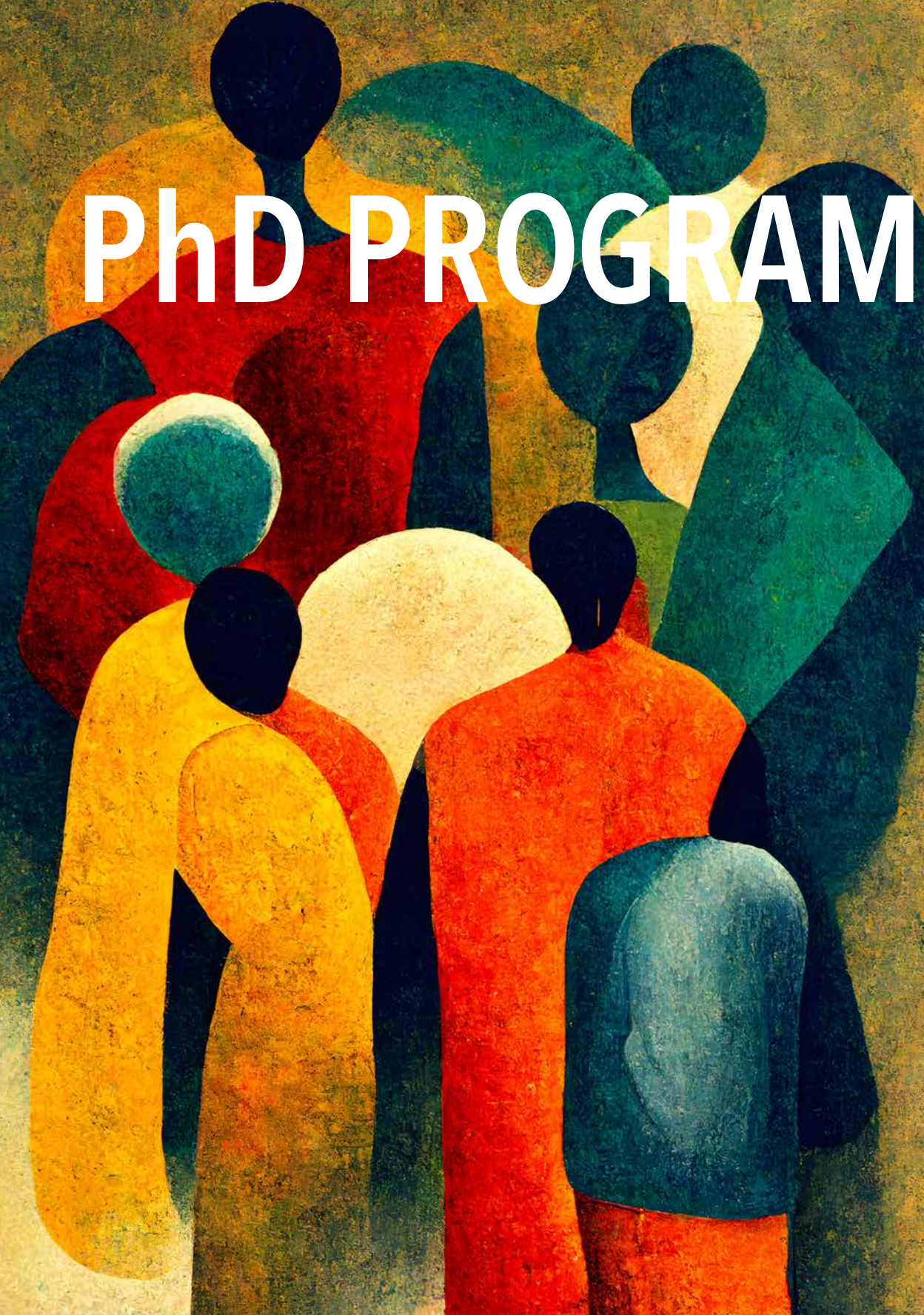


JOSEPH WATSON | *Pennsylvania* | MA Program

GROWING UP IN RURAL Southern Illinois provided unique opportunities for a learning adventure. Often those who live in small-town America have a pejorative view of their own local history. For myself, though, this was my entryway to a love for learning. Our middle school curriculum was focused on our state's history and the stories of the past opened up my imagination. That sort of reading about stories piqued my interest and provided a whole new world for me to explore. I think stories and storytelling of all kinds kindled a deep need for me to understand the world as an interwoven place of connections. I love seeing how one aspect of a story foreshadows or provides meaning for another. Having roots in a rural place gave me a broad range of experiences to empathize with.

Mentorship is one of the most important parts of my learning journey. Talking about ideas outside of class has brought them to life because of my interaction with these trusted friends. The mentors do not even necessarily need to be alive! Without these people pouring out their time and resources for me, I would not be the person I am today. I hope that my ICS journey will provide more great mentorships and learning opportunities within the Kuyperian tradition. The tradition has had a centering effect on my own life, expanding the opportunities for learning more about my faith and pushing me to learn more about philosophy as a whole. Hopefully, learning and growing at ICS will help me become a better teacher at Geneva College—another place that is formative for me both as a teacher and in my thinking. I hope that for years to come, I can contribute to these institutes of learning and give back some of what they have given to me. 🌻

PhD PROGRAM





TIMOTHY DEVRIES | Ontario | PhD Program

I AM A NEW DOCTORAL STUDENT in the Philosophy program at ICS. As a mature student, I look forward to continuing my life's journey as a learner at ICS. Already I am finding that my classes at ICS provide a solid foundation for questions emerging from the Christian social democratic tradition. Whether I'm considering the nature of "religious ground motives," or engaging in discussions about biblical scholarship, I am thankful to do so in an interdisciplinary environment that encourages a robust understanding of the antithesis at the heart of every theoretical inquiry.

Moreover, ICS supports scholarship which recognizes the formative nature of ideas, and which is hospitable to expressions of faith. I am also thankful that ICS encourages the academic integration of heart, hands, and mind, which leads to genuine dialogue about things that matter. Since ICS consists of an engaged academic community that is committed to education, I have the help I need to cultivate good learning habits and to use what I am learning for the good of others. For these reasons, ICS is already proving to be an excellent place for me to pursue a writing project on the art of the Dutch diaspora, and to consider how ideas are transformed as they cross geographical borders. 🌸

MWS-ART PROGRAM





SHANA CHAN | Ontario | MWS-ART Program

LAST MONTH, I LEARNED a term—*with-ness*—from ICS Senior Member Emeritus Jim Olthuis. The word highlighted the essence of my life’s journey as a learner.

I did not excel in my teenage years. I was ranked around 41 out of 44 students. As a way of consoling me at the time, one of my sisters in Christ wrote:

*Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;
but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles.*

My sister’s *with-ness* reminded me to look upon the Lord’s *with-ness*. This gave me courage to reset my academic and spiritual life. Since then, whenever I am weary, I gaze overhead and thirst for an eagle to contemplate. Time passed. In my twenties and thirties, God granted me postgraduate degrees in Intercultural Studies and Educational Management. I shared my ups-and-downs with my students through interdisciplinary education. Praise God that such *with-ness* helped many youngsters tide over their own difficulties as learners.

My early forties were my spiritual valley. I strived for reconciliation with God, and that led me to study Christian Spirituality in Hong Kong. Eventually God let me recognize His *with-ness* again and He restored my soul.

I admit that I am a doubting believer, and I long to understand God from a new worldview. I participated in ART in Orvieto 2023 this past summer and there I experienced God’s *with-ness* during sessions of contemplative art creation. Now I thank God for granting me a chance to study Art, Religion, and Theology at ICS. During these early days, I have had many theological questions arise. ICS Senior and Junior Members have offered passionate responses to my queries one by one. I am so blessed. My faith is under revitalization in my studies at ICS.

God have mercy. He strengthens me by *with-ness* throughout my life’s journey as a learner. 🌸

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