



Durham
University

Centre for Catholic Studies

Centre for Catholic Studies Annual Review 2024-25

June 2025



Report from Professor Karen Kilby CCS Director and Bede Professor of Catholic Theology

I'm honoured to be the Director of the Centre for Catholic Studies at this moment in its development. I have a dual sense of where we are at the moment: moving into a new level of maturity and stability on the one hand, and yet also still fundamentally young, with extraordinary dynamism and fresh possibilities.

With the establishment of the **CCS Trust** as a legal entity to oversee the use of donated funds, and the newly formalised Advisory Board, which had its first meeting this May, we are in a period of laying down of long-term structures to ensure that the CCS will remain itself, and remain close to its partners, into the future. The **two new Chairs** (the Duns Scotus Chair in Franciscan Studies and the soon-to-be-filled Clare and Hawley Chair in the History of Catholicism) equally contribute to this sense of enhanced stability and permanence.

One of the first fruits of the greater stability has been the possibility to create a "**Career Development Fellowship**" in Catholic Theology for a three-year period. It has been wonderful to welcome Dr Nomi Pritz-Bennett to the CCS. Because of the financial underpinning of the core endowment, when we identified a teaching gap (arising in part from my taking up the role of Director), we were able to fill it by creating this high-quality opportunity for an early career scholar, even at a time of financial challenge and retrenchment in the wider University. Nomi is an outstanding researcher and teacher, but not too long out of her PhD. During her time with us, she will have a chance to gain experience and further strengthen her own credentials, while contributing to our undergraduate and MA teaching. We feel lucky to have recruited someone as gifted as Nomi, and are indebted to donors and partners over many years who have built up our core funds. We are especially grateful to the Oaklea Sisters of Mercy, the La Retraite sisters, and the Jesuits in Britain whose recent generous gifts have enabled us to come close to meeting our £5,000,000 minimum target for the Core Endowment (we are about £400,000 short of that).

A recent major gift from the Society of the Sacred Heart of £1,000,000 over three years contributes both to stabilizing who we already are and to opening up dynamic new possibilities. Some of the funds will go towards **strengthening the endowment** of the St Hilda Chair in Catholic Social Thought and Practice. This helps ensure that the next time the Chair needs to be filled, the University will be able to appoint without delay, and be free to make the appointment at a senior level. Strengthening of this endowment is a strengthening of our foundations. At the same time the Society's gift will boost the work of the St Hilda Chair in more immediate ways, for instance allowing an **Early Career researcher** to be hired for a three-year position to work alongside Anna. The Society's partnership also enables the creation of the **Janet Erskine Stuart scholarships**, aimed especially at teachers and school chaplains: this will support the CCS's contribution to primary and secondary education for many years to come.

Perhaps the most satisfying aspect of directing the CCS is to see so many of my colleagues do such extraordinary things, as you'll see reflected in the pages of this annual review. The **History of Catholicism** cluster, under the leadership of James Kelly, goes from strength to strength—we are particularly looking forward to recruiting a new colleague to write a history in Britain of the Faithful Companions of Jesus. It's been a pleasure to work with Clare Watkins and watch the calm and skilful way she has brought together the wide-ranging and ambitious **Conversations, Culture and Communion** project—I don't know anyone other than Clare who could pull off quite such a participative and complexly integrated project.



And then I've had the honour of watching Billy Crozier, since his January start as the **Duns Scotus Assistant Professor of Franciscan Studies**, pack what seems to be two years' worth of work into the first few months in his post. I find it paradoxical that though he is the quietest and least flashy of all my colleagues, Billy inspires such extraordinarily devoted responses in every cohort of his students, and in every audience who hear him.

It's wonderful to have Anna Rowlands back from her two-year **secondment to the Vatican**—we've missed her, but been enormously proud of all she has managed to contribute to the global church through her work on the Synod and with the Dicastery for Integral Human Development. The fact that during this same period her recent book won a prestigious international prize is a kind of proof of the basic concept of the CCS: the most serious academic scholarship can go hand-in-hand with the deepest and most serious commitment to the wider church and world.

Thanks so much to all our partners and supporters: please help us discern new paths as we seek to grow in stability, and to embrace fresh new possibilities.



Meeting of the inaugural CCS Advisory Board, 27 May 2025.

From left to right:

Back row: Paul Murray (DU), Glen Whitehead (DU), Sr Barbara Stafford, rlr (La Retraite), James Kelly (DU), Karen Kilby (DU), Sr Cath Lloyd, rscj (Society of the Sacred Heart), Billy Crozier (DU), Simon Oliver (DU), Anna Rowlands (DU), Clare Watkins (DU), Tim Guinan (DU), Theresa Phillips (DU)

Front row: Fr Peter Gallagher, SJ (Jesuits in Britain), Sue Cooper (Brentwood Ursulines), Jane Swadling (Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre), Sr Avril O'Regan, rlr (La Retraite), Fr David Collins, OFM (Order of Friars Minor)

Report from the St Hilda Chair of Catholic Social Thought and Practice

Professor Anna Rowlands

This year has been the final (second) year of Anna Rowlands' **secondment to the Vatican**, working for the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops and the Dicastery of Integral Human Development. In addition, she has continued with her PhD supervision and her outreach work.

Anna writes: "This academic year has been an extraordinary one, beginning with the build-up to the final session of the **Synod on Synodality** and concluding with the death of its instigator Pope Francis and the election of his successor Pope Leo XIV. It has been a rich, demanding and rewarding time. I have learnt, at a personal level, many new skills in writing and translation and in watching the Church learn to grow in a more synodal style.

I have also appreciated the opportunity in early 2025 to spend a **few weeks in the US**, accompanying fellow Catholic academics as they make sense of their own changing situation. I was delighted to be invited to speak on CST at Notre Dame, Indiana and The Aquinas Centre at Candler School of Theology, Emory University where I gave their Major Catholic Lecture on Synodality. Two weeks later I returned to the US to address the Way Forward Dialogue for the US bishops in New York, an innovative event that enables dialogue between the US bishops, enabled by theologians. Finally, I was also able to spend a few days with Kim Daniels at the Georgetown University Initiative on Catholic Social Thought in Public Life.

Perhaps above all, this year has been an academic and ecclesial immersion in the life of the global Church in new ways for me. I am very grateful for this time and these experiences and I hope they will continue to enrich and shape my work."

Anna has contributed book chapters to upcoming **publications** on the pontificate of Pope Francis, a festschrift for her former PhD supervisor, a new handbook volume on Simone Weil, and edited two special editions of the Journal for Moral Theology. She continues background work on her new monograph on Simone Weil, Hannah Arendt and Gillian Rose.

Anna has undertaken a range of **media work** from podcast interviews to major news coverage of the death of Pope Francis, his funeral, and the election of Pope Leo. She has worked with a range of local, national, and international media from BBC Look North to ABC US TV and a good dose of BBC World Service in between! She has continued with the odd 'Thought for the Day' for Radio 4, when Vatican work has allowed, has published with Australian ABC religion and ethics blog, and has had her first piece with Time magazine. During the papal death and election, she has given expert support to The Guardian, Wall St Journal, Washington Post, and New York Times amongst others.

Anna has continued with **public outreach work**, including giving inputs for Caritas, giving the annual Trocaire lecture in Dublin, also attended by the plenary session attendees of the Irish Bishops Conference. She contributed towards the organising of a three-day conference for practitioners and academics in Rome on lay governance in the Church run by Australian Catholic University.

The **Centre for CSTP** has been able to step up its work a little in the last few months, thanks to some generous funding from the Society of the Sacred Heart (RSCJ) enabling much needed dedicated work on the CSTP network over the next three years. The Centre is due to host their first in-person event on 13 June – a day of discussion and networking around *Fratelli Tutti* and the challenge of pursuing 'a better politics'.



Anna at the Synod with Pope Francis



Anna with Pope Leo



Anna with core staff of the General Secretariat of Synod of Bishops, taken in St Peter's on the day the Conclave started after the Conclave Mass. Permission: T Bonaventura.

Publication by a CCS Alumna

Charlotte Bray, former CCS student and Louis Lafosse Scholar, has published her PhD thesis, *Sin and the Vulnerability of Embodied Life: Towards a Catholic Theology of Social Sin*. (T&T Clark, Bloomsbury 2025. ISBN: 9780567714886) Charlotte is now a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the Lincoln Theological Institute, Manchester University.

Research: History of Catholicism

Dr James Kelly, Associate Professor in the History of Catholicism

The History of Catholicism Team



Dr James Kelly



Liam Temple



Dr Eilish Gregory



Jonathan Bush



Benjamin Johnson, OFM Cap

Publications

James Kelly has published *The Catholic Reformation: A Very Short Introduction* with Oxford University Press. Available as both a paperback and an audiobook, the volume traces the Catholic Reformation from its beginnings in the first half of the sixteenth century, through the years of unrest in Europe, to its global expansion in the Americas, Asia, and Africa, and its continued influence and legacy into the twentieth century. It is the first introductory, single-volume title specifically focussed on the Catholic Reformation as a global, all-encompassing enterprise, that is aimed at the more general reader.

Two edited collections have also been published by members of the research cluster. Jonathan Bush co-edited with Maria Power the essay collection, *Lay Catholic Societies in Twentieth Century Britain* as part of the Catholic Record Society volumes series with Boydell & Brewer. The volume had its roots in a visiting fellowship that Dr Power held at Durham University. In addition, Eilish Gregory co-edited with CCS Honorary Professor Michael Questier, *Later Stuart Queens, 1660-1735: Religion, Political Culture, and Patronage*, which was published by Palgrave Macmillan.

Members of the History of Catholicism research cluster also published articles in scholarly journals, contributed chapters to several essay collections, and continued to contribute to a number of public media outlets, including Liam Temple's pieces for *The Conversation*, which have had more than 70,000 views.

The Durham University IMEMS Press book series, 'Catholicisms, c.1450-c.1800', of which James Kelly is a founding co-editor, continues to grow quickly and has already published four volumes. An essay collection drawn from the first ISHWRA workshop, *Female Religious and Narratives of the French Revolution: Identity, Memory, and History*, is due to be published as part of the series.

In terms of forthcoming publications, Liam Temple has delivered to Bloomsbury the manuscript for his book, *Radical Poverty: The Capuchins and Catholicism in Britain, 1850-2021*.

New projects

Liam Temple has started a new research project entitled '*The Capuchins in Australia*', generously funded by the Capuchin Province of the Assumption of The Blessed Virgin Mary. The project explores the history of the Capuchins in Australia from their earliest time as penal chaplains in the mid-nineteenth century through to the establishment of an Australian Province after World War II. Particular focus will be given to their post-war ministry amongst European migrant communities. The project will result in a monograph on the topic.

The team will shortly be recruiting a new member for a project investigating the work of the **Faithful Companions of Jesus in the UK**. Supported by the FCJ, the researcher will explore the congregation's 200-years of activity in the UK, resulting in the production of a monograph.

Grants

Liam Temple, Jonathan Bush and CCS Honorary Fellow Cormac Begadon were awarded a Small Research Grant from the **British Academy/Leverhulme Trust** to run an international workshop in September 2025 on 'Religious History and Catholic Archives: Towards an Interdisciplinary Approach'.

Eilish Gregory was awarded a travel grant from the University of Notre Dame's **Cushwa Center** to fund a trip to North America to consult materials for her project on the Little Company of Mary.

Lectures

Members of the History of Catholicism team have given a number of academic papers and public lectures, both domestically and internationally. These include invited papers at the University of Madrid, University of Strasbourg, University of La Rioja, the University of Oxford, and the North East Catholic History Society, as well as having spoken at the annual conferences of the Catholic Record Society and the History of Women Religious of Britain and Ireland (HWRBI) research network.

Conferences and workshops

The second ISHWRA (International Scholars of the History of Women Religious Association) workshop, supported by a British Academy/Leverhulme Trust Small Research Grant, was held last summer. With a title of '**Cultures of Engagement: Female Religious Communities in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries**', the workshop was convened by Sarah Barthélémy, Cormac Begadon, and Gemma Betros and involved scholars from seven different countries.

In terms of future plans, the fifth **Early Modern British and Irish Catholicism conference** will take place **29 June to 1 July 2026**. It is organised jointly between the CCS and the University of Notre Dame. In addition, there will be two workshops; as well as the above mentioned one on 'Religious History and Catholic Archives: Towards an Interdisciplinary Approach', Br Ben Johnson is organizing an international workshop entitled '**Early Modern Capuchins in Context: Spirituality, Culture and Catholic Reform**' on 8 July 2026.

Research networks

The CCS hosts the **International Scholars of the History of Women Religious Association (ISHWRA)**. ISHWRA's convening committee includes the CCS honorary fellows Sarah Barthélémy and Cormac Begadon, plus James Kelly is amongst its advisory committee. This year, ISHWRA has hosted speakers from countries including Belgium, India, Italy, Mexico and USA at its monthly seminars.

Eilish Gregory was invited to join the History of Women Religious of Britain and Ireland (HWRBI) steering committee, and continued as a convenor of the Institute of Historical Research's 'Religious History of Britain 1500-1800' seminar.

Liam Temple and **James Kelly** continued as members of the Catholic Record Society's governing council, the latter chairing the society's Awards Committee. James Kelly was also invited to be a founding convenor of the 'Early Modern Women and Religion' international research network and seminar. In addition, Liam Temple was invited to join the editorial board of the journal, *Franciscan Studies*, as a senior editor.

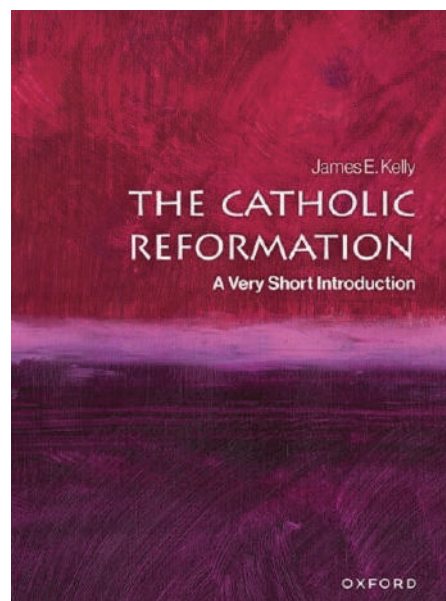


Photo by C Tuckwell ©

Report from the Duns Scotus Chair in Franciscan Studies

Dr William Crozier

Duns Scotus teaches us that theology is, at its core, a practical discipline. Theology's purpose, he argues, is not simply to promote our learning about sacred things, but also to increase our love for God and neighbour. Since taking up the **Duns Scotus Chair** in January, I have sought to honour and promote this Franciscan vision of theology.

Franciscan outreach

During lent I ran an online **retreat** for Franciscan sisters: *"Prayer, Poverty, and Passion – Walking to Easter with St. Bonaventure"*. The retreat was based on St. Bonaventure's *On the Perfection of Life to the Sisters*. Each week we read, prayed with, and discussed a chapter or two from Bonaventure's text. The retreat was attended by nearly 30 Franciscan sisters from the FMDM, Poor Clares, and Anglican CSF congregations. It was a great blessing to work with the sisters, some of whom were based as far away as Zambia and Malaysia.

Since January I have also written two **articles** for the *Tablet*. The first, on St. Francis' *Canticle of Creatures*, will be published in May to mark the 10th anniversary of Pope Francis' *Laudato Si*. The second, a reflection on the nature of grief centred on the story of the Wolf of Gubbio, will also be in press soon. I have also written a two-piece article on St. Colette of Corbie for the *St. Antony Brief*. During the summer, I will participate in a **webinar** organized by the Irish OFM province to mark *Laudato Si*'s tenth anniversary.

Over the past few months, I have worked with Dr Colette Hawkins, South Tees NHS Academic Consultant in Palliative Medicine, to support her efforts to underscore the importance of **holistic palliative care** for the terminally ill and to raise concerns about the Leadbeater Assisted Dying bill currently making its way through parliament.

Following Pope Francis' death, I did several national **radio interviews** and produced a meditation for the CCS YouTube page on the Franciscan legacy of Pope Francis' papacy. I also produced **media material** for the University on Pope Leo XIV's election and inauguration.

In June (9 -20) the CCS will hold its second **Online Franciscan Summer School**. This will consist of a mixture synchronous and asynchronous courses taught by myself, Br. Bill Short OFM, and Professor Sr. Mary Beth-Ingham CSJ. There will also be **public lectures** by Prof Sr. Margaret Carney OSF and Prof John McCafferty. It has been a pleasure to work with others in planning this, and wonderful to see how generously all the contributors have responded to our requests.

Franciscan teaching

During Epiphany term, I taught two Franciscan theology modules – a second-year undergraduate module on **St. Bonaventure** (The Thought of St. Bonaventure) and a Distance Learning MA Franciscan module: **Trinity, Incarnation, and Creation: High Medieval Franciscan Theology**. The UG module on St Bonaventure was taught in a single term and had seventeen students registered on it. The distance learning MA Franciscan module has 13 students registered on it. Both modules will run each year. During Epiphany term I also helped co-teach the first-year undergraduate module 'Introduction to Christian Theology' and contributed to DL MA module 'Twentieth Century Catholic Theology' by producing a unit on **Joseph Ratzinger's/Pope Benedict XVI's liturgical thought** and theology of scripture and revelation.



Dr William Crozier



The first Franciscan Conference November 2019

From October 2025, I will, alongside continuing this other work, be teaching a yearlong undergraduate course on **medieval and early modern Franciscan mysticism and spirituality** as part of the second year Research and Colloquium Module run in the Department. The research strand will focus on the spiritual and mystical writings of some of the most important female Franciscan thinkers: St. Clare of Assisi, St. Angela of Foligno, St. Colette of Corbie and Venerable Mary of Jesus of Ágreda, as well as St. Margaret of Cortona and Margherita Colonna.

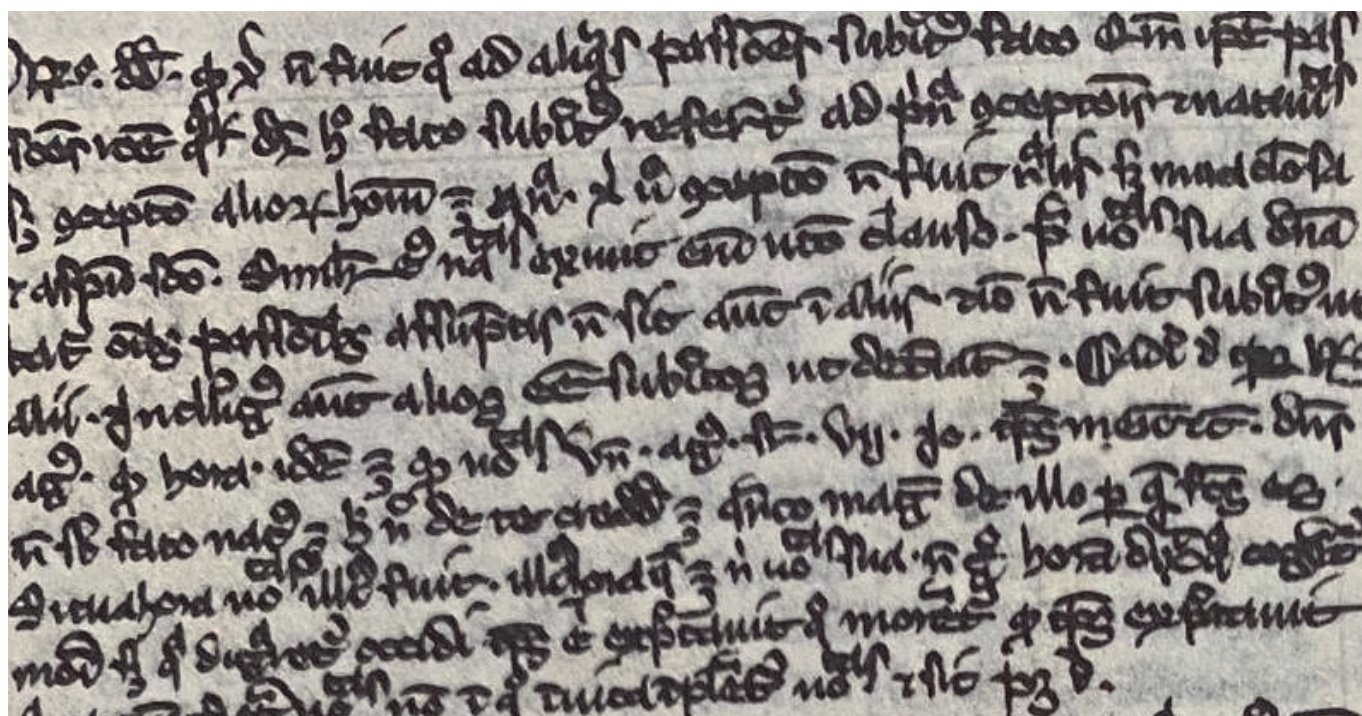
Looking ahead

In **April 2026**, the CCS will hold its **third International Franciscan Studies Conference: Life and Love Transfigured: Exploring New Horizons in Franciscan Studies**. The Conference will mark the 800th Anniversary of St. Francis' death and will bring together many of the different branches of the Franciscan family, male and female. Taking place both in Durham and at Ushaw College, the conference will speak to both the head and the heart. It will include academic traditional lectures, workshops on Franciscan evangelization and mission, liturgical and ecumenical events, and several public talks. The list of confirmed speakers includes Fr Casey Cole OFM, Prof. Richard Cross, Prof. Dan Horan, Dr Darleen Pryds, Dr Bill Hyland, Prof. Lydia Schumacher, Prof. John McCafferty, and Prof. Michael Cusato OFM. It has been a pleasure to work with Fr Liam Kelly OFM, as well as Theresa Phillips and Karen Kilby, in planning it.

I am currently in negotiations with Durham University IMEMS Press regarding a contract for my **monograph** containing an edition and translation of Bonaventure's *Quaestiones de colore*. I am also finalizing an **article** containing another work attributable to Bonaventure – the *Quaestiones de fato*. Like the *Quaestiones de colore*, the *Quaestiones de fato* is a text written in Bonaventure's own hand. In the last year I have also published **book chapters** on Dun Scotus' physics of light and his economic and political thought.

And finally ...

It is a huge blessing for me to hold the Duns Scotus Chair, and I will do my best over the coming years to fulfil the vision for the Chair which the various Franciscan donors have for it. During the past few months I have begun to get to know some of the Franciscan donor communities, both here in the UK and in Ireland. This has been a wonderfully enriching experience, and I look forward to working with them in future.



Extract of St. Bonaventure's *Quaestiones de fato*. In his own hand.

Publication by CCS Alumnus Fr Liam Kelly, OFM

Fr Liam Kelly has published a book of his PhD, *Poverty, Peacemaking, and the Sacred: A Girardian Reading of the Early Franciscan Movement*. (Franciscan Institute Publications, ISBN: 978-1-57659-476-6). Fr Liam is a Franciscan friar of the Province of Ireland, and Lecturer in Systematic Theology at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, Ireland.

Report from the Bede Professor of Catholic Theology

Professor Karen Kilby

It's been a pleasure to take up the role of **Director of the Centre for Catholic Studies** this year. I've enjoyed other leadership roles in the past, including being Head of Department at Nottingham, but the experience of leadership in the CCS is different. Rather than fitting firmly into existing University structures, the CCS sits on a boundary between the University and its many partners. This makes some things complicated, but it gives a freshness, dynamism and sense of possibility that I continue to find wonderful, even after 11 years. And this borderlands quality draws on a slightly different set of leadership skills than running a Department.

My **teaching** this year has been focused on the Distance Learning MA. I taught my own two modules ('Catholic Theology: A Preliminary Tour' and 'Twentieth Century Catholic Theology') and convened Anna Rowlands' module during her secondment. The programme is still growing, but the students we already have are as wonderful a group as I have ever worked with, interesting, able, varied, and deeply committed. I don't think any would be studying theology if the programme were not in existence.

2025 is the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, associated in the Church's memory with the Creed and the doctrine of the Trinity: it was a pleasure therefore to help Fr Eugene Duffy make a **video** on the first article of the creed for the website of the shrine of Knock; to give a **lecture** on the Trinity for the Cleveland Newman Circle in Middlesbrough; and to give the **2025 Laishley Lecture** for the Heythrop Institute and the London Jesuit Centre on the theme "The Creed of Nicaea and the Development of Doctrine". I also published a 4,000 word **article** on the Trinity ("Think again: the life of the mind and the doctrine of the Trinity" available at <https://mbird.com/theology/think-again/>) for Mockingbird, an American journal and website, and a **chapter** entitled "The Theologian, the Historian and the Holy Spirit: Reflections around Nicaea" in *Nicaea and the Future of Christianity—Orthodox Christianity and Contemporary Thought*.

Expectations of the Bede Chair are that I spend 20% of my time on **outreach**. One consequence of taking up the role of Director is that some of this time is spent on supporting the outreach of other colleagues and of the CCS as a whole, but I did also, in addition to the various bits of Nicaea-related work mentioned in the previous paragraph, speak to my parish's Journey in Faith group; speak at the parish of St James, Spanish Place in London; publish an article in *The Tablet* about one of my students, kept in prison without formal charge for nine years (available at <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/strange-ways-of-theology/>); and continue as a **trustee of CAFOD** and a member of its Strategy and Performance Committee and its Remunerations Committee.

Finally, I've given **papers** in Durham, Leeds, Cambridge, St Andrews, Aberdeen, Rome and at the Catholic Theological Association of Great Britain; attended a **workshop** in Cambridge; and been involved in **recruitment panels** at Maynooth (for a Lecturer in Systematic Theology), St Andrews (for the Chair in Divinity), Cambridge (for the Regius Professor of Divinity), and Durham (for several CCS posts and also for the Lightfoot Chair).



Prebends Bridge, Durham. Photo by C Tuckwell ©

Career Development Fellowship in Catholic Theology

The CCS was delighted to welcome Dr Nomi Pritz-Bennett to the staff team in October to a Career Development Fellowship in Catholic Theology. These positions are fixed term and especially designed to include structured development support for early career academics. Nomi's post is for three years, funded partly by teaching buyout funds from Anna's secondment to the Vatican, partly from teaching buyout funds within the Porticus funded 'Conversations, Culture and Communion' project, and some support from income to the CCS Core endowment.

Nomi says, "This year has been full of new beginnings. I've loved getting to know the students and finding my rhythm teaching a distance MA module on Thomas Aquinas, and two undergraduate modules: 'The Meaning of the Cross' and 'Topics in Christian Ethics.' I've given papers at several conferences – one highlight being a workshop on Catholicity and Eschatology in Rome. I continue to develop my monograph on Maurice Blondel, who remains both a challenge and an inspiration, and in June I co-directed the CCS Early Career and Postgraduate Conference. It's been a rich year, and I'm excited for what's next."

My research currently follows two paths. First, building on my doctoral work, I continue to explore how deifying union with God can be understood as perfecting and solidifying – rather than erasing – our identity as finite creatures. Secondly, and relatedly, I aim to examine whether the language of evil is rightly to be applied to human limitations and weaknesses tied to finitude, and whether finitude can be disentangled from sin. Both areas reflect my desire to pursue a broader study of the challenge finitude poses to theological anthropology and eschatology.



Dr Nomi Pritz-Bennett

Behind the Scenes

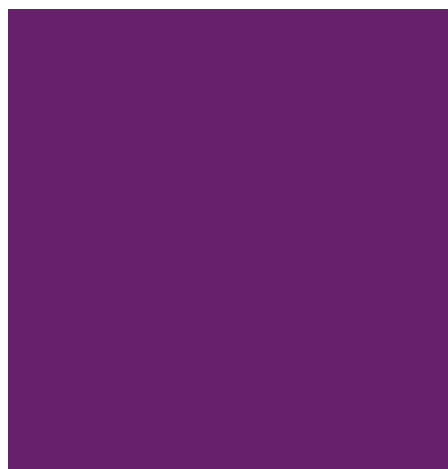
The level of administrative support the CCS enjoys is an unusual privilege in our wider university context. It is one of the benefits brought by the generosity of our partners, and crucial in enabling us to sustain the variety of our activities without abandoning core commitments to teaching and research.

As the CCS has expanded, so too has Theresa Phillips's position over the last 14 years. Promotion and a title change - to CCS Manager - came about 18 months ago, to acknowledge the growing complexity of her work and the level and variety of her responsibilities.

This year Theresa has folded into her many-faceted role the management of new structures and new patterns of meetings, ensuring their smooth integration into the life of the CCS. She continues to work closely with the Director, helping to think through strategy and tackle the practicalities of a dynamic Centre. A crucial aspect of Theresa's responsibilities involves managing finances within a complex university system.

Of course, no one operates in isolation, and Theresa is ably supported by Catherine Tuckwell, 0.6fte Administrator. Over the last two years, Catherine has taken on an increasing number of tasks, using her wide range of skills, not least her gifts in photography, filming, and video and website editing, and has enriched the CCS in many ways.

Theresa says, "The work of the CCS Manager is varied. The role has grown and developed over the years as the CCS has evolved, and I thoroughly enjoy the variety especially the interaction with students and partners. In 2021, due to relocation of my husband's job, I sadly thought I would need to move on, but, with the support of Paul Murray, then Director, the University agreed to remote working. I come to Durham on average once a month with visits coinciding with meetings and events. I was delighted and can't imagine doing any other job: my colleagues in the CCS are amazing, so supportive. The CCS an oasis."



Theresa Phillips

Research: Constructive Catholic Theology

Conversations, Culture and Communion

Professor Clare Watkins, Lead Researcher

The work done in *Boundary Breaking*, and reflected on in *The Cross of the Moment*, made clear the far-reaching implications of attending to the experiences of survivors and others impacted by sexual abuse and its mishandling in the church. This research showed us that safeguarding processes are not the only response needed – essential as they are; rather, a whole range of practices, behaviours, and understandings are implicated.

As a response to this realisation, a new project was launched in September 2024, funded by Porticus, the English Benedictines, and the Jesuits in Britain, and I was delighted to take on the role of research lead, working closely with Karen Kilby, Paul Murray, and Will Mattiello-Kent. Working under the title *Conversations, Culture and Communion: networking for church vitality and health*, the project employs methods of **participative learning and research** to widen the conversations around the issues raised in *The Cross of the Moment*, and find ways of working with a variety of groups in the church to bring about the **deep changes in practice and understanding** that are needed to make our communities places of safe, life-giving relationships.

The project's emphasis is on **conversation** as a key practice for mutual learning, understanding, and culture change. Appropriately, then, the first six months of the project (October 2024 - March 2025) focussed on **listening** to and getting to know people, ministries, and existing projects who we identified as key stakeholders in responding to the insights of *Boundary Breaking*. Working with the contacts already identified through *Boundary Breaking* and its funders, three particular streams for conversation were identified: youth ministries, formation and training, and survivor groups. The conversations I have had with the 50 or so people in these groups, as well as with the bishops and diocesan safeguarding leads, has encouraged me in the **hope** that – as a Catholic Church in England and Wales – we have the gifts, desire, and understanding to go 'beyond safeguarding' as such, and renew our communities in ways which will enable graced relating, working, and mission for us all, as we learn from the tragedies of abuse.

In March 2025 the Conversations project held its first **Network Gathering**, where those involved in the conversations to that point met in person, for a day of reflection, prayer, and discussion. Building on those discussions, we are now developing 3-4 specific **research projects** – attending to the voices and experiences of young people, working with clergy to reflect on their ministry and formation experiences, and developing thinking and practices around accompaniment for those impacted by abuse – which will form the core of the next 9-12 months of the project. The work of **networking** and ongoing conversations with existing and new partners continues, as well as working with others in Europe, and further afield, involved in similar projects.

This is profoundly rewarding work, and I continue to be energised, encouraged, and humbled by those committing to participating in this project. The work ahead feels rooted in hope and practical love.



Research: Constructive Catholic Theology

Receptive Ecumenism in a Synodal Church

Professor Paul D. Murray, Dr Greg Ryan and Dr John Stayne

In June 2023 the CCS held a successful symposium on Synodality and Receptive Ecumenism, *Learning on the Way*, which brought together 130 delegates from seven Christian traditions, including Sr Nathalie Becquart XMCJ, and for which we have continued to receive very positive feedback from participants – as well as asking ‘what next’? Building on the symposium conversations, Paul Murray and Greg Ryan, now joined by John Stayne, have begun a **follow-on project**. Six Catholic theologians are preparing short papers for a colloquium with peers from the UK and Rome in June 2025, exploring areas of potential Catholic learning which emerged at the 2023 symposium. Alongside this, six other Christian traditions are writing papers on their own learning, for exploration through small group work with the CCS team. The initial output from this phase will be a **volume** on Receptive Ecumenism in a Synodal Church, bringing together insights from 2023 and 2025 as an example of the local church sharing an ecumenical and synodal gift which might be received more widely. In a second phase of this work, therefore, the CCS is working with the Institute for Ecumenical Studies at the Angelicum in Rome to plan a **‘conference in synodal style’ for 2027**.

In addition to the synergy with synodality, another area which has been fruitfully explored in recent years is the creative reception of Receptive Ecumenism in Scandinavia, resulting in the Fifth International Conference on Receptive Ecumenism held in Sigtuna, Sweden in 2022. A **publication** arising from this conference has now been completed, edited by Greg Ryan together with colleagues from Sweden, and will be released later this year, including essays by several CCS members and friends: Nausikaa Haupt, Olle Kristenson, Michael Nausner, and Gregory A. Ryan, *Spirit Flowing Like Water: New Conversations on Receptive Ecumenism*, Church of Sweden Research Series no. 24 (Wipf & Stock, 2025).

Greg is also working with the *Rose Castle Foundation* on two further publications exploring ecumenical learning through practices of shared biblical reading.

Life After CCS Leadership

Professor Paul D. Murray

Shortly after the close of the last academic year, with a few companions I spent a week on prayer **pilgrimage**, walking St Cuthbert’s Way, from Melrose in the Scottish Borders to Lindisfarne. The simple rhythm of walking, breathing, setting out, passing through, and appreciating was very conducive.

Following that, the remainder of July through to the end of September 2024 was spent editing down my over-length monograph manuscript, *Healing the Wounds of the Church: The Theology and Practice of Receptive Ecumenism*, for submission to a publisher for external review. The reviews eventually came back on 8 May – the same day that we got a new Pope! – and are very positive, albeit also identifying some further work for me to do. So, this year’s July through to late September will have much the same focus and feel as last year’s, with the goal of a full and final submission of the manuscript before the start of the next teaching year.

Between last October and this June, alongside working as Co-Investigator on the Conversations, Communion and Culture project, and on the next phase of the Learning on the Way project, my most substantial focus has been work towards a follow-on monograph to *Healing the Wounds of the Church*, exploring a constructive Catholic ecclesiology (theology of the church) for a synodal age.

Between them, the continuing work on the ecclesiological implications of clerical abuse and our handling of it as a church, and the work in service of our becoming a more synodal church, are providing both a strong push and an encouraging draw towards continuing Catholic ecclesial reform. The work I am doing on the next monograph is situated in this dual context – between this sharp push and this attractive pull – and is seeking to be of service as we seek, as the pilgrim people of God, to navigate a way through the particular Catholic moment we are in.

Amongst other things that I am looking forward to next academic year, I will be devising and **teaching** a new Year 2 module, ‘The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology and the Life of the Church’.

Research: Lived Catholicism

Lived Catholicism and Synodality: A Seedcorn Project

“**Lived Catholicism**” as a field of study emerged from the doctoral work of Avril Baigent, aided by two well-attended and dynamic online global conferences the CCS hosted under her leadership in 2020 and 2021, and by the publication of a special journal edition (*Ecclesial Practices Special Issue: Lived Catholicism. Vol. 9.1.*). Lived Catholicism brings together specialists in sociology, theology, anthropology, history, and other disciplines to explore the **experience of everyday Catholicism**, including its often unruly character. It takes its starting point not from official institutional expectations but from the voices and experiences of ordinary people. It can allow the roles of improvisation and subversion in everyday faith to come to the surface in a way that much theology, and even a good deal of traditional sociological study of Catholicism, has not been able to. It is an approach which lends itself to the **study of synodality**, highlighting the range and variety of experiences of the synod process around the world, from parish communities to the Rome Assembly.

Lived Catholicism is an area in which the CCS would like to continue to develop, and therefore we are delighted to be collaborating with **Notre Dame University** in this “Seedcorn” research project, led by Karen Kilby (CCS) and Clemens Sedmak (ND) and developed in association with Avril. The project focuses on the different **lived experiences of synodality** in Eastern and Western Europe as a provocation for deeper reflection on the joys and challenges of the Synod process. The project began with empirical research conducted in Germany, Poland, and Slovakia. The results were presented at an April colloquium in London which included scholars from Hungary, Austria, the UK, and the US, and a keynote lecture by theologian Fr Tomáš Halík.

The Colloquium ranged widely across questions such as: Where are synodal practices happening outside the institutional Church? What are the implications of many different groups of Catholics feeling marginalised? What further theological work is needed to develop the role of baptism (“all the baptised”) in a hierarchical church, and an accompanying theology of ordination? What more can be learned from the ambiguities of the role of the priest in synodality? The CCS was strongly represented at the Colloquium, not only by Avril and Karen, but with papers from Clare Watkins and Myriam Wijlens (CCS Honorary Professor). Paul Murray and Greg Ryan were also able to participate.

The project will culminate in a **third online Lived Catholicism conference**, 2-3 December 2025, focussing on the variety of experiences of synodality around the world. We will invite papers on cross-disciplinary approaches to listening, different forms of discernment and decision-making, and the experiences of those on the multiple margins and peripheries that the synod process has highlighted.

Lived Catholicism Doctorate

Avril Baigent’s thesis title: *Forming Catholic Identity in Young People: Contingency, Agency and the Power of Family Life*. Avril is Director of Pastoral Development in the Diocese of Northampton, and co-founder of the School for Synodality. She was also a facilitator at the 2024 Rome Assembly.



Study

Distance Learning Programme in Catholic Theology

The Distance Learning programme in Catholic Theology is now in its **second year** and is maturing well, with 28 students currently enrolled. The students come from a **range of backgrounds** and careers (teaching, chaplaincy, medicine, software engineering, law, psychotherapy, library science, non-profit consultancies, etc) and a **range of places** in the world: the majority are living in Britain, but we have students from Massachusetts and Hawaii in the US and one student each from Nigeria, Cameroon, and Canada. We currently have one religious sister, two Catholic priests and one Anglican priest enrolled. One student began her studies in a high security prison and is continuing now that she has been released. The students range in age from their 20s to their 70s. There are some wonderful 2-4 minutes **videos** of current student reflections on the programme available on the CCS website - <https://www.durham.ac.uk/research/institutes-and-centres/catholic-studies/facilities/distance-learning/>

For the first time this year it has been possible for students to enrol on the core module, '**Catholic Theology: A Preliminary Tour**', as a single standalone module. This enables a wider group of students to dip their toes in the water, including those who have not previously done formal study of either theology or some other humanities subject. Of the eight students who started out on the single module, six have chosen to continue their studies to the MA or Diploma. The CCS is in the process of obtaining approval from the university to make two further modules, **CSTP** and **High Medieval Franciscan Theology**, available on a standalone basis.

The annual **Residential** took place in Durham in April where twenty of the students met in person. For just over 48 hours students shared together in stimulating lectures and discussion led by a range of module convenors, other Durham staff, and CCS students who had recently completed their PhDs. The lectures at the Residential are not necessary to any particular module, so it's optional, but nevertheless an enriching experience, enjoyed by all.



Lucy Jane is a second-year student on the Distance Learning MA. She lives in France and had been looking for an MA in Theology for some time before joining this programme. Lucy Jane has found the DL learning experience fits in very well with a full-time professional working life. She says, "The flexibility the university has provided in the format is fantastic, it's very well done. The content is amazing, and I don't want this to end! It is so rich, so wide ranging, and a personal exploration of one's own faith as well as an academic discipline."

The Northern Diaconal Formation Partnership

An innovative partnership, based in the CCS, between Durham University and the Northern Diaconal Formation Partnership (NDFP) has been renewed for a further three years (2024-27). NDFP provides initial training for permanent deacons for the Catholic dioceses of the North of England (Hexham & Newcastle, Middlesbrough, Leeds, Hallam, Salford, Lancaster, and the archdiocese of Liverpool) and the diocese of Wrexham. It delivers a four-year part-time formation programme for candidates for the permanent diaconate through central and regionally pooled teaching resources, with elements of pastoral, spiritual and human formation delivered in the home diocese.

The core theological formation programme is delivered through regular weekends at Hinsley Hall, Leeds, and using online learning alongside lay students. The CCS hosts two part-time staff to support this partnership: Dr Greg Ryan is the Academic Coordinator, responsible for curriculum design, teaching quality, and student theological development, as well as teaching on the programme. He is supported by Catherine Tuckwell as Programme Administrator. In recent years, CCS staff, students, and supporters have contributed to the teaching programme in various ways, and we hope that this is an area which can be expanded. This year Greg has been active in revising the curriculum to incorporate developments in understanding of synodality within the Catholic Church.

Students, Scholarships and Alumni

Students

CCS students continue to bring life and vitality to the CCS. The thrice termly Catholic Theology Research Seminars (CTRS) continue to be a core point of contact for students and staff with a rich range of topics and speakers widening knowledge and understanding in Catholic theology. The early evening 'Out of Hours' meetings have continued, with students meeting to share pizza and a member of Dept of Theology & Religion staff gives a short talk for discussion. This year topics have included: 'Experience of a Lay Theologian' with Karen Kilby, 'Academic Theology, Spirituality, and Vocation' with Paul Murray, 'Biblical Studies and Theological Interpretation: Some Reflections' with John Barclay, 'Existential concerns and theological study: exploring the relationship' with Judith Wolfe, and 'Theology and Christian Ministry: A Single Vocation?' with Simon Oliver.

At the beginning of June, the CCS held the annual **Early Career and Postgraduate Conference** where 30 students (six from Durham, 20 from around the UK, and four from further afield, Poland, Italy, Chile, and the US) presented papers on various topics in the area of Catholic theology and Catholic studies. This is always a great event, a chance for postgraduate students and other early career researchers to meet and to present their research in a collegial environment. The day conference ended with a CTRS, the 2025 **Teilhard Seminar**, given by Prof. Judith Wolfe (University of St Andrews), 'The Coherence of Hope'. Some of the papers from the conference will be shared with the Newman Association who sponsored bursaries for those attending.

Scholarships

Through **generous donations** from the Carmelite Sisters, the Congregation of Jesus, the Faithful Companions of Jesus (FCJ), the Jesuits in Britain, Mater Ecclesiae, the Sisters of Christian Education, and individual donors, the CCS has been able to support 19 students with scholarship and bursary awards totalling £174,173.94 in 2024-25.

We are delighted that the first **scholarship endowment** has been set up with a generous donation from the Society of the Sacred Heart. Janet Erskine Stuart Scholarships will be available from 2025/26, aimed especially at teachers and school chaplains. The funds will be available to support students for many years to come.

We are also delighted that the Sisters of Christian Education were able to renew their donation for the Louis Lafosse PhD Scholarship Fund for a further three years from 2025/26. This funding will allow the CCS to make two more three-year awards to PhD students to include full home level tuition fees and a stipend at the UKRI national level.

The CCS are extremely grateful to all those who give towards this work supporting students in their studies, many of whom would be unable to pursue their dream without your support.



Louis Lafosse PhD Scholar, Mao Cheng (full time 2022/23 – 2024/25)

Drawing on my background in law, theology, and Chinese culture, my doctoral research seeks to reconstruct the notion of natural law in the work of John C. H. Wu (1899-1986) – a Chinese Catholic thinker and a prominent jurist – from both interdisciplinary (law and theology) and interreligious (Chinese and Christian) perspectives. The Louis Lafosse PhD Scholarship has made it possible for me to pursue this creative, experimental, and highly challenging work at the CCS – a diverse academic environment and a vibrant scholarly community that fosters intellectual freedom, interdisciplinary dialogue, and genuine collegial support. I am especially indebted to my supervisors Professor Karen Kilby and Professor Anna Rowlands, for their outstanding expertise, penetrating insight, and their openness and patience in mentorship. The scholarship has relieved me of financial burdens, allowing me to immerse myself in research while resting my heart in the CCS family.

Alumni

Congratulations to CCS scholarship holders completing PhD programmes in 2024-25:

- **Brendan McMullan** - Thesis title: 'Like a fading photograph'. A qualitative study into how the Irish Roman Catholic community understands, accepts and receives their Church's teachings about homosexuality.
- **Amanda Murjan** - Thesis title: Self-Giving and Human Fulfilment: Critical Reflections on Self-giving in the Thought of Pope John Paul II in Dialogue with Psychology.
- **Florence O'Taylor** - Thesis title: Paying Attention to Women's Lived Experiences: Towards an Empirically Grounded Political Theology of Addiction.
- **John Stayne** - Thesis title: From the Spirit: Charisms as a Constitutive Principle for Catholic Ecclesiology.



St Jude Scholarship Holder, Tim Wright (part-time, 2020/21 - 2025/26)

I am a postgraduate student at the CCS working towards a doctorate dealing with the relationship between Catholic theology and natural science. More specifically, I am investigating what the thought of Karl Rahner might tell us about the curiosity inherent in human exploration of outer space. Rahner's notion of the *Vorgriff* or pre-apprehension of the absolute is a very fruitful model with which to describe what is going on both in the movement towards the horizon found in space flight and other rapidly developing areas within scientific research about the universe such as astrobiology.

Being a member of the CCS community has been invaluable. The research seminars and access to engaging academic debate have aided my understanding of both my own area of Rahnerian research as well as increasing my awareness of the wider debates within Catholic thought. I am very grateful for the nurturing support the Centre has provided.

Staff Alumni News

In April 2025 Dr **Brian Casey**, FMDM Fellow in the History of Catholicism 2020-24, commenced the role of Historian and Archives Manager for Dublin Cemeteries Trust, based in Glasnevin Cemetery. The role includes researching and writing about the history of the five cemeteries of Dublin Cemeteries Trust (Goldenbridge, Glasnevin, Palmerstown, Newlands Cross, and Dardistown).

Dr **Sarah Barthélemy**, Catherine de Francheville Fellow in the History of Catholicism 2021-2024, is an Invited Professor at the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium.

Development Report

This has been a momentous year for the CCS in several respects, in particular the establishment of the **CCS Trust** as a legal entity that will oversee the use of donated funds to underpin the CCS Directorate and Administrative Team for the long-term. This has been a shared aspiration of the CCS and several key partners for many years now, and reflects the hard work, vision and patience of numerous people, the generosity of our donors, and crucially the willingness of all parties to embed structures that will support the CCS, and all it represents, into the long-term. Key partners in the Trust include the Sisters of Mercy (Oaklea), the Congregation of La Retraite, and the Jesuits in Britain, all of whom donated £1m each.

The Trust will also oversee two new permanent endowments funding **Professorial Chairs**: The Duns Scotus Chair in Franciscan Studies; and The Clare and Hawley Chair in the History of Catholicism. The **Duns Scotus Chair** has been funded by the global Franciscan family, namely, among others: the Franciscan Province of Ireland, the Conventual Franciscan Federation, and the British and Australian Capuchins respectively. The **Clare and Hawley Chair** has been funded by the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Brentwood Ursulines, and named for their respective foundresses.

Alongside the Trust, the CCS has formally established an **Advisory Board** with a consultative role to advise both the CCS and the CCS Trust. In this way, we hope to ensure that the shared vision, aims and ethos of the CCS are protected, so that it may flourish for future generations.

In other major developments, we are delighted to announce the establishment of the **Janet Erskine Stuart scholarships**, funded by the Society of the Sacred Heart in England and Wales.

Named for Sr Mary Janet Erskine Stuart RSCJ, former Superior General of the Society from 1911-1914, the scholarships are intended for teachers and chaplains, and includes funding for schools outreach. Together with support for the St Hilda Chair in CSTP, and the UK Centre for CSTP, the pledge totals £1m over three years.

The Sisters of Christian Education have renewed their commitment to the **Louis Lafosse Scholarship** for a further three years, marking 12 years of continuous support. The Faithful Companion of Jesus have pledged to fund a three-year **postdoctoral fellowship** to research and publish their history in Britain to mark the bicentenary in 2030 (this alongside their existing Bicentenary Scholarship programme). Mater Ecclesiae have also agreed to renew the **Catherine Mulligan Scholarship**, and the **Northern Diaconal Formation Partnership** (NDFP Ltd) have also renewed their partnership to May 2027.

Porticus continue to provide invaluable support, particularly for 'Conversations, Culture and Communion: networking for church vitality and health', which is also supported by the English Benedictine Congregation and the Jesuits in Britain. This is the next stage of the 'Boundary Breaking' project, responding to the challenges outlined in the *Cross of the Moment* report. Porticus are also supporting a PhD in partnership with the CCS and Durham's new Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding.

We thank all our many and varied partners for these and every generous gift which is greatly appreciated by the staff and students of the CCS alike.



The University welcomed two CCS partners as new members into the Chancellor's Circle in May: The Irish Franciscans, represented by Vicar Provincial, Fr David Collins OFM;



and the Brentwood Ursulines, represented by Congregational Leader, Sr Margaret Soper OSU, and Trustee, Mrs Sue Cooper.

The Centre for Catholic Studies is pleased to be working in partnership with:

Arts and Humanities Research Council

Brentwood Ursuline Sisters

British Teilhard Network

CAFOD

Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre

Capuchin Franciscans of Great Britain

Capuchin Franciscans of Australia

Capuchin Friars, St Augustine Province, US

Carmelite Nuns

Catholic Historical Society of Ireland

Catholic Theological Association of GB

Community of St Francis

Conference of Religious in England & Wales

Congregation of Jesus

Congregation of La Retraite (Britain & Ireland)

Congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph of Peace

Conventual Franciscan Federation (US)

Durham University Catholic Chaplaincy

English Benedictine Congregation

Faithful Companions of Jesus

Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood

Franciscan Province of Ireland

The Hartley Trust

Institute of Our Lady of Mercy

Jesuits in Britain

Little Company of Mary

Mater Ecclesiae

National Board of Catholic Women

Newman Association

National Institute for Newman Studies, Pittsburgh

Northern Diaconal Formation Partnership

Porticus International

RC Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle

Sisters of Christian Education

Sisters of Mercy (Oaklea)

Sisters of the Poor Child Jesus

Society of the Sacred Heart

The Society of St Francis

The Tablet and The Pastoral Review

Trustees of Ushaw College

University of Notre Dame, Australia

University of Notre Dame, Indiana

& many Generous Individuals of Vision



Images taken at the Friends and Benefactors day, June 2024



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Centre for Catholic Studies

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A Prayer for the Work of the Centre for Catholic Studies

Lord,
If this be not your will, frustrate it,
frustrate it fully and frustrate it quickly,
and move our heart's desire closer
to the heart of your desire for us.
But if it be of your will,
then continue to open for us the
generosity of heart, mind, and
means that are needed,
and may this generosity begin with us.
Amen

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