

# NEWSLETTER OF THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE-SSCS

## NEWS FROM IRC MEMBERS AROUND THE WORLD

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### *Conference on Christian Spirituality for the Modern Seeker*

Self-implication is a methodological topic in the study of Christian spirituality. The conference sponsored by SSCS in Adelaide, Australia, *Christian Spirituality for the Modern Seeker* was organized to attempt to live this concept which many of us have treated theoretically. The organizers had a vision about how to integrate self-implication in an academic conference. Thus, the lived experience of the presenter would be part of a session, as would a process inviting the participants to enter into the experiential dimension of the concepts presented. This Newsletter will offer reflections on this conference by members of the planning committee as well as by a few attendees, whom we thank for making their reflections available. At the end of the Newsletter, you will find links to the keynote addresses. *The Editor*

#### ***From Phil Daughtry, Conference planning chair***

The vision for the recent SSCS Conference in Adelaide was to humanise a gathering which, whilst maintaining an academic focus and quality, would deliberately break from a calcified orthodoxy of back-to-back read and/or didactic papers with scant opportunity for processing, conversation and lived spiritual experience. Our goal was to allow breathing space, interiority, creativity, and conversation. Our ideal was to blend elements of contemplation and festival with the disciplines of distilled thought from scholarly endeavour and reflective practice. Our desire was to encourage presenters and delegates to have foremost in mind the ways that scholarly ideas land in human experience and make a difference in real life. Our method was to limit time for information and context didactics, to encourage the communication of distilled essence of thought, to provide back-up broader reading to enable delegates to explore further as motivated by curiosity and connection, and to create artistic, contemplative, and conversational space to enable the conference to be and become a spiritual event.

This was undergirded by a commitment to communication, direction, and hospitality. We believe the outcome has been largely successful and provides an experimental basis for further reflection and, we hope, imaginative risk-taking in future endeavours.



*Tree of Life* participants could add their reflections  
Michelle Krieg, art therapist, [chelleykrieg@gmail.com](mailto:chelleykrieg@gmail.com)

#### ***From Chris Morris, Conference planning committee***

It was wonderful to gather in-person with such a large group of practitioners of spirituality from diverse backgrounds. One theme reverberated throughout the conference - ‘participatory knowing,’ and we were invited to centre our spiritual endeavours in this way of knowing from the inside out. A kaleidoscope of entry points were offered, not only describing participatory knowing, but enacting it from music, art and poetry, to meditation and scholarship. Both keynote presenters led us into the ever-expanding dimensions of our discipline with a particular focus on the earth. As a teacher of spirituality, it affirmed and stretched me towards the

possibilities of a 'participatory pedagogy' in my own teaching and research.

**From George Marchinkowski,**  
*University of the Free State, South Africa*

The word *Smörgåsbord* describes a kind of meal in which there is variety, a range of tasty morsels which delight both the eyes (at first) and then the taste buds. This word aptly describes the experience of the recent International Conference of the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality held at Tabor Institute in Adelaide, Australia. From the start, participants experienced colour, sound and texture delivered by an array of talented people. Each day began and ended in a Plenary Session which included contemporary (popular) music, poetry, visual art, worship opportunities – all complimenting the keynote addresses. This was followed (twice a day) by parallel presentations from an array of speakers from across the world, presenting their research in a rainbow of perspectives. Food was plentiful and varied. In the late afternoon, participants were able to debrief and network with a glass of wine and some cheese. The International Conference succeeded in being an academic conference like no other. Phil Daughtry and his team can be proud of the results of their hard work and imagination. It was an experience of joy.

**From Matthew Wickman**  
*Brigham Young University, Utah*

Two very different presentations underscore for me the richness of these international SSCS conferences. The one was by a PhD student in systematic theology, the other by a primary school teacher. The conference format – no reading of papers, just talking through main ideas – accentuated the differences of vocation and life experience between the speakers. Benedict Shoup, the first presenter, talked about John of the Cross, discussing the “dark night” in terms of modern phenomenology: Martin Heidegger, Jean-Yves LaCoste, and others. I found the presentation smart, polished, and deeply conversant in the intersection of spirituality and modern thought, an area of particular interest to me. The other presenter, Claire Forbes, also smart and polished, focused on contemplative methods for teaching young children how to be receptive to the Holy Spirit. I haven't devoted my studies to this subject, though I was

once a father of young children who tried to instill similar lessons as best I could.

As a mid-to-late-career scholar of literature, I've spent years – decades – attending academic conferences devoted to the pursuit of knowledge. If I've turned to the SSCS at this stage of my career, it's because I believe that ultimate knowledge in any field is only found through the Spirit of God. That Spirit, connecting us to Christ, reminds us of how and why things *are* in the first place. The two presenters I mention above underscored that conviction. But they brought those lessons home not only through their ideas, disclosing the importance of religious education and the “dark nights” that must accompany all true understanding, but also through the manner in which they expressed them. Our conference organizer, Phil Daughtry, had encouraged presenters to bring their whole selves, not just their concepts, to bear. In response, Benjamin disclosed how spiritual understanding informs his own study as well as modern thought generally, not to mention his reasons for pursuing a life in (truly) “higher” education. And Claire's earnest, heartfelt insights reminded us that of all the things we can teach, to anyone of any age, life in the Spirit is most important of all.

Numerous meaningful conversations with other presenters, during and after the conference, supplemented my experience with Benjamin and Claire. Through all these exchanges, it was the Christ- and Spirit-seeking persons behind the presentations that most moved me. Their openness to spiritual life animated the ideas they so ably brought to share.

**From David Rensberger**  
*Biblical spirituality, retired from Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, GA*

I've been attending academic conferences for around 45 years, and I have never experienced so creative and stimulating a conference as the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality International Conference held at Tabor College. Besides the careful selection of plenary speakers and arrangement of simultaneous breakout sessions, which included hands-on workshops as well as paper sessions, I found that the incorporation of musical and visual arts elements not only supported the theme of the conference, but enabled delegates to engage that theme and its ramifications as whole persons, not just supposedly objective intellects. Indeed, the invitation to paper presenters to offer

their ideas in engaging ways as their full selves, not just to be scholarly personas reading off a page, helped me, at least, to attempt to embody my main idea as well as to present it, and to consider how this idea is being enacted and can further be enacted in real-world settings. The generous times set aside for conversation outside of presentations also enabled the engagement of a variety of topics among delegates. Overall, though, this was a conference like no other in supporting thoughtful, often innovative



scholarship with a delight in one another's presence and in the purposes of the conference. This left me feeling glad I was there every minute--something unique in my experience of academic gatherings.

### ***From Mary T. Kantor***

*Merrimack College, New Hampshire and Phillips Academy, Andover*

While one expects intellectual engagement at a high level at academic conferences (expectations met and greatly exceeded in these July days...), it's the attention to all the details that serve not just the head, but the heart, the spirit, the senses, the appetite, the opportunity for relationship building, and some glee that set this one apart. Having left behind a sunny summer, I arrived to chilly winter days and was immediately warmed and welcomed to the Tabor campus with gathering spaces around cozy outdoor fires and a fluttering art installation. An extra goodie for international guests, a taste of local chocolate, was an add-on to my registration bag. Flowers, candles, twinkling lights, a labyrinth and meditation space, days that began and ended with song, rhythm, poetry, and reflection, ample dining and communing time, a lavish dinner spread all evidenced a thoughtfulness and care by those who had a hand in shaping the conference. Great attention was given to serve full enspirited humans. And when the focus was on the intellectual and academic, the frameworks serving this were high calibre in an excellent sound system

for speakers, as well as musicians, and an AV team that was attentive to each presenter in every room. The conference papers will be available for revisiting and reconsidering the rich content of the keynote speakers and break-out sessions. I will relish this revisit. But I can't think of the academic content without also remembering the magnificent enormous magenta and white (unidentifiable to me) Australian bird that landed outside the window during one session, the hospitable host who went out of her way to show me a summit view of Adelaide Hills or having opportunity to pet a kangaroo with my new and just as joyous American



friend on our add-on day. "Christian Spirituality as a Pathway for the Modern Seeker" – this Christian seeker is grateful for exploring the many pathways opened in Australia this July.

*Labyrinths by Bruce Hume Ph.D. Talking the Walk*  
<https://talkingthewalk.com.au>

### ***Links to Keynote Addresses***

#### **Day 1**

<https://learn.tabor.edu.au/mod/page/view.php?id=374210> Morning Keynote Mary Frohlich

<https://learn.tabor.edu.au/mod/page/view.php?id=374663> Afternoon Keynote Garry Deverrell

#### **Day 2**

<https://learn.tabor.edu.au/mod/page/view.php?id=374664> Morning Keynote, Garry Deverrell

<https://learn.tabor.edu.au/mod/page/view.php?id=374665> Afternoon Keynote, Mary Frohlich

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