

THE MCDONALD CENTRE for Theology, Ethics, and Public Life

Report 2017-18

MA = Matthew Anderson, Associate Fellow

NJB = Nigel Biggar, Director

JB = Jonathan Brant, Associate Research Fellow

EB = Ed Brooks, Associate Fellow

JO = James Orr, McDonald Post-Doctoral Fellow

A. Strategic aims

The mission of the McDonald Centre is to bring a Christian intelligence to bear on ethical issues of public concern, with a view to

- developing Christian ethics' grasp of contemporary issues
- commending a Christian vision of moral life in society at large
- raising the quality of public deliberation about ethical issues; and
- encouraging Christian ethicists in the art of honest engagement with fellow-members of a 'secular' (i.e., plural) public.

B. Highlights

- The appointment of Dr Ashley Moyses as the McDonald Postdoctoral Fellow in Christian Ethics & Public Life for 2018-23. Dr Moyses was selected from 38 applicants from six countries.
- The appointment of Dr Dafydd Daniel as the McDonald Departmental Lecturer in Christian Ethics for 2018-22. Dr Daniel was selected from 34 applicants from eight countries. In February 2017 he had been chosen to be a 'New Generation Thinker' by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and BBC Radio 3.
- Professor Eric Gregory of Princeton University delivered the fourth series of McDonald Lectures under the title, "The In-gathering of Strangers: Global Justice and Political Theology". (See below.)
- A colloquium on "Chinese 'Just War' Ethics" (November 2017), which featured Drs Ping-cheung Lo, Jonathan Chan, and Ellen Zhang from Hong Kong Baptist University; Professor Cecile Fabre and Sir Richard Sorabji from Oxford University; Dr Stephen de Wijze from Manchester University; Professor David Ellery from the Royal College of Defence Studies; Dr David Whetham from the UK Defence Academy; and members of the UK, US, and New Zealand armed forces.
- A colloquium on "Bruce Gilley and 'The Case for Colonialism'" (May 2018), which featured Professor Bruce Gilley from Portland State University; Professors Paul Collier, Margaret MacMillan, and Alexander Morrison from Oxford University; Professor Tirthankar Roy from the London School of Economics; Professor Jeremy Black from Exeter University; Professor Ali Ansari from St Andrews University; Dr Zareer Masani, biographer of Thomas Macaulay; and Philip Bowcock, former officer in the Colonial Administrative Service in Sudan and Northern Rhodesia.

- The 10th Anniversary McDonald Conference, “Is Religious Liberty under Threat?”. (See below.)

C. Summary of activities and achievements

Professor Nigel Biggar, Director

In 2017-18 NJB had the opportunity to deliver his January 2017 Policy Exchange lecture, “After Iraq: When to Go to War?”, three further times: as the 2017 Hinsley Memorial Lecture, St John’s College, Cambridge; at the British Army’s Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research, Sandhurst; and at the Oxford and Cambridge Club, London.

He was invited to lecture at the 2017 Euro-I.S.M.E. (International Society for Military Ethics) conference, École Militaire Royale, Brussels; at the Institut für Theologie und Frieden, and the Führungsakademie der Bundeswehr, Hamburg; at the Evangelische Bildungsstätte auf Schwanenwerder, Berlin; and at the Catholic University of America, Washington, DC.

In October 2017 he spoke alongside Onora O’Neill, former President of the British Academy and Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission at the London launch of These Islands, a pro-United Kingdom forum; and his paper, “What the United Kingdom is Good for” featured as These Islands’ inaugural publication.

In March 2018 he lectured at the National Assembly of Wales, Cardiff, on “Nations, Unions, and Exits: A Christian View”, National Assembly of Wales. And in May he took part in “The Legacy of the British Empire”, a panel discussion sponsored by the *Times*, and held at its London HQ.

He was also invited to join the Editorial Board of the *Texas National Security Review*.

NJB’s main research project has remained the same one as last year: producing his book, *What’s Wrong with Rights?* He has now completed a fourth chapter of 41,000 words(!), bringing the current total to 75,000 words. During his upcoming sabbatical from October 2018 to April 2019, he will complete the remaining three or four chapters, with a view to submitting a proposal to Oxford University Press in the Spring of 2019, followed by a complete manuscript in the autumn.

He has signed a contract with Bloomsbury Publishers to write a book on the ethics of the British Empire for a non-academic readership, and to deliver the manuscript by the end of September 2020.

With the arrival of the McDonald Departmental Lecturer in Christian Ethics in October 2019, NJB will be relieved of a substantial part of his master’s teaching and supervision and expects to have more time available for public service and witness.

Dr James Orr, McDonald Postdoctoral Fellow

Over the last academic year, JO has completed the manuscript of his first monography, *Divine Law and Natural Order*, which will be published later this year by Peeters for its series “Studies in Philosophical Theology” He has also completed a proposal and three chapters for his second monograph project, *Being and Eternity: Phenomenology and Thomism in Edith Stein*, which is currently under review with two leading university presses. He has received acceptances for three academic articles in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, *New Blackfriars*, and *Modern Theology*. He has been invited to review five major contributions in

philosophical theology in the *Times Literary Supplement*, including a lead essay on Oliver O'Donovan's moral theology, which was published in April 2018.

JO has been overseeing the Centre's Inequality Project, an interdisciplinary research project examining the theological and ethical issues of economic inequality in Britain and their implications for policy-making. He presented a paper on "Must Moral Theology Mind the Gap? An Assessment of Distributive Egalitarianism" to the Postgraduate Research Seminar in Christian Ethics at Oxford, a revised version of which will shortly be submitted to a leading peer-reviewed journal in theological ethics.

JO has continued his public policy work on religious freedom by advising groups involved in proposed legislation on freedom of conscience and religion in the States of Jersey and was invited to give evidence to a session of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights on the relationship between freedom of speech and the 'Prevent' duty in British universities. JO has also assisted NJB with the organisation, preparation, and logistics of the 2018 annual conference, "Is Religious Freedom Under Threat". In November 2017 he delivered the opening remarks at a dinner on "Politics and Ethics" at the Legatum Institute, which recently invited him to organise a one-day colloquium of historians in October 2018 to discuss the future for Britain beyond Brexit as part of its ongoing series "The Country We Want To Be".

In April 2018, JO launched the Oxford Scriptorium at Pusey House, a project designed to create a scholarly community of humanities researchers in the heart of Oxford. The project welcomes graduate students and postdoctoral researchers to meet as a group for regular sessions of writing and research in a structured and supportive working environment.

JO's postdoctoral position at the McDonald Centre comes to an end on 30 September 2018.

D. The 2018 McDonald Lectures: "The In-gathering of Strangers: Global Justice and Political Theology"

The fourth series of McDonald Lectures was delivered by Dr Eric Gregory from 24 April to 2 May 2018. Dr Gregory delivered four lectures:

"Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism Today: An Augustinian Perspective"

"Good Samaritans of the Entire World: Humanitarian Ethics and What We Owe to Whom"

"The Grace of Doing Something: In Defence of Intervention"

"No Nation Has Clean Hands: Tragedy and the End of Obligation"

Dr Gregory is Professor of Religion at Princeton University, where he also serves as Chair of the Council of the Humanities and sits with the Executive Committee of the University Center for Human Values. He is the author of *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (University of Chicago Press, 2008).

E. The 2018 May conference: "Is Religious Liberty under Threat? A Trans-Atlantic Dialogue"

This 10th Anniversary conference was conceived with the help of John Witte, JO, and MA, organized with the Center for the Study of Law and Religion at Emory University, and

generously funded by the McDonald Agape Foundation. It drew together scholars from Oxford, Warwick, Bristol, Cardiff, Emory, Harvard, Notre Dame and Baylor Universities, and featured Mary Ann Glendon, former US Ambassador to the Holy See, and Sir Mark Hedley, former Justice of the High Court, as McDonald Distinguished Scholar Lecturers.

F. Projects

Ethics and Empire

This project was launched in July 2017 with an inaugural conference, “Ethics & Empire: the Ancient Period”. This comprised five sessions and covered ancient Israel and the Assyrian empire, classical Roman republicanism and early Roman empire, the New Testament and Roman empire, Augustine and late Roman empire, and classical Chinese appraisals of empire. Participants hailed from the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Bristol, Birmingham, Nottingham, Manchester, Virginia and Indiana.

The project became the subject of public controversy in December 2017, which caused the resignation of the two Oxford historians serving on its Core Group. Notwithstanding this, Oxford University was firm in resisting attempts to undermine the project, press support was overwhelming, and three new historians have been recruited to fill the vacancies.

The next conference, on empires in the medieval and early modern periods, will be held in July 2019.

The Oxford Character Project (JB & EB)

The Oxford Character Project (OCP) is an interdisciplinary initiative that aims to supplement university education focusing on the acquisition of academic knowledge, expertise, and skill with a creative, academically-informed programme for character development. Project activity combines research into character formation and leadership and practical work with students at the University of Oxford and beyond. A three-year pilot (2014-2017), funded by the Templeton World Charity Foundation (TWCF), culminated in last year’s McDonald Centre conference, ‘Cultivating Virtue in the University’, attracting excellent speakers and drawing participants from around the world. An edited volume based on papers delivered at the conference is in preparation, along with several journal articles that detail our underlying methodology of character development and present the results of quantitative and qualitative research into the effectiveness of the intervention. In 2017, following the completion of the pilot phase, the work of the Oxford Character Project was independently reviewed by leading academics in the field of character formation. Comments were glowing, including: ‘This team could become the international leaders in character education in higher education.’

The TWCF trustees unanimously recommended the Project for continued funding, to the level of 50% that their articles allow for follow-on grants. This new funding has allowed the OCP to continue whilst we seek new partners willing to invest in our work. We have also begun to offer paid-for programming beyond our own student cohorts, establishing a small revenue stream. Over the last year, we have continued the usual programming, including a

year-long student programme on character formation for leadership; conferences; seminars; Ethics through Fiction and Film discussions; and special lectures. In addition there have been several new initiatives. We have developed our project entitled 'The Arts of Leading' in conjunction with the Oxford Research Centre for the Humanities and the Saïd Business School, with whom we are also discussing the possibility of an executive education programme in character development. We have delivered programming on character and leadership for the Europaeum Scholars programme as part of an ongoing engagement to contribute to their curriculum, and have been similarly invited to contribute to the new Schmidt Science Fellows programme. We have delivered a student forum on character and leadership for the London School of Economics and have been invited by the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Hong Kong to deliver a similar forum and other teaching at the start of June. We have taken up several invitations to deliver academic papers and presentations and have been approached by other universities, as well as schools, with real potential to expand our work in Oxford and elsewhere. Looking ahead, we have been invited by the committee of the Philosophy of Education Society of North America to hold a symposium on the formation of character in students at their conference in October, and are preparing for our own conference in conjunction with Wake Forest University, to be held at Wake Forest in February 2019.

We are encouraged by the high level of interest in character formation for students and 'emerging adults' and are actively seeking funding to sustain our ongoing work as well as its development and expansion.

Inequality (JO)

As part of the Centre's two-year interdisciplinary research project undertaking a theological and ethical analysis of distributive and economic inequalities in Britain and the United States, JO has prepared a draft article summarizing the project's conclusions for submission to a leading journal in theological ethics. He is also preparing to publish an essay on moral theology and human equality for the Ethics Series of Grove Books, a resource designed to stimulate and equip leaders and laypersons in the church on contemporary issues of ethical concern. This contribution is designed to initiate conversations on inequality among theological ethicists and contribute to ongoing discussions in political philosophy and the social sciences, as well as to the complex and increasingly fraught public debate on the question of inequality.

Understanding Conversion to Islam in Prison

Based at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London and directed by Dr Matthew Wilkinson, this project aims to improve understanding of the process of conversion to politically extreme Islam in European prisons, with a view to enhancing the ability of prison chaplains, Christian and Muslim, to channel the religious inclinations of prisoners in a more benign direction. The project is associated with the McDonald Centre through NJB, who sits on its Steering Group; Jonathan Aitken, who has a professional interest in its work; and Dr Wilkinson, who is an Associate Fellow of the Centre.

G. Visiting Fellows

The Centre has been pleased to host two Visiting Fellows: first, in Michaelmas Term 2017, Dr Jonathan Chan; and then, in Trinity Term, Professor Kurt Remele.

Dr Chan is Associate Professor in the Department of Religion and Philosophy, and Associate Director of the Centre for Applied Ethics, at Hong Kong Baptist University; and he is a contributor to *Chinese Just War Ethics: Origin, Development, and Dissent* (Routledge, 2015).

Professor Remele is an Associate Professor of Ethics and Catholic Social Thought at the University of Graz, Austria. He has been a Fulbright Scholar at the Catholic University of America, and a visiting professor at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis and at Gonzaga University in Spokane. His latest book is *Die Wuerde des Tieres ist unantastbar. Eine neue christliche Tierethik* (Butzon & Bercker, 2016).

H. Professor Biggar: lectures and publications

Invited lectures and talks

“Empire: Is it Always Bad?”, Oundle School, 10 May 2018

“The Legacy of the British Empire”, panel discussion sponsored by the *Times*, the News Building, London, 8 May 2018

“After Iraq: When to Go to War?”, lecture at the Oxford and Cambridge Club, London, 10 April 2018

“Ethics and Empire: Reflections on the Controversy”, contribution to a conference on “Force and Christian Responsibility”, Washington, DC, 22-3 March 2018

“Nations, Unions, and Exits: A Christian View”, National Assembly of Wales, Cardiff, 20 March 2018

“After Iraq: When to Go to War?”, the Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research, Sandhurst, 16 March 2018

“When is War Just?”, Romney Street Group, at the Athenaeum, London, 13 March 2018

“Christianity, International Law, Moral Norms, and War”, conference on Legal Norms, Moral Values, and National Interests, Evangelische Bildungsstätte auf Schwanenwerder, Berlin, 19-21 February 2018

“After Iraq: When to Go to War?”, 2017 Hinsley Memorial Lecture, St John’s College, Cambridge, 9 November 2017

“David Rodin’s Critique of ‘Just War’: A Counter-Critique”, Institut fuer Theologie und Frieden, Hamburg, Germany, 13 September 2017

“Behaving in Public”, seminar, Führungsakademie der Bundeswehr, Hamburg, Germany, 13-14 September 2017

“Faith, Identity, and Populist Politics: what is the future for freedom of speech in the UK?”, panellist, Council of Christians and Jews Public Policy Seminar, 11 July 2017

“Righting Historic Wrongs Fairly: between difficulty and impossibility”, Oxford Forum debate, “The Empire Wronged the World and Britain Should Make Amends”, Exeter College, Oxford, 3 June 2017

“Fostering Reconciliation as a Goal of Military Ethics”, keynote address, Euro-I.S.M.E.

(International Society for Military Ethics) conference, “Is Restraint in War Essential for a Lasting Peace?”, École Militaire Royale, Brussels, 2 June 2017

Book in progress

What’s Wrong with Rights? (OUP, 2020)

Chapters in books (published & forthcoming)

“Proportionality: Lessons from the Somme”, *Soundings* (forthcoming)

“Stagger Onward, Rejoicing: Jean Bethke Elshtain, Augustinian Realist”, in Michael Chevallier and Debra Erickson, eds, *Jean Bethke Elshtain: Politics, Ethics, and Society* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2018)

“Human evolution to higher things”, “Horror or glory: what’s basic?”, “On judgement, repentance, and restoration”, “Litter: a moral and spiritual problem”, “Everybody wants a happy ending: reflections on Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*”, “Palm Sunday: What does it take not to bend?”, “Remembrance” in *Untamed Gospel: Protests, Poems, and Prose for the Christian Year*, ed. Martyn Percy (London: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2017)

“Where’s the Virtue in the Humanities?”, in Kurt Almquist and Isabella Thomas, eds, *Sapere Aude: The Future of the Humanities in British Universities* (Stockholm: Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation, 2017)

“Між родиною і космополісом: етика нації” [Between Kin and Cosmopolis: An Ethic of the Nation], in ПРОТЕСТАНТСЬКА РЕФОРМАЦІЯ НА СУМЩИНІ: ІСТОРИЯ, СУЧАСНІСТЬ, ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ [The Protestant Reformation in the Sumy Region: History, Modernity, and Prospects], ed. B.O. Gura et al. (Sumy Sumy State Pedagogical University A. C. Makarenka, 2017), pp. 148-75

“The Bible, Christianity, and Patriotism”, in *Christian Citizenship in the Middle East: Divided Allegiance or Dual Belonging?*, ed. Mohammed Girma and Cristian Romocea (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017); reprinted in ПРОТЕСТАНТСЬКА РЕФОРМАЦІЯ НА СУМЩИНІ: ІСТОРИЯ, СУЧАСНІСТЬ, ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ [The Protestant Reformation in the Sumy Region: History, Modernity, and Prospects], ed. B.O. Gura et al. (Sumy Sumy State Pedagogical University A. C. Makarenka, 2017), pp. 6-11

“The Moral Justification for Military Intervention”, in Daniel Brunstetter and Jean-Vincent Holleindre, eds, *The Ethics of War and Peace Revisited: Moral Challenges in an Era of Contested and Fragmented Sovereignty* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2017)

Articles in journals (published & forthcoming)

“Compromise: What Makes it Bad?”, *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 31.1 (February 2018)

Other publications (bulletins, pamphlets, newspaper articles and letters, interviews, blogs)

“Vile Abuse is Now Tolerated in our Universities”, *The Times*, 10 April 2018

“‘Ethics and Empire’: some home truths”, *Oxford Magazine*, 11 January 2018

“Here’s my reply to those who condemn my project on ethics and empire”, *The Times*

(online), 23 December 2017

“Don’t feel guilty about our colonial history”, *The Times*, 30 November 2017

What the United Kingdom is Good For (London: These Islands, 2017)

“Europe’s Imperial Ambitions Led to Brexit”, *The Times*, 4 September 2017

“The Lessons of History”, letter, *The Times*, 12 August 2017

I. Dr Orr: publications

Books

Being and Eternity: Phenomenology and Thomism in Edith Stein (under review)

Divine Law and Natural Order (Leuven: Peeters, forthcoming, December 2018)

Articles

“Distributive Egalitarianism: A Theological Assessment” (in preparation)

“Laws of Nature or Causal Powers? A Theological Proposal”, *International Philosophical Quarterly* (forthcoming, 2019)

“Classical Theism and the Problem of Intrinsic Value”, *New Blackfriars* (forthcoming, 2018)

“The Discarded Mind: Divine Ideas and Human Concepts”, *Modern Theology* (forthcoming, 2018)

Reviews

Oliver O’Donovan, *Entering Into Rest: Ethics as Theology III* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 2017), in the *Times Literary Supplement* (20 April 2017)

Paul Draper and J. L. Schellenberg, eds., *Renewing Philosophy of Religion: Exploratory Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), in the *Times Literary Supplement* (forthcoming, January 2019)

Fiona Ellis, ed., *New Models of Religious Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), in the *Times Literary Supplement* (forthcoming, December 2018)

Keith Ward, *The Christian Idea of God: A Philosophical Foundation for Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), in the *Times Literary Supplement* (forthcoming, November 2018)

David Marno, *Death Be Not Proud* (Chicago, IL.: University of Chicago Press, 2016), in the *Times Literary Supplement* (forthcoming, July 2018) (invited)

Acknowledgements

Warm thanks are due to the Centre’s Administrator, Ginny Dunn, for running this year’s two colloquia and Advisory Council meeting, and for co-administering the May Conference with Amy Wheeler of the Center for the Study of Law & Religion at Emory University.

*Nigel Biggar, Director
Christ Church, Oxford
20 May 2018*