



Loyola Institute Newsletter

Spring 2020

## Religious Literacy: Challenges for Today

Colloquium of the Loyola Institute, 16th January 2020.



Speakers at Loyola Institute conference on Religious Literacy in Trinity College - Ryszard Bobrowicz and Dr. Johanna Gustafsson Lundberg (University of Lund, Sweden), Nick Spencer of Theos Think Tank, Religious Education teacher Emma Rothwell together with Loyola Institute's Dr Michael Kirwan SJ.

This colloquium explored the increasing estrangement of western societies from traditions of religious (especially Christian) belief and practice: a description of 'how things are, and what can be done' across European contexts- Italy, Scandinavia, and the United Kingdom- followed by an examination of the Irish situation.

Illiteracy, according to Professor Alberto Melloni, needed to be understood non-moralistically, as a failure to get on top of the super-complexity of knowledge. We need, therefore, to avoid moralistic approaches: either condemning unbelievers

as 'Godless', or dismissing the unsophisticated faithful as 'superstitious'.

The legal and political consequences of religious illiteracy were demonstrated by Johanna Lundberg and Ryszard Bobrowicz in a Swedish case study. Where the State has a programmatic, secularist, understanding of what is acceptable, it allows no space for mediating disputes such as the 'Muslim handshake' debate. Nick Spencer, from the London-based think-tank Theos, cited vivid examples of misrepresentations by the British press, but also fruitful

experiences- provided religious groups do not expect the media to be their mouthpieces. Francesca Cadeddu, from Bologna, described the historical and contemporary challenges of school education in Italy.

What is 'religious literacy', according to these speakers? It is an ability to organise complex knowledge, and to embed it in practices- being able to count is not the same as having a grasp of mathematics. 'Faith' is an orientation to the world, like a sunbeam which we look along, or look through, rather than look at.

Fr. Gerard Condon, Frances Rowland, Emma Rothwell, and Fr. Gerard Tanham offered parish, primary, secondary and diocesan perspectives on education and faith formation (including Church of Ireland). The day concluded with a call to radical renewal, through greater synodality.

What is to be done? The first step, taken by all the presenters at this stimulating colloquium, was to begin to define religious literacy- and its opposite- in new ways, and to imagine more creative strategies for responding effectively.



Dr Fainche Ryan, Director of the Loyola Institute with keynote speaker Alberto Melloni, Professor of History of Christianity in the University of Modena-Reggio and Director of the John XXIII Foundation for Religious Studies and session chair Dr Áine Hyland, Emeritus Professor of Education and former Vice-President of University College Cork, Ireland



Dr Con Casey, Founding Director of the Loyola Institute with conference speakers Frances Rowland, Fr Gerard Tanham, Emma Rothwell and Fr Gerard Condon

## About The MPhil in Christian Theology



Ursula Halligan with Julie Doran OLA, Sisters Angèle-Marie Littlejohn and Bibiane Leclercq Scholarship for MPhil in Christian Theology (Irish Women) offered thanks to the generous support of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles for an Irish woman

This Masters in Christian Theology will enable participants to gain an in-depth knowledge of core issues in contemporary Christian theology. Students are introduced to historical scholarship and to rigorous contemporary theological investigation.

Students study six modules and complete a written dissertation. This dissertation enables participants to engage in advanced study of a particular topic of interest in the field. In the process of writing, participants are offered one-to-one academic supervision. Students are assessed via written contributions for each module. There are no exams.

The course is delivered full-time over one year (12 months) or part-time over two years. Lectures will normally be held on Monday and Thursday evenings. Some elective modules may be held during the day.

There are a variety of scholarships available.

### New Academic Offerings

We are pleased that the Loyola Institute now offers:

#### Postgraduate Diploma in Christian Theology

Students study six modules. The course is taught over two semesters, September to April.

#### Postgraduate Certificate in Christian Theology

Students study three modules. The course is taught over two semesters, September to April.

For further details see website [www.tcd.ie/loyola-institute](http://www.tcd.ie/loyola-institute)

## MPhil in Christian Theology : What our students say ;



The catalyst for me to apply to a post-graduate degree in Theology came from living in the Middle East in recent years. Some Islamic friends looked for insights into the Catholic faith. On my return to Dublin, I wondered how

contemporary Christians could speak to society in a voice that is relevant to today. The Loyola Institute offered the perfect opportunity to explore this. The time was right to apply!

The MPhil offers the opportunity to explore Christian thinking throughout the ages and the programme looks at both core theological disciplines and contemporary issues. The programme of lectures and seminars offers perspectives on a wide range of subjects of concern to society today.

Our group's composition was a real surprise as it includes a few whose primary degree is in Theology and then many from other disciplines. It includes at least six nationalities, some recent graduates, some working, some retired from a wide variety of careers. There is a real richness in this diversity and a great sense of comradeship in the group as we explore the modules together. It is a real privilege to be able to undertake the MPhil at Trinity, where Theology has been available since its founding.

**Deirdre Soffe**



With a professional background in Catholic education (teaching RE in particular), I was seeking a robust qualification to further enhance my understanding of a complex subject. As a Classics alumnus of TCD, I was delighted with the course

on offer at the Loyola Institute and jumped at the opportunity to study theology for the first time in such a prestigious and inspiring setting. I was hoping for an academically provocative environment that would bring to bear the stimulating challenges of the subject.

So far it has been a pleasure to acclimatize to the pace of life in the Loyola Institute. The workload of classes and essays is designed to give students space to breath and reflect on the many profundities encountered on a weekly basis. A particularly impressive element is the attention paid to training us in first principles of 'doing good theology.' In what can be a highly theoretical subject, it is refreshing to be exposed to the more practical implications of faith and theology in the modern world. Without doubt, the course so far has equipped me to grapple with ideas of immense personal and public consequence with clarity of thought and expression. This is a commonly neglected skill, tended carefully by the Loyola Institute. That is to their credit.

**Paul Corcoran**



The Loyola Institute's Dr Jacob Erickson was one of five researchers who presented in December at the second annual Festive Research Showcase organised by the Office of the Dean of Research. Jake's research focuses on the creative intersections of religion, theology, ethics and the environmental humanities and his talk, entitled 'Laughing in the Anthropocene: Climate Ethics as Desolation, Humor and Ritual' looked at how different forms of ritual are used to navigate environmental despair.

### **Conscience in an Uncertain Age: Decision making in the Age of Google. Colloquium: Friday 8th May, 2020**

Drawing on the resources of the Catholic past, this colloquium will address the complexity of moral decision making. How do we make good decisions in complex situations, when accepted norms do not indicate a clear course of action? How is moral uncertainty resolved? Does the Catholic tradition offer resources? Questions such as these will inform this day long colloquium.

#### **Speakers**

**Prof Raphael Gallagher**

(Professor Emeritus Academia Alfonsiana )

**Prof Stefania Tutino**

(Professor of History and Italian,  
University of California, (UCLA).

More details to follow shortly on  
[www.tcd.ie/loyola-institute](http://www.tcd.ie/loyola-institute)

Thanks to the generous sponsorship of the  
Redemptorist Congregation, Dublin Province

## In Living Colour: Scripture in Stained Glass

*“Of all the English incursions into Ireland, amongst the least known is one which took place in the latter half of the 19th century. In 1850, there were less than 40 stained glass windows to be found in Anglican churches across the island of Ireland; by 1900 there were nearly 1,400, thanks in large part to the Gothic revival championed by the English architect Pugin and the English firms which furnished the bulk of the stained glass installed in so many churches on both sides of the Irish Sea during this period.”*

**Dr David Shepherd.**

Trinity College Dublin has included the research of Loyola Institute’s Dr David Shepherd in the prestigious Provost’s Review.

This annual review highlights the work of 12 researchers working within the University, inviting them to write a short paper on the importance of their work.

Dr Shepherd’s work, which is funded by the Irish Research Council, explores how the Hebrew Bible has been interpreted in the stained glass of selected churches in the United Dioceses of Dublin and Glendalough (Church of Ireland).

You can read the paper from the Provosts Review here <https://www.tcd.ie/provost/review/>



Dr David Shepherd at  
St Philip and St James, Blackrock

## Loyola MPhil Trip to Ravenna

Scan the theology book shelves and you are sure to find the famed mosaics of Ravenna adorning current book covers ranging in topics from the Holy Trinity—to the Cross—to the priesthood. The Christian art of Ravenna offers us a profound insight into the theological questions of the church in the 5th and 6th centuries when key doctrinal issues and questions about the person of Jesus, the Trinity, baptism, and others were being debated and settled amongst theologians from both east and west, in early church teaching. The art of these early Christians not only survives but is very well preserved in many baptistries and churches around the old city of Ravenna and is now recognised and protected as part of the artistic and cultural heritage of the world by the UN. Perhaps one reason these mosaics remain so intact and well preserved is that it takes a little longer to get to Ravenna, now as then, with delightful distractions such as Venice, enticing many tourists away. It was on such an ‘off-the-beaten-track’ endeavour, a field trip to see the Ravenna mosaics that Dr Amanda Dillon, who teaches a module on Theology and the Visual Arts, recently brought a group of Loyola MPhil students. Historic



Dr Amanda Dillon (centre) with Lian Gu, Mary Ellen Hawkey, Patrick Logue, Miriam Hennessey and Dorothy Glennon (left-right) in Sant’Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna.

Sites visited included; Sant’Apollinare in Classe, where one of the earliest positive appropriations of the cross as a Christian symbol is to be seen in an extraordinary depiction of the Transfiguration. Sant’Apollinare Nuovo witnesses to both a unique commemoration of female martyrs of the first centuries of Christianity, as well as some of the earliest visual depictions of the healing miracles of Jesus accounted in the gospels. San

Vitale presents the biblical exegesis of the early Christians in what is believed to be one of the first visual depictions of the Holy Trinity. Likewise, the baptistries illuminate the beliefs and concerns of a radical choice for Christ for those adults coming to faith at this moment in history. It is truly a privilege to be in the ancient churches of Ravenna and to see the earliest theologies played out in exquisite marble and glass mosaics.

## Dante and Theology



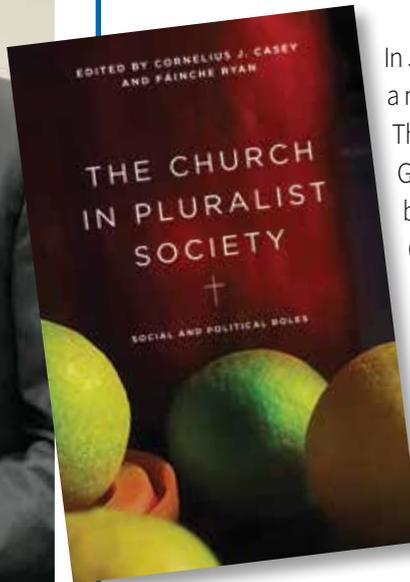
Prof. Corinna Salvadori Lonergan, Prof. Emerita, Italian Dept who delivered a Loyola Lecture on the theme of “Dante, the Comedy and Greed: ‘Radix omnium malorum’”

She is photographed with our current MPhil student Ciarán Ó Coigligh who edited *An Choiméide Dhiaga*, an Irish-Gaelic translation of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, by Monsignor Pádraig de Brún, at the request of his niece, poet Dr Máire Mhac an tSaoi. The work was published by the academic publishing house, An Clóchomhar, in 1997. Ciarán had previously edited *An Odaisé*, Monsignor de Brún’s translation of Homer’s *Odyssey*, which was published in 1990 by Coiscéim.



Dr Con Casey of Loyola Institute with Fergus Higgins and Sophia White, both of whom were awarded distinctions in the MPhil in Christian Theology (18/19)

## University of Notre Dame Press Publish Book Based on International Conference Convened by Loyola Institute



In June 2016 the Loyola Institute convened a major international conference entitled *The Role of Church in a Pluralist Society: Good Riddance or Good Influence?* This book edited by Loyola Institute’s Dr Cornelius J. Casey and Dr Fainche Ryan is the fruit of this conference.

Vatican II opened new pathways to engagement with societies shaped by modernity. The fundamental presumption of this collection of essays is that it is timely, indeed imperative, to keep alive the question of the church’s self-

understanding in its journey alongside “the complex, often rebellious, always restless mind of the modern world.” Cornelius J. Casey and Fainche Ryan have assembled some of the most prominent commentators on ecclesiastical and social-political engagements from the fields of theology, political philosophy, social theory, and cultural criticism. The contributors present differing perspectives on the role of the church. Some argue that pluralism is here to stay. Others point out that the liberal pluralism of contemporary society is aggressively powered by global corporate consumerism. This book, with its variety of voices, explores these issues largely from within the Catholic tradition.

Contributors: J. Bryan Hehir, Terry Eagleton, Patrick J. Deneen, Hans Joas, William T. Cavanaugh, Massimo Faggioli, Fainche Ryan, Patrick Riordan, and Cornelius J. Casey.

The book costs approximately €35 and is available in good book shops.



Fr. Emile Sambou from the Gambia and Fr. Jonathan Sunday Nwankwo from Nigeria with Loyola Director Dr Fainche Ryan.

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### Loyola Lecture Series 2020

**“Listening to the Essence of Things”:  
Theology, language and meaning  
in the context of Laudato Si’**

**Wednesday 19th February at 7.30 pm**

**Prof Tina Beattie,**

Professor of Catholic Studies,  
Roehampton University

### When Mercy Became Compassionate

**Monday 9th March at 7.30 pm**

**Prof John O’Callaghan,**

Professor of Philosophy  
University of Notre Dame

**What Can We Hope for?  
On Hope and Despair  
in the Book of Job**

**Wednesday 25th March at 7.30 pm**

**Prof Pierre Van Hecke,**

Professor of Languages and Syria-Palestine  
Cultures, Faculty of Theology  
and Religious Studies, KU Leuven

**These free lectures are held in the  
ISE/Loyola Institute Building,  
Trinity College Dublin**

The Loyola Institute is grateful for the generous support of the Loyola Trust (Augustinians, Carmelites (O.Carm.), Columbans, Jesuits, Loreto Sisters, Marists, Oblates, Society of African Missions).

## The Loyola Institute will co-host the sixth Power of the Word Conference 1 - 4 July 2020

It will explore aspects of the ‘call of literature’,  
for authors and audience alike.

What does it mean to speak of a  
‘vocation’ to write? What have theologians and  
philosophers got to say on the matter?

In what sense can we speak of readers  
being called to literature?

Is the spirit of literature necessarily an ‘angel of light’?

Or does the call of literature sometimes  
prove to be a siren song?

Questions such as these will be  
explored during this conference.

**Ticket: Early bird €120**

For more details and to book see [www.tcd.ie/loyola-institute](http://www.tcd.ie/loyola-institute)



## The Loyola Institute

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

*is dedicated to education and research in theology in  
the Catholic Christian tradition and offers degrees at  
postgraduate level, both taught and by research.*

*Scholarships available.*

**Further information: [www.tcd.ie/loyola-institute](http://www.tcd.ie/loyola-institute)**

**Email: [Loyola@tcd.ie](mailto:Loyola@tcd.ie)**

**Phone +353 (0) 1 8964790**



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Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

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