

Newsletter

Winter 23/24



 **HTC**

A partner of

UHI

Welcome to

Highland Theological College

It's always something of a surprise when another term comes to a close. Yet again we are presented with the opportunity to reflect, and thank God for his continued faithfulness. Over the summer, we were glad to celebrate with the class of 2023 for their graduation ceremony here in Dingwall, and then see them progress to a wide range of occupations up and down the nation.

We then had the privilege of welcoming another cohort of students in September. This term I've particularly enjoyed hearing that our new MLitt programme got off to a good start, with a group of students from a range of backgrounds. The group is made up of busy Mothers with toddlers, folks in a range of ministry positions, and even a full-time GP.

We've had some staff changes at HTC. Our new librarian, Mark D Stirling, is getting to grips with the role in Dingwall.

As ever, I'm constantly thankful for all those who partner with us to make what we do possible. Do join me in thanking God for his constant grace to us, and for the continued partnership of those many faithful friends who enable our work.

William Gwynn

Marketing and Communications
Manager

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From the

Principal's desk

There seems to me to be much in the prophet's prayer we find in Isaiah 64 that appears highly relevant to the need of the church across Scotland today. While we may not be quite yet in the desolate position described in v 10-11 of that chapter, we are rapidly heading in the direction of the 'desolation' and 'ruins' depicted there.

In that scenario, it is instructive that the prophet did not at all dissociate himself from blame for the desolate state of the Old Testament church. He counts himself as part of the problem (v 6): 'All of us have become like one who is unclean ... all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf ...' Yet, he spurs himself and others on to pray with two significant encouragements. Firstly, the fact that God is still their Father; and secondly, that God has done great things for them in the past.

And the Church in Scotland too can have equal encouragement from both these great truths today. Let us lay hold in prayer on the God whose eternal Son incarnate in Jesus Christ, has taught us to pray 'Our Father ...' Should we not join with the prophet in saying (v 8): 'Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand ... look upon us we pray for we are all your people.' I wonder if part of the implication of these words for us today is for us to say: 'LORD, can you not make something better of us – and of the church throughout Scotland – yet? Can you not bring something beautiful yet out of this lump of clay?'

And then there is the second encouragement for us to pray – what God has done in Scotland in the past, which is what the prophet rehearses in v 3-5a – the fact that God had not only looked down from heaven, but that he had come down to transform their circumstances: to liberate them from the power of the Egyptian Pharaoh; to redeem them and set them free to be his own people. And notice how he describes these actions of God - 'awesome things that we did not expect.'

The Israelites did not expect to be liberated from Egypt, let alone for it to happen in the way in which it did happen. They weren't waiting for that to happen – at least not the vast majority of them anyway. Nevertheless, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob came down to fulfil his eternal covenant promises to their forefathers, and Mt Sinai trembled at his presence.

And ever since that time God has done similar things again and again. He came down to redeem his people from their period of exile in Assyria and Babylon. Most amazingly and unexpectedly, he came down in the person of Jesus Christ; then at Pentecost in the Person of his Holy Spirit; and again and again throughout the nations of the earth, including our own, that very same Holy Spirit has come down and done 'awesome things that we did not expect.'

In the Island of Lewis from which I hale, from the 1820s onwards God came down in reviving power and blessing in almost every decade until the 1970s or 80s. My own great grandfather, after whom I am named, came to faith in the 1859 revival in Lewis; my mother's only sister came to faith as a 16-year-old in the 1949 revival in Barvas; she was then used by God as a 'spiritual mother' and 'mentor' in a more localised revival in her home village of Gravir in 1969; and when I was minister in Barvas in Lewis in the 1980s many of the church members had had experience of two previous revivals; while my oldest member could remember 4!

And all of that created a spirit of expectancy among the people in the place of prayer, with the words of the prophet in the opening verse of this chapter often on their lips and in their burdened hearts: 'O that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!' That doesn't absolve us of our duty to do what we can to bring the gospel to the people, but may all we seek to do be covered with the prophet's prayer and burden here: "O that you would rend the heavens and come down ...'

Hector Morrison

Principal

Staff update

Librarian

What's your favourite thing about the job so far?

I am enjoying getting to know the students and being able to help them in their learning and development. I am also enjoying familiarizing myself with all the library's collections.

Do you have a favourite book in the library?

Being a history graduate, I enjoy working with the library's historic texts, some of which date back to the 17th century. However, I do enjoy Nick Needham's 2000 Years of Christ's Power series (I know I cheated and chose 5 books!). His books are academic and full of historical information and are a great read.

What's unique about HTC's library?

HTC library has a very relaxed feel and is a great place to study and meet others who share an interest in the Christian faith. Also, you don't need to be a student to use the library, members of the public are welcome to join as external patrons. The library is unique because it has a large collection of just over 60,000 items, the largest by volume within the entire University of the Highlands and Islands. The library also holds three special collections: the Rutherford House Collection, the William Temple Collection, and the Fort Augustus Collection.

The Fort Augustus Collection is especially important as many of its books are rare or unique and are of great monetary and academic value. The key attraction of this collection is the Patrologia Graeca and Patrologia Latina written by the French priest and scholar J. P. Migne (1800-1875). These volumes include all Greek theological writers up to the year 1439 and all Latin authors up to 1216. HTC library really is an academic goldmine!

Where's your favourite place in scotland

I really like Moray. It's got beautiful scenery, great towns, good historic sites, and plenty of places to cycle.

What's your favourite Bible verse?

Isaiah 43:19 "See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland".

I love this Bible verse as it shows us that even when we go through tough times in life, God is working everything out and has a plan though we might not see it at the time.



Mr Mark D Stirling

Librarian

The Reason for Theological Research

Research is by no means a luxury for those whose calling is primarily that of 'equipping the saints', or rather that of being ministers of that continuous movement of grace we know as a seminary or theological college education. It is not primarily that Christian training colleges want to be viewed as academically respectable, as 'wannabe' academic university departments. It is rather that what we communicate in classes is communicated better when we who teach also research what we teach. That is, rather than simply following the textbooks, we too are learners, learning new things about the subject ourselves, e.g. what might shed new light on passages in the Bible from the historical context or the history of biblical interpretation; or we are learning new things about our society and how people (ourselves included) have changed their thoughts about a variety of things, requiring engagement in our theology. All this needs tracing and examined. Foundations dug deep will help, (to switch metaphors) to enable a clearer and more sonorous, even sound interpretation.

We as teachers will be less inclined to follow fashions and gurus, simply and enthusiastically accepting the hypotheses and agendas of others, but will be those who test and seek spiritual wisdom.

For that reason it's of the essence of a college, not only to have a number of masters and research students, but also to encourage a research culture where colleagues can deepen their specialisation in one or two areas. This is vital for honours/elective and masters-level teaching. The world of academic conferences and journals should not dominate what we do or how we see ourselves, but, to adopt a sporting analogy, a 'quick run in Europe or the world series' should raise our game. Of course we won't be discriminating about where we join in, and will prefer communities of thinking which are themselves seeking God, even as they think hard and ask hard questions.

We want our students to be thinkers, who will not stop reading and reflecting from the moment their last exam or assignment is done, students who won't be those who say 'now I've got all that mind-stuff behind me I can now preach and teach with the heart.' When both mind and heart are fully engaged, then that can be a beautiful thing to behold and a real resource for the kingdom of God. Those who want to love the Lord with fewer than the four things Jesus reminds us (in Mark 12:30) should perhaps reconsider their sense of call to the pastoral ministry.

Of course it isn't all about biblical studies, church history and doctrine. There are also current ethical questions to be considered, but beyond that there is reflection on the nature and ways of worship, corporate and individual. In other words there is a place for 'piety in action', as some colleagues will examine what makes the church better and fitter. That requires the sharing of research-based expertise and analysis that goes a bit beyond the anecdotal and the untested claims on social media.

In all this UHI have seen fit to appoint myself to encourage research at HTC through reading seminars, feedback on articles and books, conference and project co-ordination, while connecting up with the wider UHI research effort, where that is meaningful. Research is also meant to reach and serve those in our church communities who might find it nourishing and stimulating, through book launches, public lectures, day conferences, short courses and even being part of more practical projects.

Dr Mark Elliott

**UHI Professor of
Biblical and Historical Theology**



Mark has a commentary on Psalms 42-72 appearing later this year with Bloomsbury (International Theological Commentary series), and a book on the history of interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles scheduled for the end of 2024.

Power and Leadership for the Church

This summer, one of our staff, Dr. Mark Stirling, published a multi-author volume on the use and abuse of power in the church. It's titled 'Not So with You: Power and Leadership for the Church'. We were thrilled to partner with the Chalmers Institute for a book launch in November. The book is now widely available for purchase.

The core message of this book is that the misuse of power in the church (not just by leaders) is a theological problem. It reflects a misunderstanding of who God is and a misrepresentation of his character. For someone "in the name of Jesus" to misrepresent Jesus in the way they treat people is what it means to break the Third Commandment - to take the name in vain. We really can't get Jesus' work done in non-Jesus ways and the first half of the book therefore addresses the question of what Jesus' ways actually are and what God is really like. This foundation allows us then to address various pastoral and practical issues.

The answer to the misuse of power is not the non-use of power, but the right use of power. Jesus' cross-shaped pattern underlines that power is to be used for loving, self-giving service of others for their blessing and benefit. It is not to be used for personal gain nor for protection from the cost of loving people. Our hope is that this book will serve the church by calling us back to solid theological foundations for leadership and the exercising of power that will lead to healthier churches that demonstrate to the world who God is and what he is like. I wish I could say "Enjoy this book", but the subject matter makes it very difficult to enjoy. There are some harrowing chapters, especially in the second half of the book. However, I do hope it will do good in the world. The prayer that goes with it is that the church may re-commit to doing Jesus' work in Jesus ways and its leaders may bless and serve its members.

Dr Mark Stirling

Part time lecturer and Director of the
Chalmers Institute



Our new taught masters

MLitt: Theology, Culture

Our newest course, the MLitt: Theology, Worldview, and Culture got off to a strong start this Autumn. We asked a couple of the students from the cohort what they loved about the course so far.

"The focus on worldview and culture is a formational one that encourages us to always ask the 'so what?' question. As a busy GP, the MLitt has offered an invaluable opportunity for study I never thought would be possible. It is a thought-provoking, stretching and inspiring course that is already impacting my day-to-day life."

Neil, 1st Year MLitt Student.

"I'm studying this course part-time, whilst mothering two under twos at home. Pre-recorded lectures and evening seminars enable me to participate during this busy season of life! I have really enjoyed the discussions about how the Bible narrative speaks into our culture and the way we think about life. It's challenging me to consider in more detail how a 'Christian worldview' shapes the whole of life."

Martha, 1st Year MLitt Student

Worldview and

Modules:

- + Theology and Worldview
- + The Doctrine of Creation
- + Culture and Society
- + The People of God
- + The Land
- + The *Polis* (or City)

Taught by

- + Rev Dr David Kirk
- + Dr Mark Stirling
- + Professor Mark Elliott
- + Dr Jamie Grant

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Website: www.htc.uhi.ac.uk

Study at HTC

- + Are you interested in becoming part of our community of faith and scholarship? Have a look at these course overviews, and get in touch or head over to our website to find out more!

Christian Theology Access

- No entry requirements
- Ideal for those interested in entering the BA programme
- Can be completed online at your own pace
- Modules include:
 - Study Skills
 - Pastoral Theology
 - Old/New Testament

BA (Hons) Theological Studies

- Equips you with a broad knowledge and understanding of Christian Theology
- Will provide you with the personal and professional capabilities required for a variety of ministries
- Study on campus in Dingwall or Paisley, or at home
- Access to excellent library facilities

Masters by Research (MRes)

- Full time over one year, or part-time over two
- Complete a 40,000 word dissertation
- Can be completed at home or on campus
- Write on a topic of your choice under supervision
- Engage with our faculty, and make use of their specialisms to inform your work
- Access to our post-graduate seminars

PhD

- Faculty offers excellent supervision on a wide range of topics
- Can be completed remotely or in Scotland
- Some recent completions include:
 - Polanyi's critique of reductionism
 - Exodus 19:5-6 as a missional text
 - Samuel Rutherford's doctrine of sanctification

Get in touch

Email: htc@uhi.ac.uk
Website: www.htc.uhi.ac.uk

Why should Christians Study Philosophy?

HTC is the responsible academic partner for the philosophy degrees offered by the University of the Highlands and Islands. While these philosophy programmes are not Christian in their approach per se, studying philosophy has many benefits for Christians. To mention a few: 1) the studying of philosophy helps with the development of skills such as critical thinking and clear reasoning. Such skills are important in every aspect of life, from personal decision-making to addressing theological and doctrinal questions.

2) Such skills enable Christians to better understand and articulate their beliefs. Understanding the basic structure of good philosophical arguments enables Christians to better explore the rational foundations of their faith. In addition, it will help Christians to have a better understanding of the theological doctrines they hold and to be better equipped to explain to others such doctrines.

3) The views of early Christian thinkers like Augustine and Aquinas, as well as modern theologians like Karl Barth, Van Til, and Alvin Planting, are all underpinned with philosophical thoughts of their day, therefore, understanding the historical and philosophical context in which Christian theology developed help Christians to appreciate the contributions of such theologians. 4) Christians are called to live an ethical life and philosophy helps provide a framework for ethical thinking. In the 21st century, we are challenged by complex moral issues, such as the use of artificial intelligence, social justice, and environmental issues. Having a well-developed ethical framework enables Christians to engage in the discussion of such ethical questions from the perspective of a Christian worldview. 5) Living in the 21st century means that Christians find themselves to be in an increasingly secular world. Christians, consequently, often find themselves in discussions with people coming from different

worldviews. Studying philosophy enables Christians to engage in thoughtful and respectful dialogue with others, discussing important questions about the existence of God, the nature of reality, morality, etc. There is much more to say about the reasons why Christians would gain from studying philosophy, but hopefully, enough is said for me to encourage you to explore the contents of our philosophy programmes.

Innes Visage

Programme Leader and Senior Lecturer



'I loved having the space to build deeper understanding of the social issues I care about the most, seeing how these do not emerge in a vacuum, but are embedded in broader structures. Whether you care about social or environmental justice, human rights, the social economy, international relations or any other subject, this degree will help you explore and widen your interests.'

-Recent Graduate

Interested in Philosophy?

Go to: htc.uhi.ac.uk/courses



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- + Our Alumni are distributed all over the world, and continue to have a robust evangelical influence in their wide ranging professions. From missionaries to theological colleges, churches and schools. Throughout the UK, the USA, and the world.**
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Thank you.

HTC

