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# PER SPEC TIVE





## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

**A**MID THE GROWING CROSS-PRESSURES of polarization that have taken hold of communities, institutions, and countries today, pursuing collaboration is a tall order. Moments calling for discernment more often precipitate factions than friends: either-or, us or them, all or nothing. It seems like a rare exception when a difference of opinion or genuine disagreement does *not* result in two sides retreating in opposite directions, throwing sticks and stones behind them all the while.

But at ICS, as an interdisciplinary Christian graduate school, collaboration lies at the heart of how we live academic life *with* one another. As President Ron Kuipers explores in the following pages: “At ICS, we believe in the power of this ‘with.’” In the classroom, we consider texts and difficult questions together, contributing our own perspectives and experiences and allowing the perspectives and experiences of others to speak into and shift our own. Among our institutional peers and with fellow teachers and students, we plan and participate in collaborative events, committees, and conversations. In our communities, we actively engage in and reflect on life in our churches, schools, cities, and social structures; and we nurture our students to be invested leaders with and for those with whom they share these spaces.

Collaboration is a way in which we invite others to—truly—join us in pursuit of a shared goal, and in so doing, become capable of more than we would be alone. So in this issue of *Perspective* we’re highlighting the stories of some of our closest collaborators on campus in the Toronto School of Theology, asking colleagues and former students to share what collaboration in general, and with ICS in particular, means for their own work and learning.

For our contributors, collaboration often looks like gaining surprising insights into familiar topics, experiencing and extending hospitality, or encountering a diverse and rich harmony of voices that uplift and open the human spirit. But also, attempts to collaborate often ask much of us, and the fruits of those efforts may only be seen by future generations. It is certainly true that collaboration requires work. It requires showing up and trying again, speaking up and letting go, showing vulnerability and showing courage. May God bless such work.

DANIELLE YETT



Darren Dias



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# THE POWER OF “WITH”

*And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

—Matthew 28:20

**T**HE WORD “WITH” CAN BE used to imply many different things. It can suggest potential proximity—“put this book with the others”—or accompaniment—“let me go there with you.” It can connote hipness, as when Grampa Abe Simpson vociferously complains, “I used to be with it, but then they changed what ‘it’ was!” It can imply agreement and comprehension—“I’m with you so far”—or even a deep solidarity—“I will stand with you in your struggle for justice.”

With all these different uses and connotations of the word “with,” how might we understand the way that the resurrected Jesus uses the word when he says to his disciples, “I am with you always,” words he utters moments after he has charged them with the task of spreading his *shalom* way to the ends of the earth?

In the song “Can’t Hardly Wait” by The Replacements (one of my favourite rock bands from the 1980s) there is a cheeky line that always makes me chuckle, where singer Paul Westerberg intones: “Jesus rides beside me, but he never buys any smokes.” While I resonate with this image of Jesus as a steadfast travel companion on the road trip of life, I hope and trust that he is more than someone who is simply “along for the ride,” mooching my last cigarette to boot! (In my case, as a non-smoker, this cigarette would have to be a metaphorical one.)

Perhaps it might help if we connect Jesus’ promise

at the end of the gospel of Matthew to a claim made near the beginning of that same gospel, where the angel, echoing Isaiah 7:14, tells Joseph that the child Mary carries is the promised Messiah, the one who will be called “Emmanuel,” which means “God is with us” (Matt. 1:23)? Once we make this connection, we begin to discern the mysterious contours of this very powerful “with,” and the way Jesus’ promise includes but also moves beyond simple companionship.

The very word “with,” I think, says something about the nature of divine power itself, this messianic possibility that Jesus promises to make available to us. As ICS Senior Member Emeritus Jim Olthuis suggests in his book *Dancing in the Wild Spaces of Love*, the power of this “with” is not a dominating or oppressive power, not an “over,” but rather a power that comes alongside us and empowers us—much like Jesus did, incognito, when he joined his erstwhile unwitting disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Jim calls this power “withing,” and describes it as the way humans are uniquely called to image a Creator who desires to be with and love creation:

*As God is with-us (Emmanuel), so we are to be-with others, cum amore (with love). “Withing” (power-with rather than power-over) is our gift and calling, be(com)ing the unique selves we are through relationship with other persons*



*(intersubjectivity), with creation and all its creatures (solidarity), and with God (spirituality). In and with the impetus of love’s promise, we live-with, work-with, wrestle-with, suffer-with, celebrate-with the whole family of earth’s creatures, all of creation, and God. (xvi-ii)*

Jim later describes “withing” as “a celebrating-with and suffering-with without submission or domination, a being-with in which we are true to ourselves even as we exist in connection with each other” (87).

At ICS, we believe in the power of this “with.” As we strive to live out our God-given mission in Christian higher education, we have embraced a spirit of collaboration and cooperation. We see how God has blessed this work when our collaborative efforts allow us to have a greater transformative impact than we could ever hope to have on our own.

In the pages of this issue of *Perspective*, you will read about some of the many ways that ICS collaborates with other people and institutions. For example, in the Educational Leadership stream of our MA program (MA-EL), we collaborate with the Society of Christian Schools in British Columbia, EduDeo Ministries, Calvin University, Edvance Christian Schools Association, and Vocate Christian Schools Employee Association.

In our PhD program, ICS offers a conjoint degree with the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam (VU). This decades-long arrangement has created strong ties between ICS and the VU, giving ICS students the opportunity to share their doctoral research with scholars at this renowned university. In my own case, I was able to share insights I was learning in the philosophy of religion with my co-supervisor, the late Prof. Hendrik Vroom, and the VU doctoral students he was supervising at that time.

As an affiliate member of the Toronto School of Theology (TST) at the University of Toronto, ICS has influenced, educated, and shaped scores of TST students, welcoming them into our seminars and serving on their graduate supervisory committees. In this issue, you can read some firsthand accounts of the formative role ICS faculty members have

played in the spiritual and intellectual formation of these students.

Through our Centre for Philosophy, Religion, and Social Ethics (CPRSE), ICS has collaborated with such diverse groups and institutions as the Canadian Interfaith Conversation, the King’s University, the Centre for Community-Based Research, Martin Luther University College, and the Christian Reformed Church in North America. These collaborations have allowed us to curate events that allow people from all walks of life to meet and discuss pressing issues of contemporary spiritual, social, and political concern.

The most recent example of such collaboration is the public conference *Beyond Culture Wars: Fostering Solidarity in an Age of Polarization*, which we’ve just co-hosted with Martin Luther University College from April 18-20 in Waterloo, Ontario. With keynote speakers Kristin Kobes Du Mez (author of *Jesus and John Wayne*) and James K.A. Smith (author, most recently, of *How to Inhabit Time*), this conference provided a space for discernment and conversation for Christians who want to develop redemptive ways to practice their faith, ways that build social solidarity rather than promote fractious social polarization.

Yet none of these collaborations, and others besides, would be possible without the deeper collaboration that enables us to pursue them: our collaboration with the community of witnesses that faithfully supports ICS’s efforts, and by so doing allows us to increase its impact significantly beyond what one might expect for an educational institution of such a small size.

Through all these collaborations, we strive to keep in mind and embody God’s “withing” spirit, and enter into the divine collaboration to which God in Jesus Christ continually calls us. How different this power of collaboration is from the kind of power we all too often seek, the power to dominate and control others, the earth, and even God! How wonderful instead is our Maker and Redeemer’s “with,” this divine connection that empowers us to connect—with the earth and all its creatures, with each other, and with God? 🌹

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Darren Dias

# A CONFIDENT FUTURE

ONE OF THE MAIN reasons for the great success of the Toronto School of Theology (TST) over the past 50 years is our confidence in relationships. The result of the relationships between seven diverse colleges—Knox, Wycliffe, Trinity, St. Michael’s, St. Augustine’s, Emmanuel, and Regis—is one of the most integrated academic and formational consortia to do ecumenical theology. Only together can we offer exceptional graduate theological education with degrees oriented to ministerial leadership and research. Likewise, the TST has a special relationship to the University of Toronto, Canada’s premier public research institution. Together with the University of Toronto, the TST colleges offer degrees in theology conjointly.

Another important type of relationship that the TST values is with our affiliate members, such as ICS. While governance, administration, and degree programs remain distinct in our relationship with affiliate members, there is a great degree of collaboration. Collaboration extends to faculty involvement in graduate student supervision and examinations, cross registration of students in courses, access to library and research resources, and even sharing physical space.

The TST and ICS’s historic and deep relationship bears much fruit. True to its claim the ICS brings its

unique “tradition of inquiry, and spirit of engagement” at the intersection of religion and philosophy, art, and Reformational perspectives to the wider TST community. Some examples of recent fruitful collaborations include ICS bringing noted theologian Miroslav Volf to campus;

Prof. Rebekah Smick’s contribution to the arts and spirituality program; and Prof. Emeritus Robert Sweetman’s mentoring of countless TST students. These are just 3 examples of the numerous collaborations we enjoy in the areas of teaching, research, and scholarship.

Our relationship with ICS reflects our common commitment to student-centered learning, excellence in teaching, and cutting-edge scholarship. Because of the unique qualities that ICS brings to our relationship, students and faculty experience a diverse context for discussion and exchange, not only in terms of ecumenical theology but also in terms of interdisciplinarity.

As the landscape for academic theological education and scholarship shifts across North America, the confidence we continue to have in our relationships promises to bear fruit into the future. 🌸

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Brenda Kronemeijer-Heyink

# COLLABORATION AND CAMPUS MINISTRY

*But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as God chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be?*

—1 Corinthians 12:18-19

**A**CADEMIC RESEARCH IS BOTH a narrowing down to focus on one thing and an opening up to new ideas and the input of others. Communities require a similar narrowing down: a gathering of “others like me” where I feel like I belong. Yet, to be healthy, communities also need to be open to new voices and ways of doing things. As a community that desires to welcome people who are both academic and Christian, the Christian Reformed campus ministries at the University of Toronto (UofT) try to hold that tension of narrow focus and open welcome. We focus on a unique subset at the university (graduate students) while also striving to create an expansive space for all those looking for a place to belong. Collaboration helps us to hold on to this tension, allowing us to focus on the unique calling God has for us as a ministry while also recognizing that God is greater than our own efforts.

Reformed Campus ministry bears witness to God’s presence on the university campus and in people’s lives. Because God is sovereign, God is already present at

the University of Toronto. God is present not only in the relationships we have with each other, but also in the work and task of the university. God’s image bearers are pursuing truth through teaching and research. God’s love is reflected in the presence of welcoming communities and in the call to justice and inclusion. As a campus ministry, we are honoured to join in that work and deeply relieved that we do not have to do it alone.

Campus ministry is a ministry of presence, bearing witness to people’s lives and concerns, as well as representing God to those at the university and more broadly. As a ministry we desire to be connected to the university and to work with others to the mutual benefit of all. Our office and meeting space are on campus, and we do our best to collaborate with the organizations where we are housed. This has had moderate success. At times, the space we make for certain beliefs can make others uncomfortable. Other times, people struggle to imagine how a Christian organization fits within the secular mandate of the





university, and there is a subtle pressure not to express beliefs that might question the university's values. Even so, we try to collaborate with the university and others whenever we are invited. As we discover the university's own sacred cows, we also imagine ways to provide opportunities for people to wonder about spirituality and other topics that matter.

Campus ministry is necessarily ecumenical, recognizing how God works in and through all denominations and all sorts of Christians. As a campus ministry, we seek out opportunities to partner with others on campus in order to be reminded of how God works in the whole body of Christ. Rejecting competition and being generous in our partnerships with other ministries models a belief in the abundance of the gospel. In practical terms, this means letting go of comparing ourselves to the success of another campus ministry's programs or outreach. Instead, we rejoice in what they are doing and trust that God will guide us in what we do (although perhaps God might also be nudging us to ask them for some help when it comes to outreach).

As a campus ministry we desire to pay attention to how we might best serve the unique culture of this campus and the work that God is doing already in and through others on campus. Just as how one dances changes as the music changes, campus ministry moves in step with those the Spirit brings to us as a campus ministry. We pay attention to what other campus ministries are doing, noting where we are in harmony but also how our efforts might create a fuller sound or even God-honouring dissonance. We're thankful to work together with the chaplains at the different theological colleges and the Campus Chaplains' Association, adding extra harmony to things like an ecumenical worship service and welcome barbecue for Christian students. At the same time, we add our

own unique voice. Graduate Christian Fellowship is one of the few places where graduate students across disciplines can come together to ponder how God is shaping them in their discipline and their faith. We are thankful for how the Reformed tradition's love of deep thinking and asking difficult questions can contribute to the song of the Spirit here at UofT.

We also believe that campus ministry is part of the work of the whole church. Our name indicates how closely we are connected to the Christian Reformed Church, but we also rejoice in the participation of students from a variety of faith backgrounds, especially our extended relationship with folks in the Anglican tradition. Connections to the broader and local church provide us with support and accountability, as well as providing diverse perspectives on what being the body of Christ looks like.

When people mourn the loss of young people in church, campus ministries bear witness to how God is working in the next generations. Furthermore, campus ministry continues the work of the church in encouraging and challenging the faith that is shaped in one's childhood. Campus ministry forms leaders who can actively serve and participate in the church during their time at university and later. Furthermore, campus ministry practices being the body of Christ, creating space especially for those who struggle with how they feel about God and the Bible.

Because God is already present at the university, we approach our ministry and pastoral efforts with hope: we get to participate in what God is doing. Because God and the body of Christ is larger than we can imagine, it makes it easier to approach ministry with a spirit of generous collaboration. 🌻

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Monica Marcelli-Chu

# ZOOMING IN, ZOOMING OUT

*What does a collaborative process look like in the classroom? A TST graduate shares the lasting impact of the ICS classroom on her learning and, now, teaching.*

**D**URING MY DOCTORAL STUDIES at Regis College and the Toronto School of Theology (2015-2021), I knew that my research interests and the questions I was bringing to that research were profoundly shaped by my classroom experiences at ICS. Seminars on Charles Taylor with Ron Kuipers and Spiritual Exercise as Christian Philosophy with Bob Sweetman, both in my first year of coursework, profoundly shaped the questions I brought to the texts of Aquinas, broadening my horizon, and the “work” I should expect a piece of writing to do.

I knew then that the classroom experiences at ICS “rounded out” my intellectual journey at TST in a unique way, and this formation extended into the dissertation stage with Bob’s participation on my committee. I remain grateful now for what I already understood then about the space ICS provided during my theological studies. Seminars at ICS were an opportunity to dig deep into the world of the text, and then to engage in robust conversation with the text, with the people around the table, and with the manifold thinkers and questions each person

around the table was doing their philosophical and theological work with. Whether it was Charles Taylor, or Augustine, or Anselm, “truth” was worked out, negotiated, claimed, disclaimed, scrutinized, contemplated. Truth was not assumed in this space; rather, truth meant work—the work of reading, conversing, writing, reading again, conversing again, writing again.

The work of conversation in the classroom, learning from professors and peers, and engaging the texts and questions I was exposed to, refined my own questions, as it shifted horizons and provoked new perspectives. I understood then that one of the gifts the space ICS afforded was the style of conversation, and that this quality of classroom learning was intellectually formative. This was a space to engage in constructive debate. This was not a space where the question of “right” or “wrong,” or determining understanding or misunderstanding based on conceptual clarity, drove



the conversation. This was a space that challenged my way of thinking, and moved me towards an “openness” in learning that suspended questions of right and wrong for the sake of the process.

What I have discovered since then, especially in my first year as an assistant professor at the Jesuit School of Theology, is how much the ICS classroom shaped me as a teacher, because of how this space formed me as a collaborative learner. As I teach in a theology school that emphasizes the importance of context and engaging the global world and church, I remember—as I practice and work out the process of—collaborative learning. Allowing my own learning to become part of a process and conversation, rather than its own end, prepared me to understand the good of the other in the classroom. Inviting others into that process of reading, conversing, writing, reading again, conversing again, writing again, is work that destabilizes and grounds, as it questions, challenges, and deepens understanding *in via*.

I often tell my students we’re in a “zooming in” or “zooming out” part of the class, and this has absolutely nothing to do with online learning, and everything to do with “working out” the process. Zooming in means: What is on the page? What is at stake in the issue? What are the facts? What are the terms? Who wrote it? Who is claiming it? What does it mean? Zooming out means: What are the questions it provokes? What are the tensions and contradictions? Who is missing? What is missing? What else can it mean? The first is an exercise in grounding—becom-

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ing acquainted with the text or the issue before us, but also with one another as readers and learners. The second is an exercise in expanding—becoming acquainted with the horizons that transcend the limited space of the text, the terms that define our questions, and the classroom.

Working in theology is a joy. But working in theology, particularly moral theology in my case, is a complex kind of joy that requires navigating personal journey, community discernment, social concern, and care for the person, whether that be a student, friend, or new acquaintance that “just has a question for you.” I now have a tremendous fear of those words, because they are often followed by profoundly moving questions that reflect sustained commitment to faith and persons, and deep struggle with where they have experienced neglect, failure, and cruel indifference, on the part of religious communities, persons, and institutions. These spaces of moral and spiritual complexity are very human spaces where truth is “worked out”—claimed, disclaimed, contemplated, spoken, challenged. Morally complex spaces that weave personal histories, systems, and bodies into challenging conversation—that invite contemplation of mystery while demanding sustained commitment to justice—are

spaces of collaborative theological work. 🌸

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Héctor A. Acero Ferrer

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# A COLLABORATIVE PHILOSOPHY OF MEMORY

*[B]y remembering and telling, we not only prevent forgetfulness from killing the victims twice; we also prevent their life stories from becoming banal.... Thanks to the memory and to the narratives that preserve this memory, the uniqueness of the horrible—the unique uniqueness, if I dare say so—is prevented from being leveled off by explanation.*

—Paul Ricoeur, “The Memory of Suffering,” in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*

**L**ANDED IN THE WORLD OF PHILOSOPHY through my interest in memory. Ever since I discovered, as a child, that it was possible for people to have very different recollections of a shared experience, I became fascinated by the power that memory holds over us. I was constantly amazed by the fact that memory could both bring us together and divide us, harm us and heal us, paralyze us and motivate us. As much as I was somewhat of a “unique” child, this fascination with memory

wasn't an oddity of mine, but it was in the air in Colombia, my country of origin, during my most formative years. In the Colombia of the 80s and 90s, the cultivation of select collective memories (and the elimination of others) became a national project, one in which practices of remembrance and memory-erasure became the cornerstone of economic and political domination. Memory has been, therefore, a topic of great existential significance for me in my journey as a person, an academic, and a citizen.

At the heart of this existential concern with memory was my proximity to many people for whom remembering their loved ones—often people they had tragically lost in the context of Colombia’s armed conflict—became a form of life. The primary mobilizing force of this form of life was the preservation of the integrity of the stories and calls to action of the deceased, against the silencing forces of the political and economic powers of the time. Key to this movement were the mothers and grandmothers of the conflict’s deadly victims, who understood with great clarity the point that Paul Ricoeur makes in the opening quotation of this piece, namely, that forgetting our victims is killing them twice. Armed with inexplicable resilience, mothers and grandmothers were determined to build a nation-wide counternarrative to that of the political and economic powers, one in which their children would not die a second death and their stories would not become banal.

And to a significant extent these women accomplished their task. Over the past twenty years or so, the counternarrative they collectively crafted emerged as an alternative political force in Colombia, shifting the focus of the country’s media to the forgotten conflict victims and getting the government to acknowledge the devastation of the war politically. This achievement has not gone unnoticed by international scholars and activists, who have deemed the Colombian experiment an exemplary case of historical memory, one built from the ground up and rooted in local memory initiatives of unparalleled resilience. Currently, Colombia has both a National Centre of Historical Memory and a Truth Commission, both of them national organizations tasked with retrieving, preserving, and indexing historically the names, testimonies, and wishes of the conflict victims and survivors. Rightly so, these institutions attribute their success in shifting the national narrative to the local memory initiatives that many decades prior began the work of remembrance at the ground level.

This incredible achievement of retrieving and inscribing the names and stories of so many in the historical memory of the nation is evidence of a kind of collaboration that is so rare in our world today.

The groups of women survivors that spearheaded this process overcame radical political differences and profound grief in the pursuit of the common goal of lifting the forgotten out of oblivion. Their profoundly transformative collaboration began with a simple collection of names and stories, and it has now expanded the Colombian narrative of the conflict so that more and more victims are gradually included in a process they have called dignification. This is why memory work has become the main—and perhaps the only—hope for a future in which the country is actually held in common by all of its inhabitants.

This is yet another indication of the power that memory holds over us, as it creates the narrative space in which we can, in Hannah Arendt’s terms, “hold a world in common.” Memory’s ability to create the ground to sustain our collective lives and motivate our concerted action is at the heart of such power. The memory initiatives that I have described here share an acute understanding of memory’s ability to shape our collective present and future, as well as the significance of including everyone’s stories in any community’s future-casting vision. Isn’t this how the voices of the departed become catalysts for future change and how they can help us restore the wreckage of history?

I have been very fortunate that my academic journey has led me to places in which I’ve been able to explore and share the story of the resilient people of Colombia. In particular, at ICS I have been able to delve into the collaborative philosophy that inspires and orients Colombians in the pursuit of justice and peace. But this isn’t only an exploratory exercise; it’s a process in which I hope I can learn from the communities I study what it truly means to develop, first, an understanding of the human condition that includes all and, second, an account of the world we share in which everyone’s story has a place. All I know now is that this can only be achieved collaboratively. 🌹

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Christina Labriola

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# IN CONCERT

## CREATIVE COLLABORATION FOR THE KINGDOM

*Therefore by your concord and harmonious love Jesus Christ is being sung. Now all of you together become a choir so that being harmoniously in concord and receiving the key note from God in unison you may sing with one voice through Jesus Christ to the Father.*

—Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Ephesians*

**I**T HAS ALWAYS STRUCK me that music-making is collaborative at its core. The joy of music is a shared joy, enveloping fellow performers (and audience members), yoking them together in a common experience that reverberates at multiple levels of one’s being. The musical dynamic is one of concerted coordination, receptive listening, and self-donation. Choral singing highlights this reality beautifully, as many distinct voices converge to form a coherent, unified whole, a new and mighty collective voice of the ensemble that is greater than the sum of its parts. The singers themselves are their own instruments—ears, larynxes, vocal folds, glottises, pharynxes, lungs, diaphragms, but also hearts, souls, imaginations, and minds. Breathing, heart rate, and even brainwaves sync up as singers attune themselves to one another, focusing their energies, abilities, and creative potential to serve the task at hand: the making of music. What better image cap-

tures for us the multi-voiced communion and single-heartedness of the Body of Christ?

As a musician, scholar, and Christian, a collaborative approach to both art and life is one that informs my thought, practice, and spirituality at multiple levels. Musical collaboration, the collaborative interdisciplinarity of music and theology, and Christian life as a collaboration with the divine: this triad of interrelationships has informed the way I understand and seek to carry out my work and ministry.

It was perhaps my training as a musician that first impressed upon me the joy and fulfillment inherent in the collaborative dynamic—the “point-counterpoint,” “give-and-take” approach, which requires of both (or all) parties deep and attentive listening as well as generous self-giving. As a choral conductor, singer, and pianist, it is the collaborative approach that I find most life-giving and fruitful. To me, it emphasizes that music is not a solipsistic endeavour,





but contains something of the nature of a “free gift,” something given for and to another and self-expressive of the giver. When I direct a choir, I strive to embody a collaborative model of leadership that invites, cultivates, inspires, and draws out rather than imposing my will upon the singers in a heavy-handed, dictatorial fashion. Duets, accompaniment, and indeed any kind of ensemble music-making nurture relationships of trust and allow for mutual flourishing whilst looking towards a common goal.

During my studies in the Master of Sacred Music program at Emmanuel College (TST), another layer was added to this collaborative approach. As I engaged in a program combining music courses *and* the study of theology, the convergence of these two worlds opened up breathtaking new horizons for me. I began to think deeply about, and to seek to enact intentionally through my practice as a musician, meaningful ways that music could be brought into conversation with theological and spiritual realities. This dialogic, interdisciplinary approach fueled my desire to continue the study of theology and music—and more broadly, theology and the arts—at the doctoral level and to continue to seek applications of it through research and music-making.

As a Doctor of Theology student at Regis College (TST), I sought out collaborative approaches to theology/spirituality and the arts/music, especially through modes that engaged the imagination, beauty and theological aesthetics, and mysticism. It was thus that my path led me—providentially—to the doors of the Institute for Christian Studies, and into Rebekah Smick’s and Bob Sweetman’s classes. I was deeply inspired by the model of collaborative, interdisciplinary engagement on display, and the rich discourse to which I was invited to contribute. Philosophical and theological rigour went hand in hand with a profound artistic sensibility and robust understandings of the dynamics of spiritual life and prayer. I can still recall—it is not an exaggeration!—my post-class walks back home to my Annex apartment, mind and heart abuzz with the excitement of new ideas, insights, connections, and possibilities.

As a TST student, the welcome I received at ICS profoundly shaped not only my course of study but

my intellectual and spiritual life as a whole. One remarkable experience stands out: Rebekah’s course in the ART in Orvieto program, which I had the privilege to take in the summer of 2015. I look back on this experience in many ways as the cornerstone of my doctoral studies: an opportunity to consider the interrelationships among art, religion, and theology “on location” in Orvieto, Rome, Assisi, and Florence. I could not have absorbed the beauties of Italy and all of the intellectual, spiritual, artistic, and cultural marvels more eagerly! Following my time in their classes, Bob and Rebekah continued to demonstrate the collaborative ethos through their generosity in serving as examiners for my comprehensive exams, and Rebekah on my thesis committee. Their expertise, guidance, and inspiring passion were central to my progress through my degree and my development as a scholar.

The collaborative approach that so inspires my music-making and interdisciplinary work in theology and music points to a deeper theological reality. Ultimately, cooperative ways of working, receiving, and giving reflect a Trinitarian model and speak to us of a God who is relational—a God who is love. The work of God in the Incarnation, too, is a kind of collaboration: the *fiat* of humanity, given voice through Mary’s “yes” at the Annunciation, allows God to give himself to us totally, coming among us as a human being, “pitching his tent among us” and labouring alongside us in radical solidarity. The wonder of Christian life is that God invites us to collaborate in God’s salvific work. We have been given the dignity of being invited to become co-labourers with God in bringing about the kingdom. God values each of our contributions to this one great project—the goal of reconciling all things in Christ, which Louis M. Savary (after Pierre Teilhard de Chardin) has called the “Christ Project.” Let us, in our work and in our play, cultivate creative, generous, and collaborative ways to contribute to God’s great choral masterwork of salvation. 🌸

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Rebekah Smick

# DECORUM AS HOSPITALITY IN AUGUSTINE

*And the Word became flesh and lived among us,  
and we have seen his glory, the glory as of  
a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*

—John 1:14

**I** GOT A SURPRISING RESPONSE recently from a paper I gave entitled “Augustine’s hermeneutics of *decorum* in humanist art theory.” It was surprising because it drew out the implications of the topic in ways that I didn’t think my intended audience would likely go.

The paper was my contribution to an academic reading group sponsored by The Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies at Victoria University (CRRS) in the University of Toronto on the subject of how art historians have tended to interpret the relation between art and the church at the time of the Counter-Reformation, that mid-sixteenth-century moment when the Roman Catholic church firmed up its positions on a variety of topics that had been radically called into question by the Protestant Reformers.

What my colleague in that reading group found herself appreciating about the content of my paper

was how it suggested that humanist art theory of the Renaissance was innately communal. In her words, my Augustinian reading of the classical rhetorical concept of *decorum* provided important grounds for understanding early modern art theory as fundamentally more collaborative in nature than individualistic, which has been the more common interpretation of that tradition. The advent of art theory in the Renaissance is generally seen as a by-product of the period’s general tendency to place individual humans and what they do at the centre of things.

While this wasn’t exactly the intention of my paper, I was heartened to hear her draw out that conclusion because it reminded me of just how radical and reorienting Augustine’s Christian inflection of classical culture was, and has been, in the history of the Western tradition. Indeed, in the case of *decorum*, as I hope to suggest in what follows, he managed to



Saint Augustin by Philippe de Champaigne (1645-1650)

transform a key concept of classical writing practice into a way of explaining the claims of hospitality that resided for him at the centre of God's participation with humankind.

For most people today, the call to proper *decorum* makes us think of the stifling manners of a long-gone generation. Directives like sit up straight, keep your hands folded, don't use the wrong fork for your fish strike us as anything but hospitable. Similar directives populate Renaissance art treatises—make sure, when you paint, that everyone is appropriately dressed according to their age and status, don't mix the low with the high, steer clear of vulgar figural movements that don't fit the situation at hand. Like etiquette

instruction of the 1950s, the idea of *decorum* here seems to be all about questions of status.

But, buried in these directives is a fundamental principle of rhetoric as a kind of writing. Unlike philosophical writing, rhetorical writing tends to be more audience-oriented. It aims to convince people of the truths it seeks to express not solely through the strength of its argumentation, but also through its ability to elicit a strong affective response from its audience. Understanding in this context is gauged not by the attainment of logical certainty, but by a gut-level assent that what has been said contains truth. As a liberal art, painting was understood to fall under the umbrella of rhetoric as a mode of communication in the early modern period.

While it is easy for us to see, in our present political climate, why there has always been suspicion about the validity of "truths" that are expressed rhetorically, rhetoric has also always been considered a more effective way of conveying truths that are not easily expressed through logical means. For example, while the logic of the law suggests that people who steal should be prosecuted, the higher truth of justice suggests that a hungry child in Gaza right now should not be punished for taking food. To be made aware of this kind of truth, which is more a matter of wisdom than reasoning, requires means of expression that are beyond what strict logic allows.

Moreover, the success of conveying these kinds of

truths depends on finding ways to communicate that are in tune with how one's audience understands. In other words, if one aims to make known to another person a truth that is not easily explained, then one needs to be attentive to the circumstances that govern their ability to know. For example, you may need to find something from their own frame of reference that could, by constructing an analogy or comparison, open up for them the elusive truth you are hoping to convey. Meeting this kind of need was behind much of the language recommended as useful in rhetorical writing manuals.

It is this drive to accommodate the needs and circumstances of one's audience that lies behind the classical rhetorical principle of *decorum*. He will be eloquent, says Cicero, who can adapt his speech to fit all conceivable circumstances (*Orator*).

But, it is in the hands of Augustine that this general concern to heighten the possibility of reaching one's audience through apt expression is turned into a principle of collaborative hospitality. This transformation takes place within the context of Augustine's account of revelation—that is his understanding of precisely how it is that God communicates with us.

For Augustine, of course, one of the most important sites of God's self-communication is scripture, the interpretation of which occupied Augustine in several contexts. Not surprisingly, an important feature of these discussions is the expectation that the language of the Bible was informed by the rhetorical principle of *decorum* since the kind of truth that the Bible was meant to convey was the "full of wisdom" variety. In other words, Augustine interpreted the divine author of the scriptures as offering truths that needed to be accommodated to humanity's lack of familiarity with, and even limited intellectual capacity for, its divine content.

As can be seen from the seventeenth-century painting of St. Augustine by Philippe de Champaigne included in these pages, the variety of rhetorical usages in the Bible were not simply, as we have suggested, about providing humans with a strictly intellectual understanding of its divine subject matter. They were also meant to be conduits for the love of

God that had authorized the scriptures in the first place. As Champaigne shows, the promise of Veritas (Truth) that hovers over the large Bible on the lectern to the right of Augustine will both illuminate his mind - represented by the light that surrounds Augustine's head—and enflame his heart—which he holds gingerly in his left hand in line with the rays of light that first emanate from the truth of the Bible. The Bible's truths have the possibility of being both known and felt.

But Champaigne's choice to show Augustine with quill in hand makes something else clear about Augustine's expectations for Biblical exegesis. He understood that enlightenment of the kind that Champaigne represents is a collaborative effort. It requires an active, interpretive grappling with a text that of necessity must convey its ineffable truths in terms that can only point to, or suggest, its underlying hospitality. Yet, once that struggle for understanding gains traction as a mode of conversation with our God, it is confirmed by an experience of that ineffable love which informed God's gift of self-communication in the scriptures in the first place.

While there is considerably more that could be said about the way in which Augustine's exegetical paradigm became foundational for Renaissance art theory, the fact that it did is at least partially evident from the bodily directives that populate the art literature of the period. As outward expressions of an inner concern to be hospitable to those around you—a God directed love made visible—such actions, when properly represented, were thought to both facilitate and spread an artwork's fundamentally moral message.

And while we today might shy away from others' directives about what constitutes *decorum*, we might still find great value in *decorum* that is born of an earnest desire to communicate our highest concerns to others outside our frame of reference so that they might join us in collaborative conversation about what matters most. 🌺

REBEKAH SMICK is Senior Member  
in *Philosophy of Arts and Culture* at ICS.



Anita Siraki

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## ON COLLABORATION WITH THE TORONTO SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARIES

*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*

—Psalm 119:105

**G**REETINGS, READERS OF *PERSPECTIVE*, from your ICS Librarian, Anita. When I first started this position in August, many long-standing items required attention in the Library, including to ensure that ICS students and faculty would have access to the University of Toronto library system. One of my first points of introduction was with the fantastic library staff at Knox College's Caven Library, a TST member College of the Toronto School of Theology within the University of Toronto network. They welcomed me to the group that also includes Emmanuel College, St. Augustine's Seminary, Wycliffe College, Regis College, St. Michael's College, and Trinity College. My first meeting with the other library staff went well, with everyone showing kindness, patience, as well as gratitude to have ICS as an active part of their discussions in our capacity as an affiliated TST institution. To date, ICS has collaborated with the TST libraries on a number of projects, including a showcase of the works of several of our Senior Members. The timing of that event this past January coincided with the Ontario Library Association yearly conference, which presented a dilemma. Thankfully, and with much gratitude, my ICS colleague, Héctor

Acero Ferrer, stepped in to offer to bring the publications we needed to the faculty showcase, to help with constructing the display, and to answer any questions that attendees had.

The power and the gift of collaboration is something I deeply value and treasure. This has manifested itself strongly in the ongoing work at ICS's Hamilton Annex. For many years, each Librarian would plan a day's trip to St. Stephen-on-the-Mount to retrieve specific items that patrons requested to bring them back to Toronto and to ensure that both Junior Members and Senior Members could have access to the materials needed. In the fall of 2023, the staff of St. Stephen alerted us to some urgent structural issues that needed to be attended to, which resulted in a large-scale collaboration between ICS staff and the church. Together, we planned several site visits to box up and move all of our materials temporarily until the necessary repairs could be accomplished. Several ICS staff members committed long hours and physical work to something that had not been done for many years, as well as one of my predecessors, former ICS Librarian, Isabella Guthrie-McNaughton who graciously volunteered her time, helped us tape up boxes, and guided additional volunteers to steward



this process. Myself and the entire ICS community remain extremely grateful to Isabella for her ongoing support, assistance, institutional knowledge, and we pray for her continued health and well-being.

As well, I reflect with gratitude on the helpfulness and support of my most recent predecessor, Peter Gorman, who served as ICS Librarian until last year. His advice, answering of questions, and providing additional context have all been invaluable and very welcome. I also wish him continued health and well-being.

Additionally, I reflect with great gratitude on ICS's ongoing partnership with the University of Toronto library system. When I connected with their staff in the central department, they turned the on switch to restore our collection to "circulating" so that patrons could find and request specific ICS books and materials via the University's catalogue, as well as eBook and electronic journal database content provided to us through this crucial partnership and External Borrower Cards issued by the Reader Registration department. The work done by my predecessors in integrating the previously stand-alone ICS library catalogue into the University's robust, dynamic, and widely available system has provided a boon

for assigned readings, and enabled easy discovery of supplementary readings, improved quality of research, and much more.

Through my meetings each month with the TST as well as University of Toronto Library departments, including Cataloguing as well as Circulation, I also connected with wonderful colleagues at Knox and Trinity who have assisted me in ensuring that ICS materials are retrievable, accessible, and discoverable. I would also like to add particular thanks to the staff at the Thomas Fisher Library, both in the University's Archives and Records Management division, for providing helpful advice on ICS's archival holdings, as well as to the cataloguing department for assistance with how to make accessible the rare books that ICS staff retrieved from Hamilton, which we hope to add to the system soon.

Overall, the ICS Library runs on partnerships, collaborations, and a dedication to working with other groups to ensure that the ICS community can continue to grow and flourish through our resources. 🌹

*ANITA SIRAKI is the ICS Librarian and has a Master of Information degree from the University of Toronto.*

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