

## A note from Remi



I trust this note finds you well! Here are some news on the national postgrad conference: This year the speakers have put the whole understanding of a Christian mind in a nutshell. The Lordship of Christ over all of

life was the center of all the talks, bringing the theme of the conference in focus, "Transforming the Mind: A beautiful mind". Everyone had the opportunity to reflect on how their faith influences their studies and were encouraged to prepare posters to explain their work, and how they integrate faith and scholarship. This edition of the "The Story" gives a taste of some of the posters presented and a couple of students' reflections on the conference. Enjoy!

*Remi*

"...One of those presentations that starts where you're at, and leads you through things you've been striving to grasp, and brings you to a new place you'd been aching for but would have spent months or more trying to reach alone."

Rachel Bell

## Reflection: On National Christian Postgraduate Conference

The sixth annual national conference for Christian postgraduates and postdoctoral researchers started on a gloriously sunny Friday evening. Delegates from various parts of England convened in Dovedale House in the tiny village of Ilam, Derbyshire. The theme of the

came to redeem our human nature, to restore us to our full humanity. And Christ's Lordship over all of reality invites us to engage our mind with the whole of reality (2 Cor. 10: 3-5).

After a night prayer it was time for some of us to rest, for others the night was still young...

On Saturday morning, the second speaker, Stefan Lindholm, spoke about 'The importance of intellectual virtues'. He started by reminding us that the goal of human life is to be fully human, although we start out as disintegrated beings. During the period of scepticism that started with Descartes, doubt became the method by which we acquire certainty for our beliefs. This view of epistemology focuses on duties and gives little attention to the fact that knowing is an active process that involves our will.

The role of the will in our epistemology can be seen in the importance of intellectual virtues. The goal of the mind is not 'justified true belief' (knowledge), but understanding. Moral virtues such as courage, humility and wisdom can help us to understand reality. Virtues can be acquired (gifts of the Spirit, education) and the relative importance of different virtues is context-dependent. Recognising the importance of the will and of intellectual virtues will make us more fully integrated humans.

"we tend to view reality as divided into two realms"

conference was 'Transforming the mind: a beautiful mind', with reference to Romans 12: 1-2. Two speakers from l'Abri Fellowship addressed the theme in talks. After dinner Andrew Fellows spoke about 'The Lordship of Christ over all of life'. He argued that we tend to view reality as divided into two realms. We highly value the realm of the spiritual, the soul, the sacred and redemption. The other realm, that of the material, the body, the secular, the creation and the world, is accorded less value. Our mind, our faith and our commitments are focused on spiritual things, not on things of the world. This leads to a diminished Lordship of Christ over the realm of the creation, which is associated with a weakness of mind and an inability to confront the Enlightenment and its profound influence on our culture. Andrew spurred us to resist this duality and to acknowledge the full Lordship of Christ. God is our Creator. Christ

"knowing is an active process that involves our will"

Following Stefan's talk, Andrew spoke on 'The integration of reason and imagination'.

There is a perceived division between reason, theology and facts about reality on the one hand and imagination, myth, symbols and meaning on the other hand. Reason isolated from the imagination leads to a naturalism that cannot deal with the supernatural, and eventually to a radical scepticism of reality and truth. Imagination isolated from reason is detached from reality and can lead to a fall into the demonic or to syncretism. Philosophy and mythology are united in Christ, who satisfies the search of both the mythmaker (incarnation) and the philosopher



(truth), because He is full of grace (aesthetic concept) and truth (John 1:14). Integration of imagination and reason produces a beautiful mind!

After lunch it was time for some activity. Although the weather was less favourable than the day before, a group went to Ashbourne (gingerbread capital of England!) and another

“Integration of imagination and reason produces a beautiful mind!”

group went for a walk in the hills. On our return, we discussed various aspects of the integration of our faith and our work in small groups. This was a good way to evaluate all we had heard so far and to come up with questions.

In the evening, short presentations were given on the work of l’Abri, Friends International and FOCUS (a group of Christian students in Sri Lanka). Sindiso Mnisi and Mike Clifford showed us how their faith has impacted on their work in law and engineering respectively. The evening ended on a musical note with a barn dance!

On Sunday morning we had the opportunity to query the speakers about the talks and to pose any other questions we had. After a time of quiet during which we could reflect on everything we had heard and pray about it, we had a time of worship during which we shared communion. The conference ended with a lunch and after saying goodbye to old and new friends we headed home. I feel so blessed to have been at this intense weekend. The talks gave me much to think about and many ideas to incorporate in my life and work. The strong sense of community made me feel at home at once even though I knew no other participants in advance. The conversations I had with many different people during meals and free time were very stimulating and enjoyable. The conference was a source of inspiration, new ideas and encouragement for me and the contacts that I have made with other Christian postgraduates across the country are very important to me. Together in the strength of the Lord we will strive to transform and integrate our mind to reflect Christ in our life and our work.

**By: Eline van Asperen**  
**York University. Archaeology**

## Andrew Grenfell

MPhil in Political Theory

Oxford University

### About me

My thesis was on the philosophical concept of community, as applied to two 19<sup>th</sup> century socialist utopian novels. Community is a contested concept and it’s hard to reach agreement on its meaning. Historically, some people have looked backwards, to a traditional pre-industrial world, for their model of ideal community, while others think that the urban settings of the present can also provide it. (Marx located true community in a future world that would combine pre-industrial social solidarity with the productive advances and individual liberties of the industrial age).

The first novel, ‘Looking Backward’ by Edward Bellamy, presented an urban, consumeristic and leisure-oriented society: social interaction is based on standard structures such as the family, but in a new context. His utopian vision of community takes the form of strong, universal feelings of goodwill between citizens. The second novel, ‘News from Nowhere’ by William Morris, was (largely) rural, anti-materialistic and work-oriented: social interaction is based on mutual involvement and dependence in fulfilling daily craftwork. Paradoxically, although this vision of community is less technology-friendly, it is a more radical break with past or present social structures and is in

“Utopia and community are political but importantly also spiritual topics, touching on ideas such as Christian perfectibility and sinfulness, human relational identity, earthly and divine authority, and human freedom.”

this sense the more futuristic of the two.

### How faith has influenced my work

The first step was to believe that faith *can* influence my work, which required a community of peers and older people who could involve me in a process of trying to do so.

### How work has influenced my faith

This led to my choice of a topic a little off the beaten path, stemming from an interest in Dostoevsky and Anarchism.

Utopia and community are political but importantly also spiritual topics, touching on ideas such as Christian perfectibility and sinfulness, human relational identity, earthly and divine authority, and human freedom.



Having helped me choose a topic, my faith also encouraged me to apply theories to real life, to assess them through Christian priorities (and vice versa), and to use their categories to analyse my own thinking. It also led me to focus not only on the conceptual level but also

on the practical, normative applications of ideas: Christianity is inherently practical-minded as well as theoretical.

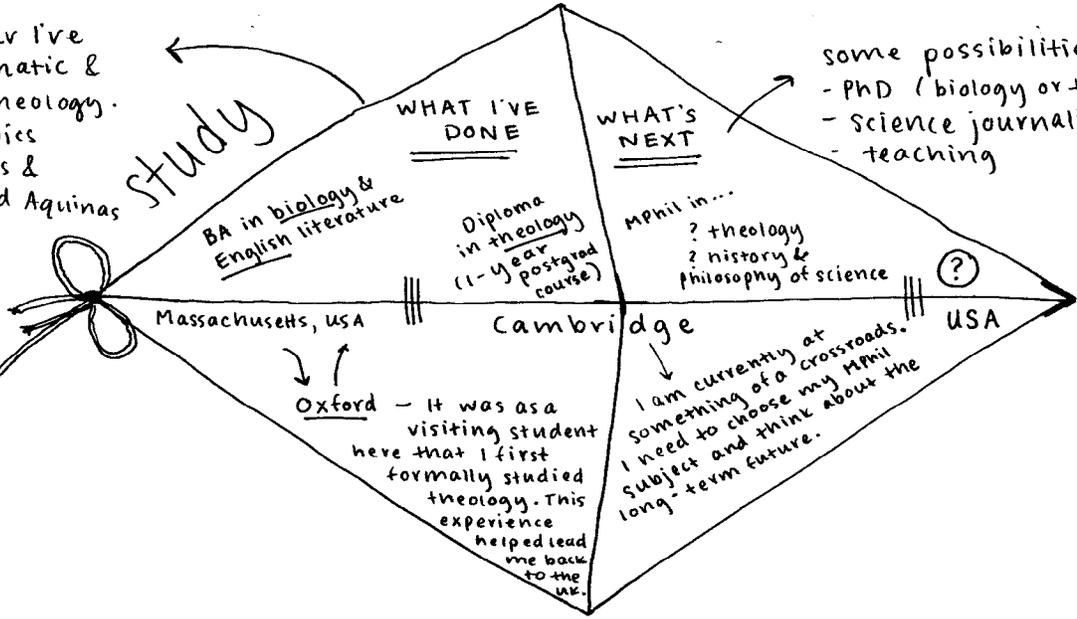
Political concepts are relevant to all Christians, since we must all live in a political world. And if the political realm also has spiritual significance, then so must any study of political concepts. Although not straightforwardly Christian, Bellamy and Morris both wrote under the implicit influence of western Christian tradition, and share considerable affinities with Christian priorities. They have helped me with how to think about community and what it should be, giving me a sophisticated headstart in trying to consider those issues as a Christian.

Awareness of the dubious ends for which Christianity has been used on a political and personal level (for example, in justifying an unequal class-based society in 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century England) has also made me more circumspect and cautious in judging what ‘the Christian position’ on difficult social matters should be, and more willing to find value in different perspectives.

This past year I've studied systematic & philosophical theology. My favorite topics include Aquinas & creation ... and Aquinas on creation.

Study

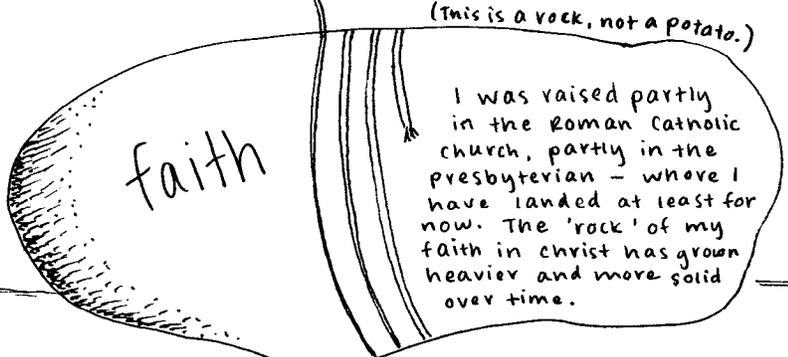
some possibilities:  
 - PhD (biology or theology)  
 - Science journalism  
 - teaching



Yagel  
 Devin

my study tugs at my faith. Sometimes this has a strengthening effect - studying theology has brought me closer to God by helping me understand Him better but even more by giving me a new language in which to love Him.

Sometimes the tug is disruptive - though the rock has never been dislodged, I sometimes feel the strain of theological questions I do not understand. Interdisciplinary work - particularly involving science and theology - can exacerbate this.



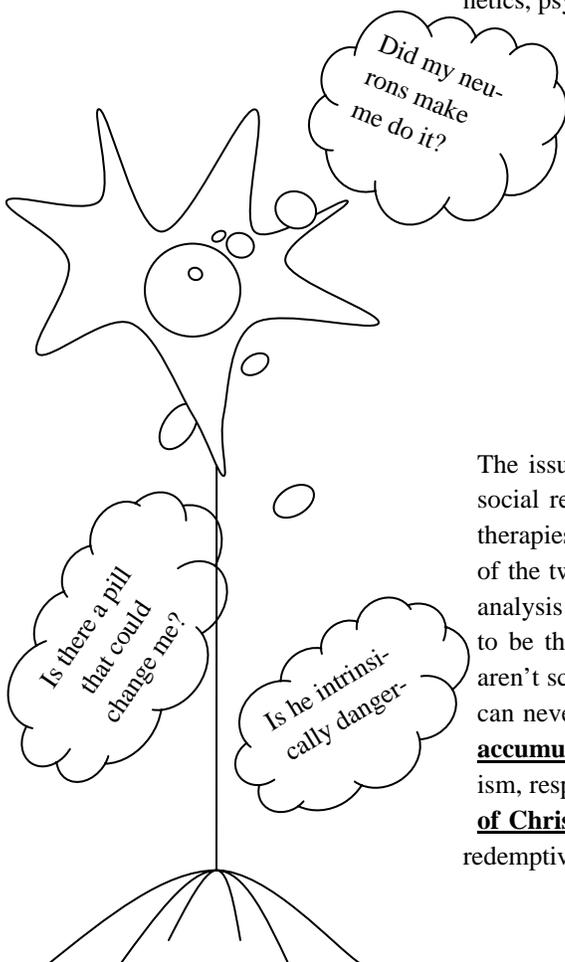
(This is a rock, not a potato.)

I was raised partly in the Roman Catholic church, partly in the Presbyterian - where I have landed at least for now. The 'rock' of my faith in Christ has grown heavier and more solid over time.

My faith grounds my study. Without this anchor, all the changing of disciplines would be aimless wandering - the kite would float away. It also provides a standard of meaning and a firm end, in the teleological sense.

## The latest crazy project...

My research is part of a project looking at the social and political implications of the new brain sciences. Specifically I'm studying a government program for managing some of the most dangerous offenders, and potential offenders, in the UK. I'm trying to establish the extent to which violent and impulsive behaviour is becoming seen through the lenses like brain imaging, psychiatric genetics, psychopharmacology as a problem of the brain.



### How my faith brought me to this point

I am convinced that Christ's gospel is good news for all of life and all of society. When his transforming power breaks into our lives it isn't just individuals but social structures that can be redeemed. Fundamentally I want to study how the 'principalities and powers' operate in society, and how we can bring gospel principles to bear on them. To me, my PhD is a chance to delve into the sociology of knowledge, and to try to think about ways in which the 'redeemed thought' that Paul speaks about in Romans can be used to shape social policy.

### How my research is influencing my faith

The issues at stake in my research field include free-will, determinism, individual and social responsibility, causality, the mind-body relationship, mental illness, behavioural therapies, use of psychotropic drugs, deviance and the nature of 'evil' itself. I'm aware of the twin dangers my analysis faces: I don't want to write just-another-well-meaning-analysis that fails to challenge destructive trends in the cultural milieu, but nor do I want to be the sort of reactive Christian who mistakenly ends up defending principles that aren't scriptural or Godly. My difficulty is treading this balance whilst acknowledging I can never become an expert theologian or philosopher... I am seeking to draw on the accumulated wisdom of church teachings around such questions as mind-body dualism, responsibility and free-will. I have been lead into rich teaching about the humanity of Christ, the concept of incarnation, and find myself returning again to the theme of the redemptive role of the whole body of Christ in his world.

By: Rachel Bell  
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Jo Calcutt

Biology, Durham University

3rd year PhD student in Plant Cell

Having worked in postgraduate and research administration for 15 years at Oxford Brookes University, I decided to have a career change and to return to academic study in 2001. My original degree was in English Literature, but when I returned to education I decided to study something completely different. I took an Open University Natural Sciences foundation course and then went to Lancaster University to study Biological Sciences. In 2005 I started a PhD in Plant Cell Biology at Durham University.

I am investigating the localization and function of a novel plant protein that binds to

“I’ve not found my PhD as fulfilling as I’d expected”

the actin cytoskeleton, one of the structural elements of the plant cell, and may connect the actin filaments to each other and to other components within the cell. I am now coming to the end of my 3rd year, finishing my final experiments in the lab and starting to write up my thesis.

How has my faith affected my study?

In some ways I find this quite hard to answer. When I changed career I intended to become a plant science researcher. However, although I’m still passionate about plants, I’ve not found my PhD as fulfilling as I’d expected. I find today’s research environment very competitive, with experiments being driven by what is needed for the next publication or research grant application. As I have journeyed with God through the 3 years of my PhD I have found myself becoming less interested in my subject and more interested in the activities I’m involved in outside my PhD. So I’m here at the conference more because of my interest in supporting postgraduate and international students than because of my interest in my subject.

However, my PhD has provided me with the opportunity of living out my faith in the lab and has led to some interesting

discussions in the lab ranging from the ethics concerning the genetic manipulation of organisms to the power of prayer over experiments that don’t work!

How has my study affected my faith?

I think it has affected it in 2 ways. Firstly, the

“the complexity and beauty of the natural world is a daily reminder of the presence of God”

more I learn of the intricate mechanisms that are present in the cells that make up all living organisms the more I am in awe of the creator God who is the source and sustainer of all life. To me, the complexity and beauty of the natural world is a daily reminder of the presence of God. Secondly, in a more practical and personal way, my faith has been encouraged through seeing God’s faithfulness to me in getting me through the challenges involved in undertaking a PhD!

Jasmin Wildman

Pharmaceutical,

University of Manchester

The overall aim of the annual conference “Transforming the Mind” is anchored in Romans 12 and challenges us to “offer [our] bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God” (Romans 12:1) and “**be transformed by the renewing of [our] mind**” (Romans 12:2).

Andrew Fellows and Stefan Lindholm, from L’Abri fellowship in Hampshire, led us through

“Jesus is Lord of all life ”

a fascinating journey of what portrays a Christian mind. They declared a Christian believes that Jesus is Lord of all life. Diminishing His lordship leads to a weak, non-Christian mind; letting His full lordship flourish provides the basis for a strong Christian mind. So, how can we obtain such a strong and beautiful Christian mind?

Andrew elucidated the ‘divided reality model’ of the spiritual (sacred) and the material (secular) world. While the two were historically separated, he said Christians should aim to integrate

the two within their lives. Both worlds are complementary: locked in the secular world only, we do not give Jesus Christ the opportunity to work in our lives; trapped in only the sacred world, we ignore the influences of the secular world and hence lose the vital ability to appraise its consequences on the sacred life. A Christian, therefore, should engage with Christ in *all* reality.

Next, Stefan talked about the relationship between ethics (i.e. life of the will) and epistemology (i.e. life of the intellect/mind). Intellectual virtues involve both the will and the mind and, therefore, equip us well for being a human being. The Bible abounds with examples of such virtues: foresight, faith, open-mindedness, perseverance, creativity and patience. As Christians, we ought to learn to recognise and assimilate such virtues in *all* our life!

Andrew then explained that (although often suggested otherwise) ‘reason’ and

“imagination ... the action of forming a mental image of what is not present to the senses.”

‘imagination’ can and should be integrated. He described imagination as “the action of forming a mental image of what is not present to the senses” and said that reason “uses mental abstraction to explore reality and looks for truth”. To engage with reality and have a true interpretation of the world, we need to *use both*. If disintegrated, we will either reach a loss of truth, or meaning.

Dr Mike Clifford, University of Nottingham, fascinated us with a presentation about how he has integrated his faith in his academic work. He looked at how needs-based products available in developed countries (such a wheelchairs and ovens) can be built with the skills and items available in and affordable for developing countries.

Sindiso Mnisi gave an inspiring presentation about her PhD in law and how her faith constantly leads her through her research. She also reminded us all that *work is life* and that there ought to be no sacred-secular divide.

It truly was a spiritually uplifting weekend. Thank you to everyone involved in making this conference possible. And always remember: *our faith is integral in all we do; all we do, we do for the glory of God!*

## Resources for Postgrads: Spotlight on L'Abri

[www.labri.org/england](http://www.labri.org/england)

L'Abri is a place where we try to take all genuine questions seriously. Our foundational belief is that Christianity as found in the Bible is true. This means that a commitment to the God of the Bible is rational and that faith is never divorced from reason. Moreover, because

Christianity is true, not only can it be discussed intellectually, it can also be passionately imagined and practically lived out as the Truth.

Furthermore, we believe that the life-affirming truth of Christianity speaks to all of human life and thought. This means our lives are not divided between "sacred" and "secular" activities, and that Christian faith integrates all of human life, including our minds, our hearts, our work, our play, and our relationships. This also means that art, history, philosophy, economics, psychology, education, politics, science, contemporary society, and all other realms of thought can be examined from a Biblical viewpoint.

It has sometimes been supposed that L'Abri is a place for intellectuals or intellectual pursuits only. This has never been the case. A wide variety of people

come to stay with us, for many different reasons, from a variety of backgrounds, world-views, ages and occupations. Some do not see themselves as Christians, and come looking for a place where their questions will be taken seriously. Many people

come to address living as Christians in the modern world. Every student brings to L'Abri their own unique life, thoughts, interests and questions.

“L'Abri was born fifty years ago in Switzerland when Francis and Edith Schaeffer opened their home to those who came seeking answers to life's many questions...”

One of the helpful things about being at L'Abri is that the study and discussion are mixed into the "real daily life" of living with families and working at all kinds of practical tasks. This provides a place where

people can begin to integrate their faith into all areas of life. This kind of integration is important in our increasingly compartmentalized world, and can be very freeing, but it may not be terribly glamorous. A "Mountain top experience" is not our goal. You should not come expecting

a secluded retreat environment. Instead we have tried to maintain the reality of life within a family setting. There are lots of mundane chores to be done, some

perpetual disorganization and not enough space for visitors to have private rooms. You may find some of this difficult, but there is a reality to the environment that many have found helpful.

We are located in the beautiful countryside of Hampshire about 50 miles southwest of London in the village of Greatham (pronounced 'grettam'). L'Abri (French for "the shelter") does not fit neatly into any categories of description. It is something like a residential centre in the context of a small community of homes. L'Abri was born fifty years ago in Switzerland when Francis and Edith Schaeffer opened their home to those who came seeking answers to life's many questions, or at least a place where they would get a serious hearing. Since then it has grown to include eight branches in seven countries.

English branch of L'Abri . Do contact us

Each edition of "The Story (PG)" will focus on a subject grouping or other resource available for post-graduate students. [www.cpgrad.org.uk](http://www.cpgrad.org.uk)

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