MESSAGE FROM THE PRINCIPAL

On 1 December 2019 Pope Francis issued an Apostolic Letter ‘Admirabile Signum (‘Enchanting Image’): On the Meaning and Importance of the Nativity Scene’ (http://bit.ly/348NaVi). The Letter is an invitation to engage with the Christmas story in a new and imaginative way. Pope Francis wants us to see the connection between some of the mysteries of Jesus' life, contained in the scene of Bethlehem, and our own lives. First, he takes us back to the little Italian town of Greccio where Saint Francis of Assisi, with the help of a local man, set up a nativity scene in a nearby cave. There were no statues in it; local people were the participants and, we are told, engaging with the story in this way brought them much joy and meaning. Secondly, he considers how different aspects of the Christmas crib can help us to 'contemplate Jesus, to experience God's love for us, to feel and believe that God is with us and that we are with him.' Most of all, Pope Francis wants us to take the nativity scene seriously (in the sense of its importance for our faith) and playfully (in the sense of a physical display of Christmas cribs in our churches, homes, work and other communal places). There are different ways of engaging with the ‘enchanted image’ of Jesus’ birth. The Letter gives only some general pointers; it leaves the detail for us to figure out. St Joseph’s Oratory of Mount Royal (a Catholic shrine in Montreal, Canada) has a museum with a permanent exhibition (‘The creches of Saint Joseph's Oratory of Mount Royal) which features nativity scenes produced by local artists as well as creches (traditional and modern) from around the world. Amongst them there is a scene, created by two brothers in California, Casey and Corey Wright, which shows the proud parents, Mary, drinking coffee from a disposable Starbucks-like cup, and Joseph, snapping a selfie with their new-born as well as three wise men with Amazon Prime packages under their arms, arriving on their Segways and there is a shepherd, snapchatting the whole encounter. There are other figures in the scene but it seems that nobody is looking at Baby Jesus (http://bit.ly/2qQYLLa).

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Welcome to the MBIT December Newsletter 2019.

This last term has been one of exciting developments and events with a host of new faces. We hope that you will enjoy this newsletter and catching up on all that has been happening in and amongst the MBIT Community.

As well as the Principal's Christmas message, we have updates on Lyn's House and introductions to some of our new staff. You can also find out about our courses as well as our new Legacy Campaign.
This representation of Jesus' nativity seems to have caused a good deal of controversy. However, it is possible to argue that by engaging with this image, viewers are challenged to reflect on the society of which they are part. Perhaps this 'hipster' nativity scene is meant to stir our imagination and make us feel uncomfortable. It invites us to think about the distractions and temptations that take us away from what is most important.

Pope Francis suggests that when contemplating the nativity scene, we should "feel" and "touch" the poverty that God's Son took upon himself in the Incarnation. He reminds us that it is customary to add other figures to our nativity scenes. Who do we want to add to our imaginary nativity scene this year?

Perhaps the wise men on Segways, after all, are not so inappropriate as long as they turn their gaze to Jesus. But, the prime place, according to Pope Francis, should be reserved for 'those whose only wealth is the wealth of the heart'. This includes all those who are forgotten, abused, broken and exhausted: the modern slaves, the homeless, the oppressed, the sick, the bereaved, the depressed and anyone who is vulnerable in any way.

Both St Francis and Pope Francis encourage us to see that the poor are a privileged part of the Incarnational mystery: 'often they are the first to recognise God's presence in our midst'. The nativity scene teaches us that 'we cannot let ourselves be fooled by wealth and fleeting promises of happiness'. Jesus' birth is meant to help us to rethink our priorities. It launches a revolution.

Pope Francis reminds us that by 'being born in a manger, God himself launches the only true revolution that can give hope and dignity to the dispossessed and the outcast: the revolution of love, the revolution of tenderness'.

As I reflect on Pope Francis' words on the 'enchanted image' and the revolution it triggers, I have in mind some paintings of the Italian Renaissance which in the background of a nativity scene have ruined Roman architecture; the crumbling old order and the birth of new things. Christmas invites us to a continuous re-birth, renewal and growth. Here at MBIT we have been blessed with a number of institutional renewals and areas of growth.

First, the appointment of new staff: Dr Louise Nelstrop as Director of Studies; Mrs Margaret Sallis as Senior Administrator; Mrs Beth Stevens as Bookkeeper; new fellows: Dr Beth Philips as 2020 Fellow and Rev'd Dr Carrie Pemberton Ford as Senior Fellow in Ethics and Public Life, Dr Liam Hayes as Director of the Centre for Ecclesial Ethics; two visiting fellows: Dr Susan Docherty as Mary Ward Fellow and Rev'd Dr Kevin Grove as Cardinal Hume Fellow; new research associates: Prof Michael Barnes SJ, Dr Amy Daughton, Dr Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin, Mr Travis LaCouter, Dr Christine Lai, Mr David Lonsdale, Dr Barnabas Palfrey, Dr Rebecca Skreslet Hernandez, Dr Samuel Randall, and Dr Alexandra Woern. We also welcomed new students and have started the renewal of our residential facilities. Thankfully, there are no ruins and the walls have not crumbled. In fact, the project so far is progressing smoothly (the Easter Newsletter will have a full update).

Alongside these different types of renewal in the life of the Institute, we have had many opportunities for spiritual and intellectual growth through our Michaelmas Term courses, seminars, public events, shared prayer and community life. And, we have been blessed with our new onsite partner, Lyn's House Community (project inspired by the L'Arche communities and the vision of Jean Vanier) [see report below].

We have also been enriched by the presence of our three sabbatical visitors: Sr Rita Duignan (Ireland), Mrs Daphne Marsden (New Zealand) and Prof
PRINCIPAL’S MESSAGE

Marian Machinek MSF (Poland). Sr Rita has written a poem ‘A Quiet Invitation’ (after the Quiet Day she attended at MBIT on 7 December) which captures well her stay at the Institute.

With Sr Rita’s permission, I would like to share it with you – may it be an inspiration to each of us for this Christmas and the New Year:

An invitation has arrived
To go ‘heart and mind to Bethlehem’
So I’m off.
Not by donkey or on a dusty road.
But by taxi, aeroplane and bus
Back home, where community,
Family and friends are
Gathered around the cradle of life.
I go whole heartedly, having met
Shepherds and angels here
Who spoke words of wisdom and hope,
Sang songs of wonder and grace,
Helped me laugh often and loudly
Restoring my heart’s joy.
Walking with other travellers while sharing
Stories of our journeys became a gift,
Now mine to offer and share.
Once again, I've seen His star,
It’s time to go, to follow
To journey onwards.

Happy Christmas and a blessed New Year!
Anna Abram

LEAVING A LEGACY: INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

MBIT aims to equip people to make a difference, whether on a worldwide scale or in a personal setting. Our deep Catholic foundations, enable us, in very practical ways, to address the social issues this country has to face up to.

We want to future-proof our work for generations to come and one way that you can help us do this is by leaving a legacy.

Our new legacy campaign aims to raise money to ensure the courses we teach, the accommodation we provide, the opportunities for accompaniment in spiritual and pastoral care we provide, our shared worship and the hospitality we offer as a community remain open to all who need and want them.

Please do consider leaving a legacy. More details will appear in our next newsletter but feel free to contact Anna Abram if you would like to talk about this further.
MBIT hosted a number of exciting events this term.

The term opened with a Mary Ward lecture from Prof. Richard Rex on the topic Margaret Beaufort: 'The King's Mother: Piety, Politics, and Philanthropy in the Life of Lady Margaret Beaufort'. It was inspiring to gain insight into the woman whose name graces our Institute and who was such a seminal figure within fifteenth-century society as well as in the promotion of devotional literature in the period. The lecture took place in our new library.

The much anticipated move of Lyn's House to the Lodge happened in September. We had visiting sisters from Africa as part of the Religious Life Project in the same month, and on the 30th of October we hosted Luce Irigaray, who was the invited speaker for our Mary Ward lecture. We hope that the reports below will give you a small flavour of Life in MBIT this term.

'THEOLOGY, CREATIVITY AND THE ARTS'

Anna Wheeler offers some reflections on the Postgraduate Study Day 'Theology, Creativity and the Arts' that took place in July

It can feel quite life affirming when a theme or themes evolve from a conference. The conference title 'Theology, Creativity and the Arts PG Study Day' told us something of the area but, being broad, you couldn't predict a direction.

Margaret Beaufort Institute provided an ideal setting for friendly and informative interaction with a stroll across their delightful garden between one talk and another.

The presentations were parallel so no delegate heard them all. I just aim here to give a feel of a handful of the talks with particular focus on the keynote, but mainly the wider thoughts and ideas that the day gave me.

Ferdia Stone-Davis set the tone as she opened in the chapel with 'Sound, Silence and Listening'. The message I took away from this was the value of silence in music which is as much a part of sound as sound itself. Ferdia made me think about how other themes might fit with this such as presence and absence, and the seen and the unseen; which I referenced later in my presentation on Peter Brook's theatre (it's good when preceding presentations help clarify your own!) and how we might reframe these concepts as not necessarily opposites but paradoxes which hold one within the other.

Henry Kirk shortly after in his presentation, showed us slides of paintings where the space or lack of busyness in a piece of art was again as much part of the picture as colour or detail.

It is in the space, emptiness and silence, across the arts, that we can be our most imaginative and sometimes where faith starts. Likewise, resolve and conclusion can sometimes shut us down to what is beyond, illustrated in the music of James Macmillan via Jeremy Begbie in the keynote lecture. Macmillan's musical open endings are not agnostic, Begbie explained, but a warning against jumping too quickly in this life. I mentioned above the notion of reframing and Macmillan does this in abundance with the concept of beauty. In Begbie's narrative, we are therefore removed from sentimentality. We acknowledge that a horrific death, such as the crucifixion, is not beauty in itself, but it does reframe beauty. The very act itself is one of presence revealed in absence.

Begbie spoke of Macmillan's work as a metanarrative of hope, which is how you could define art, and faith, themselves; particularly when working together.
I have of course missed many other presentations and themes that came out of the day so can't do justice to the day but I'd like to give huge thanks to all the speakers and Ferdia, Anna Abram, Ela, Sue, the caterers and extended team at MBIT for such an enjoyable, rich and thought provoking day.

**LYN'S HOUSE**

We asked one of our residents, Rachael Gledhill, to talk about Lyn's House.

The Lyn's House community has now settled into their new home in the Lodge at the Margaret Beaufort Institute. Inspired by the late Jean Vanier and the global community of L'Arche, Lyn's House is a place of encounter for adults with learning disabilities (our 'core friends') to gather with other volunteers, residents, and steering group members for communion through prayer, food, and friendship. The community was born in Cambridge in 2013, under the guidance of a committed steering committee, made up of lay and ordained Christians from a variety of denominations, and previously had its home in Chesterton, in a house formerly owned by Lyn. So, the community was baptised 'Lyn's House' by one of its first core friends. In the summer of 2019, Lyn's House was delighted to make its new home in the Lodge at the Institute.

There are currently 3 residents living full-time in the Lodge, who work and study in Cambridge in the daytime, and host meals for core friends and volunteers two evenings a week. Lyn's Lodge comes alive with the sound of chatter and singing and the aroma of a variety of dishes from around the world being cooked in the kitchen. Puzzles and games of Jenga are interspersed with conversations about daily life, with all its joys and sorrows. One of the gifts of Lyn's House is its challenge to recognise ourselves in people we might consider to be most different to us, as we learn to welcome each other in the gift of radical hospitality offered by Christ. Prayers in the evenings are simple – a Taize chant or a simple hymn – led by a core friend or volunteer – and a time for sharing needs, desires, and gratitude with God and each other. Suppers are generous: hot food shared round a candle-lit table, as the community breaks bread together, and rejoices in a celebration of life and friendship. We like celebrating at Lyn's House: birthdays, Christmases, and new beginnings are always an opportunity for a party, and to celebrate the gift of each other, in all our strengths and vulnerabilities.

Once a month, we meet for tea parties on Sunday afternoons in the Common Room at the Institute, which is an opportunity to spend time together as a whole community, working on a craft, playing games, or simply enjoying one another's company. This term we've especially enjoyed welcoming the staff at the Institute into our midst and giving thanks for the relationship between the two communities, and their shared vocation to rejoicing with Christ at the margins. On Thursdays in term-time, residents, volunteers, and the steering group meet for Morning Prayer over coffee at Lyn's Lodge and pray for all of our core friends and the wider community at the Institute. At other times in the year, we hope to continue our pattern of meeting for film nights, with pizza and popcorn, or BBQs in the garden. We're particularly glad to be welcoming the residents of the Institute, alongside all of the Lyn's House community, for a screening of Johnny English in January.

Finally, Michaelmas Term was a particularly busy and exciting time for Lyn's House, as it saw the launch of its first book, A Kind of Upside-Downness: Learning Disabilities and Transformational Community, edited by 3 of its founder members, David Ford, Deborah Ford, and Ian Randall. We were delighted to celebrate in Selwyn College, and to share the joys of our community with guests and friends. Lyn's House is a community and vocation to all who call it home, and a reminder of our shared commitment to each other. We've been delighted to begin our journey of sharing this vocation with the Margaret Beaufort Institute this year.
MBiT has a host of new faces this year. Not only many new students but also new staff members. Margaret Sallis was appointed as our Senior Administrator, Beth Phillips was appointed as our 2020 Research Fellow, and Louise Nelstrop was appointed as Director of Studies. We asked each of them to briefly introduce themselves.

**Margaret Sallis** joined Margaret Beaufort Institute as Senior Administrator in September. She has a wide-ranging background in business consulting, customer service, and administration. Originally from Boston, Massachusetts USA, she began her career in Cambridge Massachussetts at small technology companies and then worked for the global management consultancy firm, Accenture in Chicago Illinois USA and Sophia Antipolis France. After living in France for a few years, Margaret moved to London and set up a consultancy firm that advised companies on the use of various emerging technologies. Over the next several years, she combined working in the consulting business, raising her daughter and other family commitments, and taking on various charity roles when time permitted. Most recently, she worked at two cybersecurity start-up companies in Richmond London as Office Administrator.

She holds a BS from Providence College in Rhode Island US, a MBA from Babson College Wellesley Massachusetts, and a Postgraduate Certificate in Bioethics from St Mary's University in Twickenham. Margaret, who recently moved to Cambridge, enjoys long distance hiking and choral singing.

**Elizabeth Phillips** joins the Institute as the 2020 Research Fellow. She is also an Honorary Fellow of the Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University. She taught Christian ethics and political theology in the Cambridge Theological Federation and the Faculty of Divinity for nine years before one year as a Visiting Scholar in the Institute for Criminology (University of Cambridge) as part of her collaboration with Learning Together on a three-year pedagogical and ethnographic project convening a course on ‘The Good Life and the Good Society’ in which Cambridge students learn alongside students resident in a high-security prison. Her doctoral thesis for the University of Cambridge was a theological ethnography of an American Christian Zionist congregation and their adopted settlement in the West Bank, examining the relationship between eschatology and politics.

Beth is an international leader in the fields of Political Theology and Christian Ethics. She is author and editor of books and articles used widely in teaching in both the UK and the US. She is a Steering Committee Member of the Political Theology Seminar of the American Academy of Religion and former Honorary Secretary of the Society for the Study of Christian Ethics. She is trained in interpersonal mediation and enjoys teaching conflict transformation. She is active in interfaith engagement and has participated annually in the Building Bridges Seminar. She works on a project that involves developing, co-convening, and researching (ethnographically) ‘The Good Life and the Good Society’, a course taught inside HMP Whitemoor as part of Learning Together.
Louise Nelstrop was appointed as Director of Studies at MBIT in October. She first came to MBIT as one of our Jubilee Fellows in May, when she also taught Mysticism for the Thursday afternoon MBIT Certificate. She comes to us with academic experience both in the UK (York St John University, Glasgow University, Sarum College, and Oxford University) and overseas (UBC, Pune, India, and Mahidol University, Thailand).

Since joining MBIT, She has been excited to have taken on responsibility for overseeing the four new MAs run by the Cambridge Federation and validated by Anglia Ruskin University. She has also been busy representing MBIT at several conferences. November was a particularly busy month! She was first in Antwerp to present a film that she had the privilege of making with Belgian Filmmakers earlier this year. She showed the film ‘Complete Surrender’ at Integrated, the Biannual Art and Design Conference and will be showing it at further venues next year – in Scotland, Belgium and India.

Then she was also fortunate to be an invited speaker in November at two further conferences. The first took place in Israel, where she spoke at ‘Ascetic Trends in the Abrahamic Religions in the Thirteenth Century’, hosted by Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and the Open University of Israel. This was her first time in Israel and she was excited to walk on the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, as well as visit Mount Carmel. She then travelled to the Netherlands, where she spoke at ‘Mysticism and/as Love Theory’ in Nijmegen, a conference hosted by the Titus Brandsma Institute. She is looking forward to a calmer Lent term, teaching spirituality to students at MBIT and across the Cambridge Theological Federation. She is very excited to be a part of MBIT.

Courses on Offer

Our students are returning learners of all ages and varied educational backgrounds. Below are some of the courses available through MBIT. There is something for everyone!

The MBIT Certificate runs every Thursday afternoon in term time. Students come together to study a range of topics that span ethics, scripture, historical and systematic theology, spirituality, theology and the arts, and pastoral care.

The CCRS is a blended-learning course that introduces students to the basics of the Catholic Faith. It runs through a series of intensive study days combined with online classroom teaching.

The DCCS is a diocesan certificate in Catholic Studies. It offers an informal opportunity to learn about the Catholic faith face to face.

DTM is a graduate-entry course run by the Cambridge Federation validated by Cambridge University. Students explore their Christian vocation, while also studying theology through a range of academic and practical courses.

PGCertificates, PGDiplomas and MAs in Ethics, Modern Faith and Belief, Pastoral Care and Chaplaincy, and Spirituality were set up last year validated by Anglia Ruskin. They afford students the opportunity to explore a range of theological, pastoral and ethical topics at graduate level.

Professional Doctorate and PhDs are open to student in all areas of theology. Validated both by Cambridge and Anglia Ruskin, these allow students to pursue an area of special interest in great depth under the supervision of an experienced academic.

If you are interested in exploring what studying with us might look like, get in contact with our Director of Studies, Louise Nelstrop: ln348@cam.ac.uk

STUDYING IN MBIT

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