



**THE MCDONALD CENTRE
for Theology, Ethics, and Public Life**

Report 2014-15

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. Summary of activities and achievements in 2014-15

Professor Nigel Biggar, Director

This has been a relatively quiet year for the Centre, mainly because Nigel Biggar remained Director of Graduate Studies in the Faculty of Theology & Religion until 31 December 2014 and because he entered on a nine-month period of research leave in late March 2015. After spending most of the last eighteen months speaking and writing about 'just war' in the wake of the publication of his book, *In Defence of War* (O.U.P., 2013), he is now preparing to write a book on *What's Wrong with Rights?*

During 2014-15 Professor Biggar raised his own public profile and that of the Centre in several ways. First of all, he made a series of interventions in the press and online, both secular and ecclesial, about the referendum on Scottish independence in September 2014. He followed this up in February 2015 by publishing an essay on Britain's involvement in World War I in the online *Scottish Review*, one of Scotland's best respected current affairs journals with a circulation exceeding that of the major broadsheets. Invited by *SR* to submit further material, he published an essay on Britain's nuclear deterrent, Trident, just before the General Election in May 2015. This was immediately 'tweeted' by David Torrance, one of Scotland's leading political journalists, to his 12,700 followers. Professor Biggar intends to follow this with a third essay on assisted suicide later in 2015. In addition, he had letters (sometimes leading) published in the *London Times* on assisted suicide, Israel's self-defence, *Charlie Hebdo* and freedom of speech, and the U.K.'s defence funding.

Second, Professor Biggar accepted two invitations to speak to parliamentarians at Westminster, once on assisted suicide and once on the justification of military intervention. His writing on the moral dimension of university education inspired a seminar at the British Academy in October 2014; and his writing on war elicited an invitation to speak at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, NY, in March 2015. In addition, he spoke on World War I at a public meeting in Dublin and subsequently wrote on it in the *Irish Times* and the *Australian Book*

Review; and he lectured on just war in Slovenia, on political ‘forgiveness’ in France, and on rights at Princeton, NJ.

In October the Centre welcomed its two new post-doctoral fellows: from Cambridge Dr James Orr, the McDonald Postdoctoral Fellow in Christian Ethics and Public Life, and from Princeton Dr Michael Lamb, the Templeton-McDonald Postdoctoral Fellow in Character Formation.

In March the Centre staged a day-colloquium under the title, “Justifying Trident?”, which involved two former director-generals at the Ministry of Defence, as well as an expert on nuclear deterrence from Paris and a leading Scottish journalist. And in May it held its annual public conference on “What’s Wrong with Rights?”, whose speakers included a former president of the British Academy, a former justice of the U.K.’s Supreme Court, and a former principal adviser to the chief of the U.K.’s defence staff.

The proceedings of the Centre’s 2014 conference on “In Defence of War?” will be published in the August 2015 issue of *Studies in Christian Ethics*.

Dr Michael Lamb, Templeton-McDonald Postdoctoral Fellow

Michael Lamb joined the McDonald Centre in October 2014 as the McDonald-Templeton Postdoctoral Fellow and a Research Fellow at Harris Manchester College. He holds a Ph.D. in Politics from Princeton University, a B.A. in Political Science (*summa cum laude*) from Rhodes College, and a second B.A. in Philosophy and Theology (first-class) from Oxford, where he studied as a Rhodes Scholar.

Dr Lamb has pursued research on the ethics of citizenship, the relationship between religion and politics, and the role of virtues in public life. Since October, he has published an article on Aquinas’s account of hope and its relevance for contemporary politics, submitted another article on Aquinas and the virtues of hope, and co-authored a book-chapter on what Aristotle can teach us about communicating climate change. He is currently revising his book manuscript, *A Commonwealth of Hope: Reimagining Augustine’s Political Thought*.

In addition, Dr Lamb has helped to launch the Oxford Character Project, a three-year long interdisciplinary initiative that helps postgraduate students in various fields—including government, theology, science, economics, and engineering—reflect on the relationship between leadership and character and integrate their values into their vocations. In addition to researching character and moral formation, he has helped to lead the Global Leadership Initiative, facilitating discussions of leadership, virtue, and vocation, organizing dinners with visiting scholars, developing a curriculum for postgraduate character development, and mentoring participants. Since October, he has held individual meetings with over 30 postgraduate students to discuss their research and vocation. He has also advised Oxford’s Developing the Christian Mind program and co-organized two sections of an “Ethics through Fiction and Film” reading group (one with Oxford postgraduates, another with Rhodes Scholars), which meets to discuss novels and films that address fundamental ethical themes.

In partnership with the Centre and the Director, Dr Lamb has also co-convened a research seminar on “The Formation of Moral Character,” which has invited experts from education, the military, and business to discuss moral formation in their professions. He is now co-organizing the Centre’s 2016 conference on “Everyday Ethics.”

As an extension of his work, Dr Lamb has also advised Rhodes House on their new Service and Leadership Programme and helped to develop and moderate leadership retreats for Rhodes Scholars. On surveys following both retreats, participants ranked him highest among all of the moderators, which included former Rhodes Scholars teaching at Oxford, Columbia, and the University of Chicago, as well as professional moderators from the Aspen Institute. He now meets regularly with the Warden to offer advice on programming for Rhodes Scholars.

Dr James Orr, McDonald Postdoctoral Fellow

James Orr joined the McDonald Centre in October 2014 as the McDonald Postdoctoral Fellow at Christ Church. He received his Ph.D. in Philosophy of Religion from the University of Cambridge, where he also gained an M.Phil. (distinction) in Philosophy of Religion and a Diploma in Theology & Religious Studies (distinction), having previously completed a B.A. in Classics at the University of Oxford (double first) and a two-year program at B.P.P. University Law School.

Since October Dr Orr has been engaged primarily on a research project on theories of value, and in particular the so-called problem of intrinsic objective value. He has developed a critique of recent strategies in secular ecological ethics to ground value in the inanimate world, together with a constructive theological proposal to do so successfully. For the second stage of this project, he has turned to the question of the structure of value, and in particular the conundrum in secular value-theory as to whether values are ‘plural’ and radically incommensurable and the extent to which this would undermine traditional theological commitments.

He is currently finalizing research articles on Nancy Cartwright’s analysis of natural laws and on Kant’s shifting approach to ‘divine purposiveness’ in nature, preparing a monograph manuscript entitled *God and the Laws of Nature: A New Approach*, and writing a second book provisionally entitled *Being and Eternity: The Christian Humanism of Edith Stein*.

Alongside this research, Dr Orr has carried out a range of administrative responsibilities for the Centre. He has sought to develop a stronger digital presence for the Centre, in particular by overhauling the content, architecture, and aesthetic design of the website, and by helping to disseminate the Director’s press publications and media work over social media. He has assisted with the organisation of a one-day symposium on nuclear deterrence and the annual summer conference on human rights.

In addition to his work for the Centre, James has organised a series of well-attended events on behalf of the Trinity Forum at Oxford (Christ Church) and Cambridge (St. John’s), including Prof. Eamon Duffy on gospel themes in Caravaggio, Dr. Rowan Williams on gospel themes in Dostoevsky, Prof. Nicholas Boyle on Christianity and culture, Dr. Nick Spencer on the history of British atheism, and Dr. Michael Ward on reason and the imagination in C.S. Lewis. He also organised a symposium at Oxford and Cambridge on values and modernity and he has been invited to join the Lambeth Partnership in support of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s project for evangelism, study, and prayer at the new Community of St. Anselm at Lambeth Palace.

C. Teaching

While the education of students is not the McDonald Centre’s primary vocation, the Director and both postdoctoral fellows do spend a lot of their time teaching Christian ethics, which is in fact an important way of shaping public life by shaping the young minds of those who live it.

In addition to delivering a core set of lectures to undergraduates on “A Christian Vision of Moral Life: its Elements and Architecture”, Professor Biggar had ultimate charge of 18 postgraduate students. Of these, fourteen were engaged in doctoral studies and hailed from Australia, the Netherlands, and the U.S.A., as well as the U.K. They included a consultant in pediatric palliative care, a senior officer in the British Army, and a former B.B.C. journalist. Among their research topics were the ethics of asymmetric warfare, the rights of children in medical care, human rights in modern Roman Catholic social teaching, and the moral purposes of education.

In addition, the Director and the two postdoctoral fellows jointly taught two graduate seminars in Christian ethics. “Elements of a Christian Ethic” engaged classical and contemporary thinkers in Christian ethics and moral philosophy—from Augustine and Aquinas to Kierkegaard, Kant, and Barth—to explore a range of theoretical and practical questions: Are there moral

absolutes? What role does Scripture, reason, or natural law play in a Christian account of the good life? How do consequences, intentions, and virtues feature in moral and political analysis? Can Christians speak on their own terms in public debates, or must they adopt a form of public reason? “Select Texts in Christian Ethics” introduced postgraduates to texts and thinkers who are central to the Christian tradition of ethical reflection and relevant to contemporary ethics and politics. Professor Biggar led a session on Barth’s ethics in the *Church Dogmatics*, Dr Orr facilitated discussions of Catholic and Protestant social thought, and Dr Lamb led a session on Augustine’s *City of God*.

All three also assisted Professor Joshua Hordern in teaching an undergraduate course on “A Christian Vision of the Moral Life: Practical Issues,” with the Director lecturing on just war and Dr Lamb on the relationship between religion, politics, and the secular. Drs Orr and Lamb also led smaller discussions of practical issues such as physician-assisted suicide, abortion, and the role of government. In addition Dr Orr tutored a number of undergraduates in preparation for taking the final exam in Christian Moral Reasoning.

D. Advisory Council

After six years sitting on the Centre’s Advisory Council Sir Joseph Pilling asked to step down. Expressing due thanks for all his good service, the Director accepted his resignation.

E. Professor Biggar: lectures and publications

Invited lectures and talks

- “Rights, Religious Freedom, and Establishment”, Spring Colloquium on “Law and Religious Liberty”, Center for Theological Inquiry, Princeton, USA, 27-28 April 2015
- “Our Violent World: Christian thinking on just war and how it applies today”, St Thomas Church, 5th Ave, New York, 22 April 2015:
- “The Justification of Killing: the ‘Right to Life’ versus Double-effect Reasoning”, The Ethics of War conference, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, N.Y., U.S.A., 26-28 March 2015
- “Toward an Ethic of Empire”, School of Divinity, St Andrew’s University, Scotland, 5 March 2015
- “Le religieux: obstacle ou facilitateur du Pardon? L’exemple de L’Irlande du Nord”, conference on “Le Pardon, un défi dans l’histoire”, L’Institut Catholique d’Études Supérieures, La Roche-sur-Yon, France, 5-6 February 2015
- “Just War and International Law: A Response to Mary Ellen O’Connell”, Society for Christian Ethics, Chicago, 10 January 2015
- “Love in Just War?”, conference on Just War in the Midst of Combat?, the Divinity School, University of Chicago, 8 January 2015
- “The Justification of War and Military Intervention”, Foreign Office, London, 9 December 2014
- “1914-18: Was Britain Right to Fight?”, Christ Church Canterbury, 27 November 2014
- “Just War? The Ethics of Military Intervention in the 21st Century”, House of Lords, Westminster, 24

November 2014

- “Ethics, War, and 1914-18”, Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, Ireland, 19 November 2014
 “Who Would Jesus Shoot?”, a debate with Thomas Yoder Neufeld on the theological legitimacy of war, Union Chapel, London, 12 November 2014
 “Why Christian Faith Deserves a Place in Pluralistic Debates about Medicine”, Conference of European Church: Church and Society Commission, Strasbourg, France, 6 November 2014
 “Where the Virtue in the Humanities?”, Ax;son Johnsson seminar, “The Moral Teaching of the Humanities”, British Academy, London 16 October 2014
 “In Defence of War: What’s it all about?”, Catholic Theological Association, St Mary’s University, Twickenham, London, 9 September 2014
 “In Defence of War: the Christian tradition, controversies, and current cases”, Societas Ethica, Maribor, Slovenia, 21-24 August 2014
 “Assisted Dying: An Assessment”, House of Lords, Westminster, 9 June 2014

Books (published)

Between Kin and Cosmopolis: An Ethic of the Nation. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock and Lutterworth, 2014.

Chapters in books (published & forthcoming)

- “A Global State, International Law, and the Containment of Persistent Conflict: An Anglican Response to *Pacem in Terris*”, in Heinz-Gerhard Justenhoven. Claus Kress, Mary-Ellen O’Connell, eds.. *Peace through Law*, Studies in Peace Ethics (Baden-Baden: Nomos & Aschendorff Verlagen, forthcoming)
 “Fostering Reconciliation as a Goal of Military Ethics”, in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Military Ethics*, ed. James Turner Johnson and Eric Peterson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015)
 “Regime-Change in Iraq: A Christian Reading of the Morals of the Story”, in Robert Song and Brent Waters, eds, *The Authority of the Gospel: Explorations in Moral and Political Theology in Honour of Oliver O’Donovan* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015)

Articles in journals (published & forthcoming)

- “In Response”, *Studies in Christian Ethics*, (forthcoming)
 “Falconer’s Revolutionary Imprudence”, *Modern Believing*, 56/2 (2015)
 “In Defence of War”, *New Blackfriars* (January 2015)
 “In Defence of Just War: Christian Tradition, Controversies, and Cases”, *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 74/4 (2014)
 “Why Christianity benefits secular public discourse, and why, therefore, Anglican bishops should sit in a reformed House of Lords”, *Theology* (September 2014)
 “Review Essay: Doug Gay, *Honey from the Lion: Christianity and the Ethics of Nationalism*”, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 67/3 (2014)

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

- “Trident: Why we should learn to live with it”, *Scottish Review*, May 2015

- “Gallipoli: Should Britain have stayed well clear of it?”, *Irish Times*, 25 April 2015
- “The Good of Beauty, Proportionate Costs, and Castle Mill”, *Oxford University Gazette*, 11 March 2015
- “Cards on the Table: A Flawed, Candid History of Britain and the Great War”, *Australian Book Review*, March 2015
- “Raid Aid to Fund Defence”, leading letter, *The Times*, 1 March 2015
- “Right to Fight”, *Scottish Review*, January 2015:
<http://www.scottishreview.net/NigelBiggar1a.html>
- “Charlie and Youth”, *The Times*, 15 January 2015
- “Assisted Dying: What to Think?”, *Church Times*, 31 October 2014
- “Should Britain intervene militarily to stop Islamic State?”, blog.oup.com, 4 October 2014:
<http://blog.oup.com/2014/10/britain-intervene-islamic-state/>
- “Yes side’s nuclear stance deluded”, *Scotland on Sunday*, 14 September 2014
- “Not feart ... canny”, *Galloway News*, 11 September 2014
- “Free-riding on nuclear defence”, *The [Glasgow] Herald*, 5 September 2014
- “Nuclear option has a positive purpose”, letter, *The Scotsman*, 5 September 2014
- “Scottish independence seems like a false god”, *Church Times*, 5 September 2014
- “Scottish referendum: An appeal to the undecideds”, *Theos* website, 3 September 2014:
www.theosthinktank.co.uk/comment/2014/09/03/scottish-referendum-an-appeal-to-the-undecideds
- “Did Salmond slip up on the currency issue?”, letter, *The Scotsman*, 7 August 2014
- “Israel’s ‘self-defence’”, leading letter, *The Times*, 8 August 2014
- “Keeping the pound and losing control”, *The Scotsman*, 7 August 2014.
- “Assisted Dying”, leading letter, *The Times*, 18 July 2014
- “Independence will do nothing for the Scots”, *Standpoint* (May 2014):
<http://www.standpointmag.co.uk/node/5523/full>

Radio interviews

BBC Radio Ulster, “Sunday Sequence”, in conversation with Keith Jeffrey on just war and 1914-18

(23 November 2014)

Spirit Radio (Dublin) on Christianity and war (17 November 2014)

Premier Christian Radio (London) in conversation with Stanley Hauerwas on just war (3 November

2014):

<http://www.premierchristianradio.com/Shows/Saturday/Unbelievable/Episodes/Unbelievable-Just-War-vs-Pacifism-Nigel-Biggar-Stanley-Hauerwas>

F. Dr Lamb: lectures and publications

Invited lectures

- Panelist, “Seeking Wisdom Conference, Developing a Christian Mind Programme, Worcester College, Oxford, 21 March 2015
- “Hope for the Commonwealth: Augustine on Eschatology, Ecclesiology, and Politics,” Graduate Christian Ethics Seminar, University of Oxford, 2 December 2014
- “Augustine and the Virtue of Hope,” American Academy of Religion, 22 November 2014
- “Aristotle on the Ethics of Communicating Climate Change,” Oxford Martin School, University of

Oxford, 19 November 2014

“Beyond Pessimism: A Structure of Encouragement in Augustine’s *City of God*,” History of Political Thought Seminar, University of Oxford, 4 November 2014

“Beyond Pessimism: Augustine’s Structure of Encouragement,” Association for Political Theory, University of Wisconsin, 18 October 2014

Book (in progress)

A Commonwealth of Hope: Reimagining Augustine’s Political Thought (under revision, invited for review)

Chapters and articles (published & forthcoming)

“A Passion and Its Virtue: Aquinas on Hope and Magnanimity,” in Ingolf U. Dalferth and Marlene A. Block, eds., *Hope*, Claremont Studies in Philosophy of Religion (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015)

“Aristotle on the Ethics of Communicating Climate Change,” with Melissa Lane, in Clare Heyward and Dominic Roser, eds. *Climate Justice in a Non-Ideal World* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming)

Articles (in progress)

“Aquinas and the Virtues of Hope: Theological and Democratic,” invited and under review at the

Journal of Religious Ethics for focus issue on ‘Aquinas and the Democratic Virtues’

“Beyond Pessimism: Augustine’s Structure of Encouragement and the Virtue of Hope”

G. Dr Orr: lectures and publications

Invited lectures

“Value Pluralism”, University of Oxford, 2015

“God and Intrinsic Value”, Durham University, March 2015

“The Resurrection and Christian Ethics”, Anglia Ruskin University, December 2014

“The Problem of Evil”, St Mellitus’ College, London, November 2014

Books (in progress)

God and the Laws of Nature: A New Approach

Being and Eternity: The Christian Humanism of Edith Stein.

Articles (in progress)

“Value Pluralism and Monotheistic Commitment” (under review)

“Classical Theism and Intrinsic Value” (under review)

“No God, No Powers: On Cartwright’s Escape” (under review)

“Continuity and Change in Kant’s Physico-Theology” (in preparation)

“Diffusing Power: Legal Pluralism and Ecclesial Agency” (in preparation)

Other publications

Review, James Mumford, *Ethics at the Beginning of Life: A Phenomenological Critique* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), *Modern Theology* 31/2 (2015)

Review, Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism, Religious Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 51/3 (2015)

Review, John Hughes, ed., *The Unknown God: Responses to the New Atheists* (London: SCM Press, 2013), *Science and Christian Belief* (forthcoming)

Review, Anthony Meredith, *Christian Philosophy in the Early Church* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2012), *Heythrop Journal* 54/5 (forthcoming)

Letter on abortion and free speech, *Daily Telegraph*, 22 November 2014

Acknowledgements

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*Nigel Biggar, Director
Christ Church, Oxford
7 May 2015*