



A Welcome from the President



*GCU President
Nathan Rose*

Greetings from the Oxford Graduate Christian Union! In this newsletter you'll find a brief review of the GCU's activities in Michaelmas Term 2008. The year got off to a great start with a busy and successful Freshers' Fair stall, which resulted in the recruitment of over 100 interested graduates. At our first event of

the year at the Mitre pub, the venue was packed to capacity as Donald Hay spoke on the subject "Faith in the Academy." Other subjects covered this term included science and religion, mission, politics, film, bioethics, and economics and development. In Week 7 we all gathered at the Mitre for a social. We've seen a real growth in numbers of people coming to GCU this term, and we look forward to building on this in the coming term as we work together with the "Developing a Christian Mind" course.

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***Coming Soon:
The Veritas Forum***

The Graduate Christian Union is pleased to announce this year's Veritas Forum, "The Sons of Abraham: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam in Conversation." This year's forum will take place on the evening of 7 May 2008, as a guided dialogue among three leading Christian, Jewish and Muslim thinkers. Stay tuned for details of location and time. If you want to know more about the vision of Veritas, visit the following website: www.veritas.org

***The Women's Group: One of
GCU's Social Sides***



Dedicated to the Women's Group: Committee Members Jessica Whittle and Subiksha Krishniah

The ladies' meeting was a great time to meet new people and bond with them. Food is always a good catalyst for conversation, it seems! We shared God in our lives, challenges at work and in life, and fresh scones and tea. We were able to laugh at ourselves too, as women and individuals. Prayer requests and reports did the rounds as well! We look forward to another

potential afternoon of fun this term. Anyone interested in helping with this more actively, please contact Jessica or Subiksha: jessica.whittle@new.ox.ac.uk subikshia.krishnaiah@worc.ox.ac.uk

Summaries of Talks in Michaelmas 2008

Week 1: Dr Donald Hay, Casey Cep, Nathan Rose – “A Christian Mind? Faith in the Academy”

Our first event to launch the new academic year was dedicated to the question of what it means to be a Christian in the academic world. We were honoured to host as our main speaker Dr Donald Hay, former Pro-Vice Chancellor and Head of the Social Sciences Department of the University of Oxford. Our GCU president Nathan Rose and committee member Casey Cep joined him as speakers, sharing their experiences as Christian graduate students. Dr Hay reminded his audience that integrity as a Christian comes first, when faced with dilemmata of conscience. Nathan gave a well-researched introduction to the history of the University of Oxford and pointed to how we as Christians are to take seriously the University’s motto “Dominus Illuminatio Mea – The Lord is my light.” Casey encouraged us to see the everyday challenges of academic life as opportunities to grow in Christ. Both, the many new graduates present but also the returning students left the evening with a renewed confidence that the Lord truly is their light in their daily academic life.

Week 2: Reverend Prof Keith Ward – “Science and Religion”



For our second event of the term, we had the honour of welcoming Rev. Dr Keith Ward, one

of Britain's leading experts on science and religion, giving an eloquent and challenging talk on this always controversial topic. Dr Ward’s talk focused on objections against the statements made by some of the most irreverent atheists like Richard Dawkins and Martin Rees. As the talk developed, these became more intriguing, culminating into a very active discussion with the audience about the moral ambiguity and the scientific explanation of miracles.

Of course, many questions were left unanswered and the audience probably left the venue still mulling over some of them in their minds. Ultimately the ambiguity probably rests with the fact that science can be used to argue in favour of religion or against it.

Week 3 . Prof David Oderberg – “Contemporary Bioethics and What to do About it?”

Dr Oderberg, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Reading, delivered a fine and fervent



polemic against the recently emerged profession of “Bioethicists.” The talk was organised in cooperation with the Oxford Pro-Life society.

Oderberg eloquently demonstrated how the increasing sensitivity of the public towards ethical decision-making in the realms of medicine and biotechnology has created the industry of “Bioethics”. However, the Australian philosopher accused the profession of attracting second-rate philosophers who base their decisions not on stringent philosophical reasoning but on whatever opinion is en vogue and on an opportunistic attitude to further their own careers. Oderberg was appealing to common sense, when he gave the example of a Bioethicist who had reasoned that it

can be ethical under certain circumstances to amputate a perfectly healthy limb, if it increases the subjective well-being of the patient. In closing, he advocated the abolishment of Bioethics as a so called “discipline” and appealed to serious philosophers to make themselves heard against the absurd practices of current Bioethics. Needless to say the following debate was as heated as his talk.

Week 4. Dr Cathy Ross – “Women in Mission”



Dr Cathy Ross, Tutor in Missiology at Regent’s Park College and manager of the Crowther Centre for Mission Education at the Church Mission Society, spoke about

the role of women in mission, both historically and in contemporary mission work. She focused primarily on Victorian missionary work in New Zealand, examining the essential role played by women in the success of this mission work and highlighting the lack of recognition that was characteristic of almost all mission work done by women, not only in this period but also throughout the 20th century. She discussed with passion her research into Victorian discourse through largely ignored domestic texts by “missionary wives”, demonstrating their contributions to the mission work.

Week 5: Ross Baird, Scott Erwin and Christian Sahner – “US- Presidential Election Special”

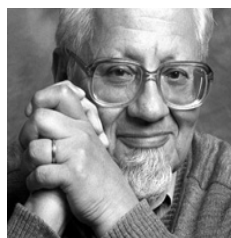
The GCU hosted a student panel on religion and the US presidential election (which was held the previous week). Committee members (and self-confessed Republicans) Scott “I-am-Mike-Huckabee” Erwin and

Christian Sahner were joined on the panel by Democrat Ross Baird.

Christian began by describing election voting patterns, which suggested that in 2008 more voters describing themselves as religious had voted for Obama than for John Kerry in 2004. However, John McCain still garnered a majority of votes for individuals describing themselves as Christian. This majority was especially large amongst Evangelicals.

Each of the three then highlighted issues (the role of abortion in voting – particularly amongst Catholics, the use of young volunteers recruited through churches, for example in voter registration, the importance of social justice issues and the future of the Republican party) after which there was a robust discussion and question session. This included a discussion of policies which are only in the US’s interests and not in the rest of the world’s. Probably the most poignant observation was that these policies reveal that US lives are weighted more important than those lived in other countries, provoking a discussion on the response to this from Christians. This was probably the best GCU I (Andrew Kerr) have been to over the last two years: the panelists were passionate, knowledgeable and excellent speakers, and there was thought-provoking and germane discussion.

Week 6: Dr René Padilla: Global Capitalism – Socialism for the Rich?



Dr René Padilla addressed globalisation, development and liberation theology. Dr Padilla is a leading South American theologian, the former International President of Tearfund, Emeritus President of the Kairos Foundation in Buenos Aires and a missiologist in residence at the Christian

Missionary Society. The Kairos Foundation is a Christian service agency whose purpose is to facilitate the reflection on and the practice of integral mission on the part of local churches.

Dr Padilla discussed the implications of globalisation, largely focusing on economic globalisation, for developing nations. Economic globalisation is understood as the increase in international economic relations and the emergence of a single world market. He first described the detrimental effects of globalisation on developing areas, using the example of Mexican farmers being undercut by cheap American farming. He discussed the world's state of poverty and prompted us to consider an individual's responsibility for the poor, whether this be merely an ethical consideration or a Christian duty. Dr Padilla encouraged us to reflect on how our individual choices and material purchases influence others' quality of life and to consider actively pursuing solutions to world poverty.

Dr Padilla's talk stimulated a lengthy discussion on the effects of capitalism in China, Africa, and Mexico, and it was edifying to hear the contrasting views concerning economic strategies and globalisation.

Week 8 Daniel Cojocaru – “Violence in Hollywood Blockbusters”

In his presentation, Daniel Cojocaru, a member of the GCU committee and second year DPhil student in English Literature, explored the role of violence in recent Hollywood blockbusters. Cojocaru's reading of films like *The Dark Knight*, *The Matrix* and *Fight Club* was given a common denominator through the application of René Girard's theory on scapegoating violence.

Girard, a philosopher of religion, claims that all cultures are built on the foundational violence of the expulsion of a

scapegoat – a violence that is subsequently hidden from the members of the respective society through the mythical belief that it originates in the victim. Cojocaru explained how, according to Girard, the innocence of all scapegoats is for the first time revealed in the Gospel accounts of the Crucifixion and how, because of this revelation, the mechanisms of expulsion are gradually crippled. In our day, we can, therefore, no longer believe in the absolute guilt of the victim and, lacking a scapegoat, are gradually left with our own unresolved conflicts. In a globalised world, which increasingly knows no outside, this crisis potentially results in an escalation of apocalyptic violence.

While Cojocaru's examples of the representation of this crisis in the films were convincing, the audience expressed severe doubts in the ensuing discussion as to the universality and Orthodoxy of Girard's highly controversial thesis. This of course guaranteed a lively and thought-provoking debate for all involved.



*Philosopher of Religion:
René Girard*

Q&A with Dr Donald Hay



Dr Donald Hay is the founder of the “Developing a Christian Mind” Course. For more information: www.oxfordchristianmind.org

Let’s talk first about the Christian Mind Course.

How did you come up with the idea of organising this course?

The idea for such a course goes back a very long time. Integration of Christian faith and academic discipline was something to which I was personally committed from the very beginning of my academic career. It took me some time to work out what that actually meant in practice, but I was greatly helped by Oliver O’Donovan who gave generously of his time and wisdom. Integration is intellectually very challenging, requiring the acquisition of expertise in the relevant theology at a level commensurate with one’s expertise in the discipline. I found that there was very little literature to get me started on this task, especially working out how to ‘apply’ theological insights in what was a completely secular discipline of economics. In the early 1990s, I collaborated with Alister McGrath in putting together an embryonic ‘Developing a Christian Mind’ programme in St Andrews church. It was very well received on the three occasions we ran it, and that left me thinking that it would be good to try something similar for the University and all the churches. It has only been recently that I have had the time to begin to make a reality of that vision.

How do you think will the students benefit from the course?

The purpose of the course is to ease the process of integration, by providing this generation of graduate students with the initial grounding in relevant theological concepts, showing how the process of

applying them in the disciplines can be developed. Inevitably, this involves considerable learning for the participants; they will need to be actively involved, not passive spectators. The conference with its disciplinary streams is designed to show how some Christian Oxford academics are already grappling with the issue of integration in their particular disciplines, providing guides and models of how this can and should be done.

I know this is a bit reductive – but what, in your opinion, are the three most important things in the life of a Christian in Academia?

1. Love the Lord your God with all your mind (see Mark 12: 28-30). The life of the mind has to be included in our discipleship of Jesus Christ, and in particular for those who are called to serve in academia. At the very least we should be committed to the pursuit of truth.
2. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind (see Romans 12: 1-2). The life of the mind has a strong moral dimension: we need to be alert to all the implications of the thought world we inhabit for the way in which we live our lives.
3. Seek the welfare of the city (see Jeremiah 29: 7). Ideas ‘have legs’ far outside academia. We need to ask how our ideas can serve the communities in which we live, both in the narrow sense of the University, and more widely in the nation in which we live.

Trivia:

Left-handed or right-handed?

Last time I thought about it, right handed. But I have never been entirely sure about right and left, so don’t put me on the spot.

Favourite soft-drink? Fizzy water.

What drives me mad is when...my computer does something unexpected or worse, and I don’t have the expertise to know what to do to put it right.



Prayer Requests

- 1) We pray for continued guidance and increasing wisdom for the committee.
- 2) We pray that we may recruit new committee members for next year from the GCU community.
- 3) We pray for God's help in reaching more postgrads, more effectively, for Christ.
- 4) We pray for moral and financial support from the Christian community in Oxford.
- 5) We pray for Monday night talks that will challenge people and for discussions that will stimulate their thinking.
- 6) We pray for the forthcoming Veritas Forum in Trinity term.

Contact:

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