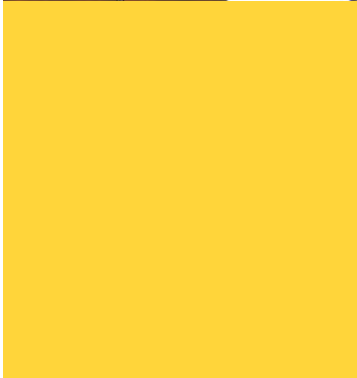




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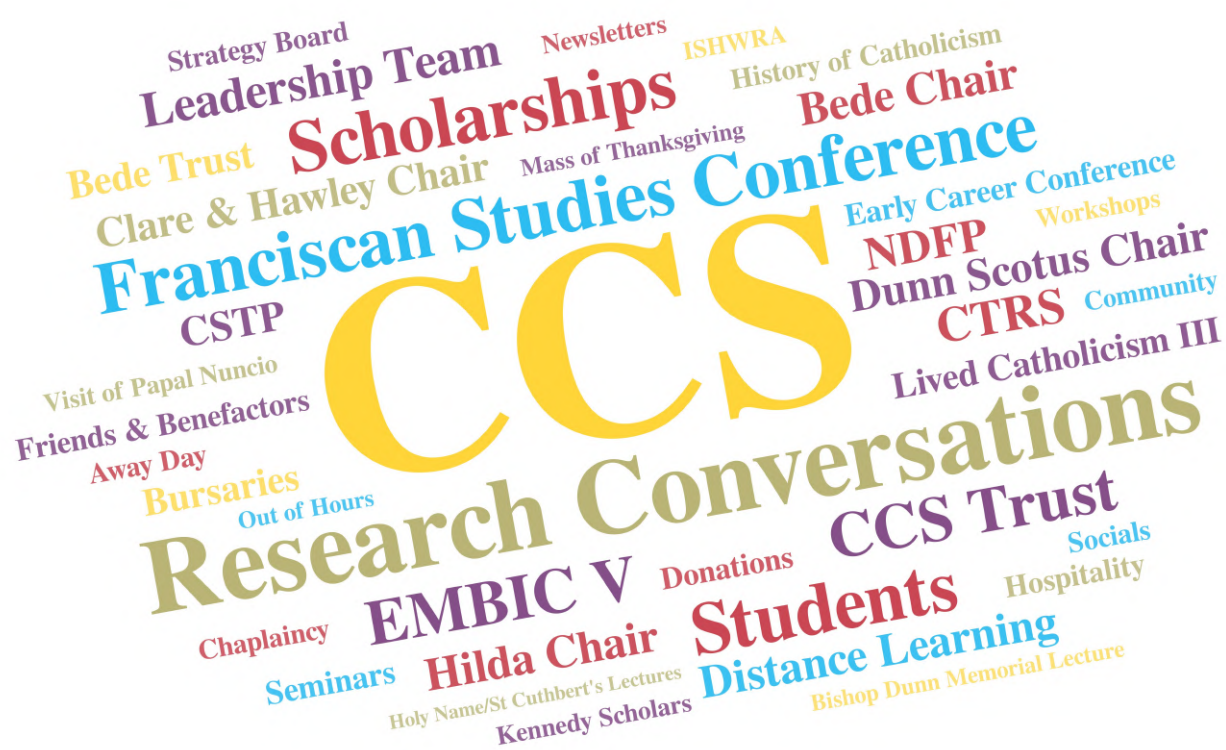
Centre for Catholic Studies

Centre for Catholic Studies Annual Review 2025-26 June 2026



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Director's Welcome and key highlights of the year

Professor Karen Kilby

It has been a wonderful year for the CCS. We are blessed to be joined by two new colleagues: Alexandra Verini, who began in November, and Kate Kelly Middleton, who will formally start in July. It is a joy to see James Kelly appointed to the Clare and Hawley Chair, and we're proud of Anna Rowlands' contribution in launching Pope Leo's first encyclical. The third International Franciscan conference was --I am convinced --our best yet, while the very generous million pound gift from the Society of the Sacred Heart is making extraordinarily valuable things possible. There is all this and much more to be grateful for, as you will see in the following pages.

It is a year of good news, then, but against a not so good backdrop: the wider picture for Theology, and for the Humanities in general, is sobering. We continue to see departments disappearing, and hear stories from colleagues around the country of job losses and immense stress. The University of Nottingham's Theology and Religious Studies Department, for instance, where I taught for 13 years before coming to Durham, was recently absorbed into its Philosophy Department, which is now, in its turn, facing heavy cuts. Looking around the country, I've begun to understand the CCS and Durham's wider Department (currently ranked 4th in the world) as something of an oasis. It is wonderful that we are stable and flourishing and can continue to explore new ways to contribute to the Church and to society -- but it is also increasingly exceptional.

If we do live in an oasis of sorts, what are we called to do? We must be grateful for all that flourishes here, certainly. We must support colleagues elsewhere, as far as we can. But perhaps that is not enough. Perhaps we must take even more seriously our responsibility to the next generation, and to the survival of the discipline itself.

This I think brings a focus more sharply than ever onto scholarship funding. The generosity of many partners over the years has enabled over 100 students to study with us at MA and PhD levels, students who have gone on to contribute in ways that make us proud. Now that public funding for doctoral studies has (to borrow the words of a colleague) fallen off a cliff, the possibility of future CCS scholarships funds becomes even more significant. We have young people knocking on our door who are gifted, enthusiastic, and committed, and who have enormous potential. We very much hope to be able to build, along with the vital year-to-year gifts, a long-term scholarship fund to support these students and those to come in future years.



Professor Karen Kilby



Report from the St Hilda Professor in Catholic Social Thought and Practice

Professor Anna Rowlands

After nearly three years of intensive synod work, this year has been a long-awaited period of **research leave**. I have been focusing on my monograph on the work of three Jewish social philosophers who engaged with Christian philosophy: Hannah Arendt, Simone Weil, and Gillian Rose. The book reads the three women as a neglected, alternative 'canon' within 20th-century political theologies. It recognises their common questions but also their serious and important disagreements about love and justice in political life and the role of faith in that process. I am very much looking forward to trialling some of the ideas that will appear in the book in New York next year, as part of taking up the one-year **honorary Vincentian Chair in Social Justice at St John's University, New York**. It has been a real honour to have been chosen for this role next year.

I have continued to publish in a range of other **publications**, including a special edition of the *Journal for Moral Theology* focused on the expertise and experience of women theologians at the Synod on Synodality. This edition will go some way towards archiving for posterity the experiences of those first voting synod women. I've been pleased to contribute to publications on Pope Francis and have a forthcoming journal article on the rule of law, stemming from a fantastic conference at Boston College in February. I have also had several public engagement articles on social teaching published in Italian.

I have not been teaching this year due to research leave, but have continued to **supervise wonderful PhD students** and am delighted that one of our students who has been completing her doctorate whilst living in Bethlehem throughout the recent war in Gaza has now submitted. I am also delighted that we are starting to get some more students interested in studying synodality at PhD level coming to study with us!

I have been involved in a new piece of **work with parliamentarians and bishops** concerning responses to 'Christian nationalism', and this work will continue to develop, both within parliament and separately with bishops of the Church of England, next year. I have also been able to undertake some work with groups of philanthropists seeking to understand some of these themes.

The start of a new papacy and unsettled geopolitical times have meant that I have continued to contribute to a range of **global media**, offering briefings and on the record commentary for publications including *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and the BBC. I have managed to get back to offering some Thought for the Day broadcasts for Radio 4 and was also invited to make a short programme for the BBC on Simone Weil with Naomi Alderman for the Radio 4 Human Intelligence series. I have contributed to a range of podcasts, including for St Paul's Cathedral.



Anna Rowlands speaking in Parliament



Anna Rowlands at Oxford conference on Democracy

I have contributed to **conferences** in Oxford, Cambridge, San Francisco, Durham, Boston, Washington DC, and Rome on themes of democracy, migration, rule of law, and synodality.

I was honoured this year to be made an **ecumenical canon** of Durham Cathedral. Given the increased importance of ecumenical cooperation in a moment of deep global need, I am delighted to have more ways to further those links and that work.

Finally, I was delighted to be **re-appointed by Pope Leo** as a Member of the Dicastery of Integral Human Development at the Vatican for a further five-year term.



Anna Rowlands being installed as an ecumenical canon of Durham Cathedral

Launch of Pope Leo's first encyclical

At the end of May, Anna was among the speakers at the launch of Pope Leo's first encyclical, Magnifica humanitas. Anna describes the encyclical as "an absolutely vital contribution" for two principal reasons:

First, humanity is facing a moment of profound urgency regarding the technological issues addressed in the document. There is not a tomorrow to begin to think about these issues, because their impact on workplaces, on labour, on immigrants, on families, on political society and on conflicts globally is now, and was yesterday, and will continue tomorrow as well.

At the same time, Anna acknowledges that many people feel uncertain or unqualified to engage with questions surrounding artificial intelligence. There's a kind of hope that somehow, and the Holy Father says this in the document, that maybe somebody else will think about these things, but we have to think about them, and we have to think about them together.

Wider CSTP research funded by the Society of the Sacred Heart

We are delighted that the generous donation from the Sacred Heart Sisters has made possible the appointment of **Dr Kate Kelly Middleton**, who will join us from the Catholic University of America in July as a postdoctoral researcher in CST. She is already hitting the ground running with a project with the Vatican on 'work as care, care as work'.

This same funding has also made possible two **study days on CST** in London for practitioners and academics interested in CST, and several online webinars. All resources are available on the Centre for Catholic Social Thought and Practice website: www.ccstp.org.uk.



Dr Kate Kelly Middleton

Report on the History of Catholicism

Dr James Kelly, Clare and Hawley Associate Professor in the History of Catholicism

The History of Catholicism Team



Dr James Kelly



Dr Liam Temple



Dr Alexandra Verini



Dr Jonathan Bush



Br Benjamin Johnson, OFM Cap

New Posts

James Kelly has been appointed as the inaugural **Clare and Hawley Chair in the History of Catholicism**. The chair has been made possible through generous support from the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre and the Brentwood Ursulines. It is named after Mother Mary Clare, foundress of the Ursuline Convent at Brentwood, and Susan Hawley, foundress of the English Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre.

Alexandra Verini has joined the CCS as a **post-doctoral fellow** on a project investigating the history of the Faithful Companions of Jesus in the UK. Her research will consider the contributions of the FCJ to girls' education and social activism in the UK from 1830 to the present, and will result in a book-length study in time for 200th anniversary of FCJ activity in the UK.

Awards

James Kelly and CCS Honorary Professor John McCafferty were awarded the **2025 Trisco-Minnich Prize** by the American Catholic Historical Association for their editorship of the 5-volume *Oxford History of British and Irish Catholicism*. The annual prize honours outstanding editing of a work in Catholic Church History.

Publications

Liam Temple has published, *Radical Poverty: The Capuchins and Catholicism in Britain, 1850–2021* with Bloomsbury, based on a four-year History of Catholicism project funded by the Capuchins of GB. Its publication was marked with a book launch at the Third International Franciscan Studies Conference at Durham, and a further event is scheduled for September at the University of Notre Dame's London base.

Members of the History of Catholicism research cluster have published **articles** in scholarly journals, including James Kelly's 'Women's Agency, Discernment, and Choice in the English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800', in *The Historical Journal*. Eilish Gregory (post doc with the CCS 2022–25) has contributed chapters to two volumes that are shortly to be published: 'The Little Company of Mary and Migration in the British Empire, 1885–1936', in *Migration and the British World: People, Flows, and Connections*, and 'Irish Sisters in the Little Company of Mary and Global Migration, 1877–1941', in *Immigration and the Irish*. The team has continued to contribute to a number of public **media** outlets, including pieces for *The Conversation* by Liam Temple and Alexandra Verini, plus the latter writing for the *Los Angeles Review of Books*.

The Durham University IMEMS Press book series, 'Catholicisms, c.1450–c.1800', of which James Kelly is a founding co-editor with two scholars from the University of Notre Dame, continues to grow quickly and has published three volumes this academic year: *The Inquisition and the Christian East, 1350–1850*; *Catholic Print Networks in Restoration London, 1660–1688*; and *Print and Catholic Persistence in the Dutch Golden Age*.

Exhibition

To mark the end of her post-doctoral project on the global leadership of the Little Company of Mary, Eilish Gregory worked with the University's Special Collections team to create a **pop-up exhibition** showcasing the LCM's archive at Palace Green Library.

Conferences and workshops

Liam Temple, Jonathan Bush, and CCS Honorary Fellow Cormac Begadon were awarded funding from the British Academy and Leverhulme Trust to run a workshop entitled **'Religious History and Catholic Archives: Towards an Interdisciplinary Approach'**. It brought together scholars from the UK, USA, Ireland, Switzerland, Austria, Belgium, and Italy to discuss the future of the field and they plan to produce an open access output.

Members of the History of Catholicism team are heavily involved with the **'Places and Spaces of Devotion'** conference, a joint initiative between the University's Institute of Medieval and Early Modern Studies and the University of Aix-Marseilles in France.

The Fifth **Early Modern British and Irish Catholicism** conference will take place in July 2026. It will be followed shortly afterwards by an international workshop organized by Br Ben Johnson on 'Early Modern Capuchins in Context: Spirituality, Culture and Catholic Reform'.

Lectures and engagement

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 Mícheál Ó Cléirigh Institute at University College Dublin, at Middlesbrough Cathedral for the Cleveland Newman Circle, the North East Catholic History Society, the general chapter of Capuchins GB, and at an assembly of the Australian Capuchin province, 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.

Members of the team have also taken part in interviews on **social media**, including the UK Word on Fire Institute and several YouTube channels, while Liam Temple's own YouTube channel, 'History with Liam' continues to grow.

As planning starts to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Catholic emancipation in 2029, James Kelly has been working with the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales and several other bodies about different ways to mark the anniversary.

Research networks

- The CCS continues to host the International Scholars of the History of Women Religious Association (**ISHWRA**).
- Liam Temple and James Kelly act as members of the Catholic Record Society's governing council, the latter chairing the society's Awards Committee plus acting as co-convenor of the 'Early Modern Women and Religion' international research network and seminar.
- Liam Temple is a member of the editorial board of the journal, *Franciscan Studies*.
- Jonathan Bush is Vice-Chair of the Catholic Archives Society.

PhD news

- Helen Knight was awarded her PhD with a thesis entitled, *Forgotten Leaders: English and Irish women religious and the development of secondary education for all Catholic girls in the opening decades of the twentieth century*.
- Former History of Catholicism PhD researcher, Scholastica Jacob, published a book based on her thesis, *A Happy Homecoming or a Second Exile? The journey from exile to revival of Benedictine nuns in England 1795-1840* (Sacristy Press, 2026).



Little Company of Mary pop-up exhibition curated by Dr Eilish Gregory



British Academy/Leverhulme Trust international workshop

Report from the Duns Scotus Assistant Professor in Franciscan Studies

Dr Billy Crozier

The past year has been a particularly productive one for the Duns Scotus with developments in Franciscan outreach, teaching, research, and international collaboration.

Franciscan outreach

In June 2025, the CCS organised a two-week online **Franciscan Summer School**, attended by over 100 participants from across the UK, Europe, Canada, and the United States. It included modules taught by Prof. Sr. Mary Beth Ingham, Br Bill Short OFM, and myself, alongside two public lectures by Prof. Sr. Margaret Carney and Prof. John McCafferty.

To commemorate the 800th anniversary of St Francis's transitus, a three-day international conference, ***Life and Love Transfigured: Exploring New Horizons in Franciscan Studies***, was held at Ushaw College from 14–16 April 2026. The conference attracted over 150 participants and was attended by members of all the major donor communities supporting the Duns Scotus Chair.

I have published **articles** in *The Tablet*, *Commonweal*, *The Conversation*, and *The Church Times*, and participated in a range of media events and webinars marking the Franciscan Jubilee.

Franciscan teaching

The range of Franciscan teaching at Durham continues to grow. Alongside the second-year undergraduate module: *The Thought of St Bonaventure* and the Distance Learning MA module *Trinity, Incarnation, and Creation: High Medieval Franciscan Theology*, a new second-year undergraduate module has been introduced: *The Fire and the Rose: Medieval and Early Modern Female Franciscan Mysticism*. This introduces students to the spirituality of figures like St Clare of Assisi, St Angela of Foligno, St Colette of Corbie, and Venerable Mary of Ágreda.

Looking to the future

My **monograph** containing an edition of St Bonaventure's Questions on Colour is nearing completion, and I have begun a second volume containing his Questions on Fate and Questions on Demonic Temptation.

Later this year, I hope to lead another **online Franciscan retreat** using Bonaventure's *Five Feasts of the Child Jesus*.

From October 2026, the Franciscan Distance Learning MA module will also be available as a stand-alone course, meaning it can be taken by those not wishing to do the full MA.

And finally....

One of the greatest privileges of holding the Duns Scotus Chair is the opportunity to work closely with the Franciscan family in the UK and Ireland, as well as in North America, and Australia. It is a deep blessing to collaborate with so many wonderful Franciscan partners.



Billy giving his lecture at the Franciscan Conference, April 2026

Building Franciscan Relationships

In Autumn 2025, I was appointed to the Advisory Board of the newly established *International Association of Franciscan Studies*, being one of its founding members.

In Spring 2026, I was also appointed to the Research Advisory Board of the Franciscan Study Centre at Tilburg, further strengthening Durham's international Franciscan profile.

Third Franciscan Studies Conference

To mark the 800th anniversary of St. Francis' Transitus, the third international Franciscan Studies Conference, *Life and Love Transfigured: Exploring New Horizons in Franciscan Studies*, was held at Ushaw College and Durham 14-16 April 2026. The conference was a truly **international** event, with participants attending from as far away as Japan, Hawaii, Australia, American, South America, and Eastern Europe, as well as a strong showing from Ireland and the United Kingdom. Over 150 people participated, with representatives of all the major branches of the Franciscan family being present.

Plenary lectures were delivered by Prof. Daniel Horan, Prof. Richard Cross, Rev. Dr Michael Cusato OFM, Prof. William Hyland, Prof. Darleen Pryds, and Dr William Crozier, scholars of Franciscan theology, history, and spirituality. The conference consisted of a mixture of academic parallel papers, workshops with a more reflective and pastoral focus, as well as acts of ecumenical worship and time for shared conversation. Fr Casey Cole OFM gave a public lecture on Franciscan digital evangelization, while Br Richard Henrick OFM Cap preached at the opening service, presided over by Rt. Rev. Stephen Wright, Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle. His Beatitude Cardinal Pizzaballa OFM, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, recorded a video for the opening session of the conference, reflecting on St. Francis' transitus and the relevance of Franciscan spirituality for today.



Attendees of the Franciscan Studies Conference April 2026 in St Cuthbert's Chapel, Ushaw

Other Franciscan Research

I am delighted to report that the past year has witnessed several significant achievements in the field of Franciscan research:

- Dr **Liam Temple**, Assistant Professor in the History of Catholicism (Research), published his latest book, *Radical Poverty: The Capuchins and Catholicism in Britain, 1850-2022* (Bloomsbury, 2026). This represents a major achievement in Capuchin studies and has been greatly welcomed by the Capuchin family. Liam is currently undertaking a major research project funded by the Australian Capuchin family, focusing on Capuchin history and social action in Australia.
- Dr **Brian Casey**, CCS FMDM Fellow 2020-24, has submitted the final proofs for his book stemming from his post-doctoral project with the FMDM sisters, *The Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood: Charism and Community in Global Catholicism, 1874-2025*. Brian's book focuses on the critical contributions to missionary work and social outreach which the FMDM sisters have made, and continue to make, in the life of the church.
- Br **Ben Johnson** OFM Cap is continuing his post-doctoral research project exploring the reception of St. Bonaventure's mystical writings were received among the early Capuchin tradition. Br Ben will run an international symposium on the history of the Capuchin movement in Durham in July 2026.
- Rev. Dr **Charles Rennie**, a Presbyterian minister based in the USA, passed his PhD viva on 13 April 2026. Supervised by myself and Prof. Rik Van Nieuwenhove, Charles's thesis explored St. Bonaventure's theology of contemplation within, *The Soul's Journey into God*.

Report from the Bede Professor of Catholic Theology Professor Karen Kilby

The Bede Chair is distinctive for including **outreach** in the basic job description. This is a rare thing for a prestigious post, at least outside the CCS. It is satisfying that the longer I occupy the Bede Chair, the deeper the relationships I form and so the better the opportunities for outreach become.

This year I have lectured at two day-long conferences for RE teachers, one of which I organised together with the Diocesan Department of Education. The Education Department were a pleasure to work with, and the day was received well. We are thinking of making it an annual event. I've also had two days with the interns at the Diocesan Youth Village: they came to Durham in January and I visited them near Consett in March. We talked about everything from the problem of evil to the question of universal salvation to how to facilitate discussions well. Elsewhere in the diocese, I've discussed the paradoxes of synodality with one of the Deanery groups, lectured on creed and the development of doctrine at Holy Name Church in Newcastle and at St Cuthbert's Parish in Durham, and spoken to my own parish's Journey in Faith group. I've also joined the Diocesan Formation and Mission Committee.

I continued as a Trustee of CAFOD, my ninth year in the role. I drew on this experience for the first of three talks on poverty I was asked to give as part of the Carmelite Ongoing Formation week, and as before I found Carmelite nuns to be an ideal theological audience—their level of learning, attentiveness, and openness is remarkable. Outside the Catholic sphere, I gave a lecture to a few hundred Anglican vicars as part of the Chichester diocese's clergy conference, and wrote a 3000 word article for the *Plough*, a journal run by the Bruderhoff.

This is my second in a 3 year term as **Director of the CCS**. One of the pleasures of the role is being able to play some part in supporting a range of projects—in the last 12 months I had an involvement in planning a major Franciscan conference, in the third Lived Catholicism global online conference, in the Conversations, Culture and Communion project, and in the 6th form RE project. I was not the centre of any, but I was able to support the work of colleagues who are carrying out each, and admire their distinctive talents and their shared commitment.

Teaching and research have carried on to at least some degree as usual (a couple of articles and a little progress on a book, Distance Learning teaching, a half dozen PhD students to supervise), and they bring real joy. It was an honour to be invited to a doctoral conference in St Maurice, Switzerland organised around my own research, and a spur to get on with finishing the book. But what stands out as particularly distinctive in the last 12 months is how often I have been called on to be involved in support of colleagues in **other institutions**. For some years I have been a member of the Margaret Beaufort Institute's Council. This year I have also assisted St Mary's, Glasgow University and St Andrews as they prepare for the next REF exercise; Edinburgh University and Trinity College Dublin as they undertook reviews of BA programmes; Cambridge and St Andrews as they appointed to historic chairs. At a time when the University study of Theology is under threat, it seems important to respond to calls to support the discipline nationally and beyond.



Durham Cathedral river reflection. Photo by C Tuckwell ©

Update on the Career Development Fellowship in Catholic Theology

Dr Nomi Pritz-Bennett has thrived in the first half of her three-year role as the Career Development Fellow in Catholic Theology at the CCS.

On the **research** side, she has continued work on Maurice Blondel, completing an article on his philosophy of mediation and is working towards submitting her manuscript, *A Vindication of Finitude: Maurice Blondel's Ascetic Philosophy*. She will next be working on a commissioned chapter for *The Oxford Companion of the Cross*, entitled 'Violence and Suffering'.

On the **teaching** side, alongside modules on Christian ethics and atonement theology, she has redesigned and taught 'Catholic Theology in the Modern World', returning to the period that shaped her own formation.

Nomi says, 'Teaching the materials on two Vatican councils, Newman, Blondel, Congar, de Lubac, Rahner, Balthasar, and others, has reinforced my sense that the classroom can integrate and clarify in new ways what I thought I already knew. At its best, time with students can become a space of shared learning, and at its most exciting, a state of flow overtakes the discussion. It is a delight to share in a-ha moments with the students, and I have been fortunate to work with undergraduates who are thoughtful, engaged, and willing to wrestle with (very) demanding primary texts.'

Convening the Catholic Theology Research Seminars (CTRS), supervising students, and developing the CCS's public presence on social media have also been part of Nomi's contributions to life at the CCS.



Dr Nomi Pritz-Bennett

CCS on Instagram

At the start of 2026 we launched an Instagram page to raise awareness and visibility of the CCS. We share the latest updates from our research, details of our events, engaging short reels from staff and students, and generally fly the flag for the work that CCS is involved in.

Follow us on [@ccs.durham](https://www.instagram.com/ccs.durham)

Students, Scholarships and Alumni

Students

CCS students continue to bring life and vitality to the CCS. The Catholic Theology Research Seminars (CTRS) are a core point of contact for students and staff. This year's speakers hailed from Salisbury, London, Leeds and Edinburgh, as well as the US and Canada. Students are exposed in these seminars to something of the breadth of the current theological scene: this year we heard about Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Oscar Romero, about holiness, existential gratitude, ineffability, the Council of Nicaea and more. It's an opportunity to get a taste of the scholarly debate in a range of areas, and also to participate in debate and discussion with one another, with their teachers, and with visiting scholars.

Creating social spaces for students to engage with each other and staff is really important to us. It is for this reason that we have a drinks reception after each of the seminars. And it is why we have continued to run 'Out of Hours' meetings in the evenings, held in the welcoming spaces of either chaplaincy or the friary, with pizza and conversation. We are also particularly grateful to Mary McHugh, who welcomes us into her house a few times a year to host social events for staff and students.

The **Distance Learning** programme is now well established and proving to be very valuable, with 43 students enrolled this year across 3 year groups. The students range in age from their 20s to their 70s and they work as teachers, chaplains and youth workers, as medics, priests, in IT, in NGOs, and much more. Some are retired; many are deeply involved in their parishes and dioceses. We are particularly pleased that we have the option to enrol someone initially only on a single module, 'Catholic Theology: a preliminary tour'. This allows some who don't have an humanities background to prove their ability, and then go on to the rest of the MA. This year this has been a route for 8 students onto the MA, including an Associate Professor in computer science at another university.

At the beginning of June the CCS held the annual **Early Career and Postgraduate Conference** where 28 students (8 from Durham, 14 from around the UK, and 6 from further afield, Austria, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the USA) 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 keynote by Vincent Lloyd (Villanova University), *Performing Race, Performing Grace*.



Keynote Lecture at the Early Career Conference, June 2026



John Baskaran, PhD student 2022/23-2024/25

I moved to Durham with my family from India four years ago. Now, I have completed my PhD, with a dissertation exploring Gregory of Nazianzus' use of literary images to speak faithfully about God in the fourth-century theological context.

On this long journey, I had the privilege of being part of CCS for two years and was supported by a St Jude bursary, which was invaluable in enabling me to focus on my studies. The CCS bursary offered me not only valuable financial assistance but also brought me into an academic and faith community where I met many scholars who shared similar academic and spiritual interests. I was encouraged and nurtured by all the conversations and interactions in all the events organised by CCS. The wide range of topics covered in the academic events broadened my understanding of theology. Having been enriched by these experiences, I am returning to India to teach at Madras Christian College in Chennai, where I will train future leaders of the Indian Church.

Scholarships

Through generous **donations** from the Carmelite Sisters, the Congregation of Jesus, the Faithful Companions of Jesus (FCJ), the Hartley Trust, Mater Ecclesiae, the Sisters of Christian Education, the Sisters of the Sacred Heart (RSCJ), and individual donors, the CCS has been able to support 29 students in 2025-26 with scholarship and bursary awards totalling £249,969.

The above awards include the first from the **Janet Erskine Stuart Scholarship endowment** established in 2025. This fund is specifically aimed at teachers and chaplains and has enabled us to offer generous scholarship funding to teachers and chaplains based in the UK who wish to study with us and are qualified to do so. As a result, the number of teachers and chaplains on our Distance Learning MA in Catholic Theology has risen significantly. The Distance Learning programme allows people to study rigorously and at depth, but also part-time and flexibly, without relocating, and is well-adapted to the schedule of teachers. We anticipate that this year the number of teachers and chaplains studying with us will be higher still due to the availability of the scholarships.

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. Please do contact as if you wish to explore a donation for CCS scholarships.

Alumni

Congratulations to CCS students completing PhD programmes in 2025-26:

- **Avril Baigent** - Thesis title: *Forming Catholic identity in young people: contingency, agency and the power of family life*
- **John Baskaran** - Thesis title: *Comparing the Incomparable: Gregory of Nazianzus' Use of Comparative Images for God*
- **Charles Rennie** - Charles's thesis explored St. Bonaventure's theology of contemplation within the soul, *The Soul's Journey into God*.



Lydia Van Calster, MA student 2025/26

My name is Lydia Van Calster from Leuven in Belgium, and I am currently enrolled in the taught MA in Theology and Religion at Durham University.

My experience of the CCS community has been wonderful: the seminars and socials organised have contributed to my wonderful stay in Durham. I especially loved the seminars as they were about a wide range of topics I would otherwise not have come across.

The CCS have graciously made my stay at Durham possible through a wonderful Mary Ward Scholarship which allowed me to broaden my horizons by providing the opportunity for me to live in a new country, meet new people, and create a space for intellectual discussions. I have much appreciated all the support the CCS has offered me, both intellectually, but especially in the welcoming, warm, and friendly atmosphere they provided.

After my year in Durham I plan to return to Leuven and do a second Masters specifically to become a hospital chaplain.

Other alumni news

- One of our former PhD scholarship holders is currently a **postulant** with the Faithful Companions of Jesus.
- Rev. Dr **Gabrielle Thomas**, CCS Postdoctoral Fellow 2017-19, has been appointed as the next Dean of Berkeley Divinity School at Yale. Gabby's third monograph, *The Problem of the Devil in Cappadocian Thought*, has recently been published by Cambridge University Press.
- Dr **Elizabeth Powell**, CCS La Retraite Postdoctoral Fellow in Theology and Spirituality 2018-22, continues part-time as an Adjunct Assistant Professor at the University of Notre Dame's London Global Gateway teaching Theology and the visual arts, and has recently been appointed Director of Research at the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology in Cambridge.
- Rev. Dr **John O'Brien**, CCS Associate Professor (Research) 2019-24, has published the findings of his project, *Transformative Renewal in the Catholic Church* (Lit Verlag Münster, 2025). John examines six pastoral initiatives unfolding at local level, and their coherence with the synodal path inaugurated by Pope Francis, to argue that the Church is on the cusp of incipient development of tradition.
- Rev. Dr **Liam Kelly OFM**, lecturer at Mary Immaculate College in Ireland, was a member of the organising committee for the very successful third Franciscan Studies Conference held in April 2026. He has recently published a monograph from his PhD research, *Poverty, Peacemaking, and the Sacred: A Girardian Reading of the Early Franciscan Movement* (New York: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2025).



Abbey House, home of the Department of Theology & Religion and the CCS

RE Resources Project

Gareth Rowe, Project lead

The CCS is leading on a project to develop **RE resources** for sixth form students in Catholic schools and colleges across England and Wales. Currently every child in every Catholic school or college from Early Years to the end of Sixth Form must do an hour a week RE. For key stage 5 (Sixth Form/College) students, this hour is in addition to any formal RE qualification they may be taking. The Catholic Education Service (CES) has published a curriculum for Early Years to Key Stage 3 but currently there is no curriculum for Key Stage 4 (GCSE) or Key Stage 5 (Sixth Form/College). Schools have to provide their own curricula and resources.

In 2025, the Dept of Theology and Religion at Durham University was asked by local Heads of RE to provide some resources they could use with their sixth formers. The **Society of the Sacred Heart** generously funded a project to facilitate their creation. Since then the project has taken on a life of its own. We met with the CES who suggested we create resources to be rolled out nationally and create a curriculum document to explain the rationale behind them.

The project is well on the way. Initially we spoke to **stakeholders** across the sector including: The Association of Teachers of Catholic Religious Education (ACTRE), The National Board of RE Inspectors and Advisers (NBRIA), The Association of Catholic Sixth form Colleges (ACVIC), CAFOD, The Jesuit Schools Network, CES Wales and St David's Catholic Sixth Form College Cardiff. We learned just how varied the sector was but also how hungry centres were for good quality resources.

The next stage was to produce a draft **curriculum** document with a selection of likely modules and take it back to the stakeholders for comment. It was enthusiastically received so we moved to finalise the module list. Academics from Durham University and elsewhere were asked to contribute and we now have a rich selection of twenty modules promised.

Modules range from core issues like 'What is theology?' through traditional approaches like 'Thomas Aquinas on the theological virtues (especially hope and love)' and 'St. Bonaventure: The Heart of Doctrine' to more contemporary approaches like 'Catholic Social Teaching: rediscovering society in the context of crisis', 'Environmental Theology', and 'Women in the Contemporary Church'.

Modules will be a mixture of filmed talks/lectures and suggestions for teacher led activities. **Filming** begins in June and we will have a pilot of six modules ready for the 2026-27 academic year with the remainder to follow the year after.

The project has been truly a **collaborative** space where enthusiastic sixth form teachers and academics have volunteered their time and expertise to make this much needed project happen!



Gareth Rowe



A Core RE class exploring Sikhism

Research: Constructive Catholic Theology

Conversations, Culture and Communion: Networking for Church Vitality and Health

Professor Clare Watkins, Research lead

The Conversations, Culture and Communion project has just passed the halfway mark of its three-year time frame. This is a good moment for reflection. What stands out to me most is the extraordinary people and work that the project has networked in the last 18 months, all working in various ways to make our Catholic Church communities places of healthier relationship, safety, and trust – places where each person, can grow authentically in their distinctive vocation. This network of care, thought, and action was evidenced at the second Network Gathering of the project in February, where over 40 participants shared projects and thinking over two days. We heard the voices of young people through the work being done by Million Minutes <https://millionminutes.org>, and the Kenelm Youth Trust <https://www.kenelmyouthtrust.org.uk>, as well as through our collaborations with Citizens UK in Hexham & Newcastle, and Arundel & Brighton dioceses. We have much to learn from the communities of our schools and youth groups – about safe spaces, hope, and inclusion.

The gathering also allowed us to reflect on what we have heard of the experiences and insights of diocesan clergy – especially those recently ordained (under 10 years), with whom I have been able to carry out nearly 25 interviews. Strangely, these clerical voices are often overlooked. The joys and challenges we have been able to attend to through these interviews raise significant questions about the formation and care of our clergy, and the importance of finding better ways of our all being able to share in conversations together.

The voices, experiences, and insights of survivors of abuse in our communities must always be kept central to our conversations, both through the presence of those, known and unknown, who live with the experience of abuse, and through developing work shaped and led by survivors. Here the Conversations project is glad to be able to support teams in two dioceses – Northampton and Plymouth – where survivor groups are working with their safeguarding teams to develop volunteer chaplaincy and accompaniment for those impacted by abuse. Our contacts with work being done in Ireland, represented at our Network Gathering, have been especially helpful as we feel our ways forward in these projects.

All that I've written here seems overly summarised and condensed, compared to the rich, dynamic realities we are working with on the ground. Through everything the theological development of themes has been on-going: ecclesiological change; theologies of ordained ministry; theological understandings of children and young people; the call to accompaniment – these, and others, have been the foci of presentations and international conferences where I have been able to learn and to present the Conversations project's work.

If the halfway point of a project is a time to take stock on the story so far, it is also a time for planning the next half of the work. Encouraged by the Network Gathering participants, we are moving now to a stronger emphasis on writing up the work of these various strands – as case studies and as various kinds of article, academic and more accessible. A dedicated website is due to be launched shortly, where more details of the projects and the ways they are shaping our theological understanding will be available – including a series of podcasts reflecting on *The Cross of the Moment*, and hearing from members of the Conversation network. The launch of this website will be announced through the CCS newsletter and will – we hope – extend our conversing for a healthier and more vital church.



Professor Clare Watkins



Thanks to Antonia Sobocki, participants at the Network Gathering were able to contribute to the international Tesseræ project being led by Rupnik survivor and artist, Sr. Samuele:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3DNJWVtrp44>

Research: Constructive Catholic Theology

Update on Receptive Ecumenism Professor Paul D. Murray, Dr Greg Ryan and Dr John Stayne

Gatherings

The **Learning on the Way** project will conclude with an international symposium in Rome during January 2027, hosted by the Pontifical University of Thomas Aquinas (The Angelicum) and including members of the Dicastery for the Promotion of Christian Unity, and the Synod Office.

NINS-CCS Newman Doctoral Fellow, Nathan Smith has taken the initiative to organise a **Sixth International Receptive Ecumenism Conference**. The conference will be held in the US during 2027.

Publications

Participants from seven Christian traditions, including guests from the Vatican, took part in a series of in-person and online workshops in summer 2025 to develop a new volume on Receptive Ecumenism and Synodality based on the successful CCS symposium, *Learning on the Way* held in 2023. ***Receptive Ecumenism for a Synodal Church***, to be published by Bloomsbury/T&T Clark in 2027, is edited by Paul Murray, Greg Ryan, and John Stayne, and includes contributions from other CCS members.

Two new books have been published:

- Nausikaa Haupt, Olle Kristenson, Michael Nausner, and Gregory A. Ryan (eds.), ***Spirit Flowing Like Water: New Conversations on Receptive Ecumenism*** (2025)
- Gregory A. Ryan, David F. Ford, Robert Leigh, and Sarah Snyder (eds.), ***Twelve Habits for Peacemakers: A Christian Wisdom of Reconciliation*** (2026).

Paul Murray's **monograph on Receptive Ecumenism**, the fruit of 25 years' work and reflection in this field, is to be published with Cambridge University Press in 2027: Paul D. Murray, ***Healing the Wounds of the Church: The Theology and Practice of Receptive Ecumenism***.

Twelve Habits for Peacemakers

A CHRISTIAN WISDOM
OF RECONCILIATION



GREGORY A. RYAN, DAVID F. FORD,
ROBERT LEIGH, SARAH SNYDER



Spirit Flowing book launch, left to right: Rev. Diane Ryan, Nausikaa Haupt, Michael Nausner, Gregory Ryan, and Olle Kristenson

Research: Lived Catholicism

Update on Lived Catholicism and Synodality: A Seedcorn Project

Dr Avril Baigent, Researcher in Lived Catholicism

Following on from the East-West Symposium on Synodality held in April 2025, the Lived Catholicism and Synodality project moved to broaden the conversation via a global online conference on 2 & 3 December 2026.

This, the **third Lived Catholicism conference** had the following aims:

- To apply the Lived Catholicism lens to the global synod project in order to explore the complexities of synodality across different contexts.
- To continue to bring together scholars of Lived Catholicism across a broad range of perspectives and disciplines.
- To promote the notion of 'Lived Catholicism' both within the academy and the wider Church.
- By holding the event online, enable a wide and diverse group of people to access the conference, from all parts of the world.

The conference was attended by 109 people from 19 countries, including attendees from Australia, Japan, Hong Kong, Philippines, India, Malaysia, Nigeria, Hungary, Malta, Italy, France, Germany, US, and Canada.

Short papers were drawn from an equally wide diverse group, alongside **keynotes** from Fr Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator SJ (Dean of Theology, Santa Clara University, California), Dr Estela Padilla (Executive Secretary of the Office of Theological Concerns at the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)), and Prof. Tricia Bruce (Senior Research Fellow with the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies).

Topics covered in short papers included democracy, change management, ethics, marriage care, hearing voices on the margins, digital Catholicism, migration, community organising, clericalism, women's experiences, and the LGBTQ community, as well as strong panels on practical theology and ecclesiology. A particular highlight was a **panel of four archbishops**: +Gordon (Trinidad and Tobago), +Lackner (Salzburg), +Mpako (Pretoria), and +Sherrington (Liverpool), interviewed on synodal leadership by Professors Anna Rowlands and Karen Kilby.

The audience included scholars, practitioners and interested lay attendees, with feedback overwhelmingly positive. Of the **feedback** received, 85% felt strongly that the conference expanded their understanding of and engagement with synodality, while 96% felt that the "Lived Catholicism" approach had added valuable dimensions. More generally, comments showed that we had met our aims of offering a more nuanced and diverse picture of synodality.

Videos of the presentations are being made available via the [LivedCatholicism.org](https://livedcatholicism.org) website as an ongoing legacy of the conference, and to widen participation.

In the concluding panel of the conference, there was much interest and enthusiasm for continuing the conversation, including two invitations to future conferences. Over the three Lived Catholicism conferences we have had around a hundred presenters and 400 participants. This is an excellent foundation to draw on to develop the field of Lived Catholicism and offer new perspectives on synodality.



Dr Avril Baigent

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 in Great Britain

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

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

The University welcomed two CCS partners as new members into the Chancellor's Circle in April: the English Benedictine Congregation, represented by Abbot Geoffrey Scott OSB and Abbot Christopher Jamison OSB (right), and the Poor Clare Community formerly of Darlington, in recognition of the gift of their archive to Durham University's Special Collections.



Centre for Catholic Studies

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The Centre for Catholic Studies

is a vibrant and inclusive community of practitioners of Catholic theology and researchers into Catholicism which aims:

- to pursue critical and creative studies of Catholic thought, history, culture, and practice in all its breadth and depth;
- to form and nurture scholars and theologians who will contribute to shaping the future drawing from the richness of Catholic tradition and ecumenical learning;
- to engage with and contribute to the transformation of church and society, locally, nationally, and internationally.

In all our activity we are committed to holding ourselves accountable to the Department of Theology and Religion, the wider University, and our stakeholders, and continuing to be inspired by the gifts and charisms of the religious congregations who have been so important to our development.