

# SSCE Postgraduate Update

The Society for the Study of Christian Ethics

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Dear fellow postgraduates,

In this second issue of our quarterly SSCE Postgraduate update, we feature an interview with **Dr Margaret Adam**, Visiting Tutor in Theology and Ethics at St Stephen's House, Oxford. We also introduce two of our very own postgraduates, **Claire Hein Blanton** and **Helen Dawes**. We are just under a month to our 2016 SSCE Postgraduate Conference that will be held on the 21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> April at Durham University. The conference theme is Christian Hope: Embodying the Resurrection in the World Today. Professor Robert Song will give a plenary address on sexual ethics alongside an exciting array of paper presentations from our postgraduates. Registration for the conference remains open until April 17<sup>th</sup> and we look forward to meeting each of you at the upcoming conference.

Your postgraduate conveners,  
Nicolas Baumgartner and Esther Chew

**Feature Interview with Margaret Adam,  
Visiting Tutor in Theology and Ethics,  
St Stephen's House, University of Oxford**



**1. Tell us a little bit about yourself. How would you briefly sum up your current role and research work at St Stephen's House, Oxford?**

I moved to the States to Oxford from Glasgow when my husband took up a full-time post (NT) at St Stephen's House. I am a visiting tutor in Christian ethics at St Stephen's. I also teach (tutorials and seminars) for two American undergraduates abroad programs, one based in Oxford and one based in Bath. This is my last year (of four) coordinating the doctrine module for the Scottish Episcopal Church training for ministry program. I help out with the CreatureKind project, and I give a couple of conference papers a year. My research continues, slowly. I participate actively in the worship, social, and academic life at St Stephen's, where we live, and I attend some of the University's lectures and seminars.

**2. Your foray as a female academic in systematic theology and ethics could be described as unconventional and "accidental". Could you tell us a little bit more about that?**

**Early Days**

My undergraduate degree was in religious studies, but I did not continue directly on to postgraduate work, because I was not sure where I would want to focus and because my husband was already working toward ordination and postgraduate work in New Testament. I was able to audit some classes at the universities where he got his degrees, and I discovered that my passion was systematic theology and ethics, but by that time my life was too full at home to consider further education.

**Children**

We have three children (two by birth, one by adoption). I embraced child-rearing, stayed at home, and was the primary homeschooling parent. To survive on our one, modest income, I stretched the budget (food-cooperative, a farm share of vegetables, and lots of time in the kitchen), volunteered (breastfeeding/parenting support groups, AIDS ministry, church committees), explored theology, and brought in a little income from indexing and editing.

## **Back to School**

I attended local and national AAR/SBL conferences (sometimes slipping in and out the back with an infant or toddler), and I gave one conference paper as an independent scholar, but I eventually felt that I had exhausted the non-institutional resources for theology and I knew I would need credentials to teach. So, I juggled homeschooling and a masters in theological studies, at the seminary where my husband taught and where we lived on site.

## **Away to School**

When our eldest had left for university, and the second was close to leaving, I left home in Chicago to do a PhD at Duke University. It was a radical shift from at-home mom of three to student mom with one child in tow, a shift made all the more disorienting when that child decided to move back home to be with Dad, the dog, and friends.

## **University Teaching**

When I had finished my PhD coursework and exams, my husband's seminary closed abruptly. I took a full-time teaching at one university, and he got a one year sabbatical replacement position at another – again in two different states. The next year, he moved to a new job at the University of Glasgow, I continued my job in Baltimore, and our daughter – tired of her parents' instability – moved into a fine arts boarding school in Michigan. She flourished at school, but my husband and I and my thesis-writing did not. It was not a sustainable situation.

## **New Horizons**

The next year I moved to Glasgow to join my husband, finish my thesis, and look for a chance to teach again. PhD in hand, I was able to lecture and tutor here and there at the University, but I quickly realised that I was not on the conventional junior-to-senior-scholar route in academia. The market is tight, I have not published enough, I am not a young and promising scholar, and I am no longer interested in commuting.

## **Current Perspectives**

I'm feeling mostly settled in the UK now, and I am comfortable – most of the time – with teaching and research in bits and pieces, on a term-by-term basis. The priorities I claimed in my twenties have long-lasting ramifications, some of which have been disappointing career-wise, but I do not regret the time at home with the kids. The extended time of rather intense childcare for rather intense children has shaped my imagination, research, and pedagogy. It has also formed me to understand that theology and ethics are utterly inseparable from the mundane particulars of daily life.

My Oxford days are busy. I can tutor and write, and my schedule is flexible enough to allow for (the still necessary) budget-stretching, conferences, feeding and housing the variety of friends (new and old) who end up on our doorstep, community life at St Stephen's, occasional trips to the States to see our grown kids, and my marriage.

I did not figure out how to have it all, how to schedule family and career equally, or how to be a two-full-time-academic-career couple. I have figured out how to live a full, if unconventional, life for which I am deeply grateful.

### **3. You are presently spearheading the efforts of the SSCE Working Group on Gender in the Academy. What prompted the formation of the working group? What is its critical importance especially for the field of Christian ethics?**

The concerns of women and the academy pertain to anyone who participates in Christian ethics scholarship and/or in institutes of higher education. In fact, Christian ethics must attend to the particular challenges that all unconventional scholars face, when conventional means white, male, heterosexual, English, full-time, and on an uninterrupted track from degree to junior to senior academic positions. The accredited, authorised voices of Christian ethics – lecturers, professors, authors, and institutional leaders – still largely match this career model. Published research (such as the recent Durham study), our experiences, and the experiences of our friends and colleagues, demonstrate huge discrepancies in the explicit and implicit social support for scholars, especially scholars who are committed to sustaining relationships and nurturing dependents beyond academia.

SSCE is uniquely positioned to pursue these multidisciplinary and cross-population discrimination

concerns, because it already engages in socio-economic, political, ecclesial, and institutional conversations about sin, power, public policy, social practices, in/justice, and virtues. Further, SSCE can encourage, promote, and publish scholarship about gender, race, and sexual identity as substantive Christian ethics topics. What role, if any, should institutions, colleagues, and political policies play in providing the best opportunities for infants, growing children, and parents to thrive? Which of the familiar academic expectations about appearance, lecture style, distribution of time, and appropriate vocabulary should be tolerated as inconsequential, and which reflect flawed accounts of Christian anthropology and discipleship? What are the scholarship resources and opportunities for those who have prepared for academic careers that are no longer available? What responsibility do employed scholars hold for their students and unemployed postdocs? Must the ethics academy exclude from its podia and personnel those who provide daily care for dependents?

SSCE can work at encouraging a broader range of scholars to participate in its gatherings. It can encourage University colleagues to support a broader range of students and staff. And, SSCE can count discrimination as a topic worthy of ethical study. My hope is that the Working Group will be able to draw these issues more closely into the heart of the SSCE's identity, and practice.

**4. From your own experience, what were some challenges you faced in pursuing an academic career? How has it shaped you as a person and what keeps you motivated?**

I have found it difficult, sometimes painfully so, to have to be my own precedent, to need to construct my own networks, on the edges of academia and on the margins of the allegedly normal family/career patterns. It's been hard, at times, to find friends and mentors. I am fortunate indeed to have a supportive spouse in a related field, one who helps me try to avoid holding up his career accomplishments as the standard for assessing my own. I appreciate those who recognise that parenting can take a variety of shapes and don't dismiss me for the particular family decisions I've made. And, I have survived the especially challenging times because of those scholars who made time to converse with me before I was a postgrad student and those who accept me as a scholar now despite my somewhat contingent attachments to academia.

**5. What personal advice could you offer to postgraduates who are considering a career that blends both an academic and non-academic role?**

Nurture and sustain friendships – in the flesh, in correspondence, and online – as your most valuable, lifelong resources. I rely on friends for perspective, encouragement, redirection, and reminders that I have a rich life, even though – or perhaps because – I am not a senior professor at a prestigious university. Friends can help hold you accountable for writing goals and help you discern when it is time to set writing aside. Friends can recognise that you do not have to do everything you can do, just because you can do it. You might even be able to afford yourself some of the consideration, reassurance, and respect you grant your friends.

## Our Fellow Postgraduates and their Research



**Claire Hein Blanton**  
**University of Aberdeen**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Year PhD (Systematic and Ethical Theology)**

My project is, broadly speaking, an exploration of Bonhoeffer's political theology. More specifically, I am hoping to use his theology of state and ecclesiology to construct a contemporary ethic of church-state relationships and Christian responses to the state. This work is a culmination of my first degree studies in political science and German history and my master's work in theology. Outside of political theology my research interests are ecclesiology, social theology, and general ethics of everyday life. My motivation for pursuing a PhD in political theology goes back to my experience living in Texas. Current rhetoric about

church and state is highly divided there. Either churches feel it necessary to constantly be in disagreement with that state or, alternatively, to completely withdraw from engagement. I found myself thinking there must be an intermediate engagement- one that engages in political life but does not dissolve the church into *only* a political voice. Dr. Myles Werntz, one of my professors at Truett Seminary, encouraged me in this specific project and in general has been supportive of my pursuit of a PhD since my first course with him. In my free time I like reading non-fiction, non-theology books, taking dance classes, running, and watching Pointless with my husband Jack. Pointless has been the most surprising finding since moving to Scotland and we DVR when we are going to miss it.



**Revd Helen Dawes**  
**Team Rector of Shaftesbury (Diocese of Salisbury)**  
**King's College London**  
**7<sup>th</sup> year part-time PhD**

I combine my PhD research with full time work for the Church of England, which makes studying both easier and harder. It makes it harder for the obvious reason that it's difficult to find the necessary time (right now I've had to formally interrupt my studies as I settle into a rather hectic new parish post). But it also makes it easier because it gives me opportunities to be part of conversations I wouldn't otherwise have access to and which enrich my research. Whilst working on my PhD I've been a rural parish priest, then an Archbishop's policy advisor, and now I'm back in parish ministry leading a Team Ministry based in a market town and surrounding villages.

My interest in theological research comes from a desire to let my academic abilities be part of what I offer in service of the Church. That has led me to research that is rooted in the Church's engagement with public policy issues, specifically issues of political economy. My research investigates the theological implications of the necessary situatedness of the human person in a particular and continuing time, in geographical location, and in relationships with others. I am interested in how a theological description of this 'contextualisation' of the human person might contribute to public conversation about the shape of our economy. On the way I get to consider the details of domestic energy market deregulation, Karl Polanyi's account of economic embeddedness and disembedding, the philosophical question of whether the present moment has duration, and what all of this means for what we think economic activity actually *is*.

## Announcements & Calendar of Events

### **SSCE Postgraduate Communication**

We would like to hear from you! If you are keen to share an event/activity, provide your feedback or be featured, kindly drop us a mail at [pg-convener@ssce.org.uk](mailto:pg-convener@ssce.org.uk)

### **Calendar of Events**

| Time & Dates              | Conferences/Public Events  |
|---------------------------|--|
| 21st – 22nd Apr 2016      | <b>Society of Christian Ethics (SSCE) Postgraduate Conference</b><br>Christian Hope: Embodying the Resurrection in the World Today<br>Venue: Durham University<br>Registration closes on 17 <sup>th</sup> April.<br><a href="http://www.ssce.org.uk/pg-forums">http://www.ssce.org.uk/pg-forums</a>  |
| 21 <sup>st</sup> May 2016 | <b>Reconsidering Religious Radicalism: An Interdisciplinary Conference</b><br>Venue: Clare College, University of Cambridge<br><a href="http://ciris.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Call-for-Papers-Reconsidering-Religious-Radicalism.pdf">http://ciris.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Call-for-Papers-Reconsidering-Religious-Radicalism.pdf</a> |

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| 26th – 27th May 2016                           | <p><b>“Everyday Ethics: A Future for Moral Theology?”</b><br/> An Interdisciplinary Conference of Theologians, Philosophers, Social Scientists, and Social Anthropologists<br/> Venue: University of Oxford<br/> <a href="http://mcdonaldcentre.org.uk/events/everyday-ethics-a-future-for-moral-theology/">http://mcdonaldcentre.org.uk/events/everyday-ethics-a-future-for-moral-theology/</a></p>                              |
| 2nd – 4th Jun 2016                             | <p><b>Character and Virtue in the Professions: An Interdisciplinary Conference</b><br/> Venue: University of Birmingham<br/> Cost: £150<br/> <a href="http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/1619/conferences/character-and-virtue-in-the-professions">http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/1619/conferences/character-and-virtue-in-the-professions</a></p>  |
| 7 <sup>th</sup> June 2016                      | <p><b>Centre for Catholic Studies, Durham University<br/> Postgraduate Study Day</b><br/> Venue: Durham University<br/> Contact: <a href="mailto:ccs.admin@durham.ac.uk">ccs.admin@durham.ac.uk</a> to obtain booking form<br/> <a href="http://www.centreforcatholicstudies.co.uk">www.centreforcatholicstudies.co.uk</a></p>  |
| 29th – 1st Jul 2016                            | <p><b>A Transforming Vision: Knowing and Loving the Triune God</b><br/> The 2016 Theological Conference<br/> Venue: Pusey House, St Giles, Oxford<br/> Cost: Early registration £85 (before 28 February), regular £115, students £20 and £60 (early and regular)<br/> <a href="http://www.puseyhouse.org.uk/2016-theological-conference.html">http://www.puseyhouse.org.uk/2016-theological-conference.html</a></p>               |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> – 7 <sup>th</sup> Jul 2016     | <p><b>Tyndale Fellowship Quadrennial Conference<br/> ‘Marriage, Family and Relationships’</b><br/> Venue: High Leigh Conference Centre, EN118SG<br/> To register: <a href="https://www.getfeedback.com/r/Mg5W3xEI/">https://www.getfeedback.com/r/Mg5W3xEI/</a></p>   |
| 6th – 9th July 2016                            | <p><b>Exploring the Glory of God Conference</b><br/> Venue: Durham University<br/> <a href="https://gloryconference.wordpress.com/call-for-papers/">https://gloryconference.wordpress.com/call-for-papers/</a></p>  |
| 9th – 11 <sup>th</sup> September 2016          | <p><b>SSCE 2016 Annual Conference<br/> Christians and Other Animals</b><br/> Venue: Westcott House, Cambridge<br/> <a href="http://www.ssce.org.uk/content/2016-conference">http://www.ssce.org.uk/content/2016-conference</a></p>  |
| 17 <sup>th</sup> – 18 <sup>th</sup> April 2017 | <p><b>Seventh International Conference on Religion and Spirituality in Society</b><br/> Venue: Imperial College London, London, UK<br/> <a href="http://religioninsociety.com/2017-conference/call-for-presenters?utm_source=N17DanA&amp;utm_medium=N17DanA&amp;utm_campaign=N17DanA">http://religioninsociety.com/2017-conference/call-for-presenters?utm_source=N17DanA&amp;utm_medium=N17DanA&amp;utm_campaign=N17DanA</a></p> |