

## Confession: The Church's Gift to the World?

*'The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit,  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt thou not despise.'* (Ps. 51:17)

Pusey House, Oxford

*Wednesday 25th – Thursday 26th February 2026*

Confession is perhaps the most misunderstood of all the sacraments. It is a new beginning, a means of renewing one's hope for eternal glory, and of encountering again the forgiveness of the Father. And yet, concerns about safe-guarding and the Church's care for the vulnerable mean that the confidentiality of what is said in private confession, i.e. the 'seal' of confession, is both misunderstood and attacked by many today, both within and outside the Church.

In what is sometimes called a 'therapeutic' society, where self-care is understood and the hope of repentance is not, what is the connection between counselling in secular and ecclesial contexts? What is the difference between receiving forgiveness and therapy? Finally, at a time when there are calls for the Church, organisations, and governments to apologise for things which took place in previous generations or centuries, how do we understand corporate responsibility, guilt, and forgiveness?

Although the practice and theology of confession have varied among the different traditions of the universal church, yet there is enough in common for Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox Christians to be united in cherishing the same gift.

Our conference will gather an ecumenical array of speakers from these different traditions to consider some of the pastoral challenges and contemporary issues that are being faced by clergy today in the ministry of hearing confessions, and by the Church and Christians more

generally. This will include, among other concerns, how confession relates to the commitment to safeguarding and the protection of the vulnerable, to the inviolability of the seal, and to the wider significance of confession in a culture that preaches tolerance without practicing forgiveness.

We hope that this colloquium will be not only interesting, but also a source of encouragement for ordinands, seminarians, and clergy across different ecclesial traditions. This conference can also serve as a form of formation or education for those preparing to hear confessions, seeking renewal in this ministry, or looking to the hope which the Church offers the world through the gift of renewal and reconciliation.

The Conference includes a public lecture at 4pm, Wednesday, on 'Dr. Pusey on the Effects of Absolution: Catholic but not Roman' by Fr Ben Jefferies. Tea and coffee will be served in the Hood Room from 3:30pm. Tickets are not required for the public lecture only, but tickets must be purchased to attend the rest of the colloquium.

Evensong will follow the lecture at 5.30pm, at which the Revd Dr Philip Moller SJ will preach.

All attendees are warmly invited to join in the liturgical worship of the House at the advertised services. There are also Roman Catholic masses available nearby at Blackfriars Priory and the Oratory at 7:30am and 6pm.

Please email [mehmet.ciftci@stx.ox.ac.uk](mailto:mehmet.ciftci@stx.ox.ac.uk) with any queries

## **Conference Schedule**

### Wednesday 25th February

1:45–2:00. Opening remarks.

#### **Session 1: The Priority of Confession**

2:00–3:30.

2:00–2:30. The Rev'd Fr Ian McCormack, 'As if the grave closed over it': historical Anglican perspectives on the Seal of the Confessional.

2:30–2:45. Q&A.

2:45–3:15. Prof Neil Robertson, The Augustinian elevation of sacramental confession in the Prayer Book Tradition.

3:15–3:30. Q&A.

3:30–4:00pm. *Tea and coffee served in the Hood Room.*

#### **Public Lecture: Chapel of the Resurrection.**

4:00–5:25. Fr Ben Jefferies, Dr. Pusey on the Effects of Absolution: Catholic but not Roman.

#### **Evening Divine Service.**

5:30–6:00. Evensong. Preacher: The Rev'd Dr Philip Moller SJ.

## Thursday 26th February

#### **Morning Divine Service.**

7:30–8:00. Morning Prayer.

8:00–8:30. Mass.

*A light breakfast will be served in the Hood Room for those who wish to attend Morning Prayer/Mass.*

9:00–9:30am. *Welcome coffee served in the Hood Room.*

#### **Session 2: Theologies of Confession in the East and West.**

9:30–11:00.

9:30–9:55. The Rev'd Fr Philip Corbett, The history of sacramental confession from an Anglo-Catholic perspective.

9:55–10:20. The Very Rev'd Fr Nicholas Crowe, The theology of sacramental confession in the West.

10:20–10:45. The Very Rev'd Fr Stephen Platt, The sacrament of confession in the Eastern Churches.

10:45–11:00. Q&A.

*11:00–11:30. Coffee break.*

### **Session 3: Confession and contemporary issues.**

11:30–1:00.

11:30–12:00. The Rev'd Dr Joanna Collicutt, Clinical psychology and confession.

12:00–12:15. Q&A

12:15–12:45. The Rt. Hon. Lord Biggar of Castle Douglas, Corporate guilt and reparations.

12:45–1:00. Q&A.

*1:00–2:00. Lunch break.*

### **Session 4: Hearing Confessions in Contemporary Pastoral Ministry.**

2:00–3:30.

2:00–2:25. The Rev'd Dr Peter Anthony, The practicalities of renewing the sacrament of confession in parochial life.

2:25–2:50. The Rev'd Fr Nicholas Edmonds-Smith, The decline and revival of confession in the Roman Catholic Church.

2:50–3:15. The Rev'd Dr Jakob Tronêt, Sacramental confession in the Swedish Lutheran Church.

3:15–3:30. Q&A.

*3:30–4:00. Tea and coffee break.*

### **Session 5: The Seal and Safeguarding.**

4:00–5:20.

4:00–4:30. The Rev'd Canon Rebecca Swyer, Safeguarding.

4:30–5:00. The Rev'd Fr Stephen Coleman, Dangers to the Seal.

5:00–5:20. Q&A.

### **Evening Divine Service.**

5:30–6:00. Evensong. Preacher: TBC.

## SPEAKERS

**The Rev'd Dr Peter Anthony**, is Vicar of All Saints', Margaret Street.

**The Rev'd Canon & Rt. Hon. Lord Biggar of Castle Douglas** is Regius Professor Emeritus of Moral and Pastoral Theology at the University of Oxford and is Distinguished Scholar-in-Residence at Pusey House. He was appointed C.B.E. "for services to Higher Education" in 2021.

**The Rev'd Fr Stephen Coleman** is Priest-in-Charge of the Grosvenor Chapel, Assistant Director of the Centre for Law and Religion at Cardiff University, and Trustee of the Ecclesiastical Law Society.

**The Rev'd Dr Joanna Collicutt** is a Supernumerary Fellow at Harris Manchester College, an Associate Priest in an Oxfordshire parish, and an Honorary Canon of Christ Church Cathedral.

**The Rev'd Fr Philip Corbett** is Parish Priest of St. Silas' Church, Kentish Town, a priest of the Society of Holy Cross, and former Chaplain of Pusey House.

**The Very Rev'd Fr Nicholas Crowe** is Prior Provincial of the English Province of the Order of Preachers, and Official Fellow and Visitor of Blackfriars Hall, Oxford.

**The Rev'd Fr Nicholas Edmonds-Smith** is Provost of the Oxford Oratory of St. Philip Neri.

**The Rev'd Fr Ben Jefferies** is an Adjunct Lecturer at Trinity Anglican Seminary, Hospice Chaplain at Preceptor Home & Hospice, and Liturgical Book Designer for Anglican House Publishers.

**The Rev'd Fr Ian McCormack** is Priest Associate and Director of Grafton House at the Church of the Advent, Boston.

**The Very Rev'd Fr Stephen Platt** is Rector of the Russian Orthodox Parish of St. Nicholas in Oxford and an Archpriest in the Diocese of Sourozh.

**Professor Neil Robertson** is Professor of Humanities and Director of the Foundation Year Programme at King's College, Halifax.

**The Rev'd Canon Rebecca Swyer** is Deacon in the parish of St. Richard's, Haywards Heath. She has recently stepped down from being Director for Apostolic Life in the Diocese of Chichester and is currently Associate TEI Reviewer in the Church of England's national Ministry Development Team.

**The Rev'd Dr Jakob Tronêt** is Vicar of St Mary's, Sigtuna in the Church of Sweden.

## WHERE TO EAT LUNCH

### **The St Cross College Cafe.**

Located on site, the College Café is open 9:30am – 3:00pm, and serves fresh barista-style hot drinks, cold drinks, pastries, snacks, and sandwiches. It is the quickest and most convenient way to get lunch.

### **Taylor's Deli, 31 St Giles, OX1 3LD.**

Serves a wide variety of hot and cold sandwiches, paninis, pastries, and good coffee.

## THE CENTRE FOR THEOLOGY, LAW, AND CULTURE

The Centre for Theology, Law, and Culture is an academic institute dedicated to enriching contemporary intellectual and cultural life by a rigorous engagement with theology and related academic disciplines. Based at Pusey House, it draws upon Oxford's longstanding and exceptional scholarship in Law and the Humanities, and in particular upon the Catholic tradition in the Church of England. The Centre hosts colloquia, lectures, and seminars, and supports scholars and scholarship in the pursuit of truth within the academy, and for the renewal of the Church within a pluralistic civic society.

Dr Jonathan Price is the Director of the Centre and Matraszek Fellow of Pusey House & St Cross College. The Centre is grateful for the generous support of Mr Marek Matraszek.

## CONFESSION TIMES

### **Pusey House**

Confessions are heard regularly by Fr Matthew Cheung Salisbury from 9:00-10am on Thursdays in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel. This week, due to the conference, he will be in the Liddon Room.

### **Blackfriars Priory**

Confession is available at 12.30pm and 5.30pm on Saturdays in the priory church.

### **The Oxford Oratory**

Confessions are heard 20 minutes before all Masses, Sunday to Friday, and an hour before all Masses on Saturday. Weekday Mass times are 7:30am, 10:00am, and 6:00pm.