

Thomism, Creativity and the Arts: Jacques and Raïssa Maritain

Blackfriars Hall, Oxford, Tuesday 01 July 2025

Speakers, titles and biographies

Alice Ramos

Jacques Maritain on the Artist's Vision and Moral Character

Alice M. Ramos is recently named Professor Emerita of Philosophy at St. John's University in New York where since 1987 she taught metaphysics, medieval philosophy, early modern philosophy, and concentrated in aesthetics and ethics. She is currently Adjunct Professor at St. Joseph's Seminary in NY, teaching Natural Theology and Theological Aesthetics. She has a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Navarra in Pamplona, Spain, where she worked primarily in St. Thomas Aquinas, and also holds a prior Ph.D. in French Literature from New York University. Among her publications are *Dynamic Transcendentals: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty from a Thomistic Perspective* (Catholic University of America Press, 2012) and *Beauty and the Good: Recovering the Classical Tradition from Plato to Duns Scotus* (edited volume, CUA Press, 2020). She is a past president of the American Maritain Association (2002-2004).

Brad Elliott OP

Art and Imitation: The Role of Nature in the Human Artistic Act

Fr. Bradley T. Elliott is a Dominican friar of the Western Dominican Province. After completing theological studies, he was ordained to the priesthood of Jesus Christ on June, 22nd 2018 at St. Dominic's Church in San Francisco, CA. In 2014 Fr. Brad received an MA in philosophy from the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology in Berkeley CA. In 2021 he received a Licentiate in Sacred Theology from the Pontifical Faculty of the Immaculate Conception in Washington DC. In 2025 he completed a Doctorate in Sacred Theology at the Catholic University of America in Washington DC focusing on the role of human craft and participatory governance in the social doctrine of the Church. He is currently a professor of Moral Theology at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology in Berkeley California.

Jan Bentz

Creative Intuition and Being in Art: Maritain and Gilson on Beauty

Dr. Jan C. Bentz earned his Ph.D. in Philosophy from in Rome. He also holds two master's degrees in sacred art, Architecture, and Liturgy, as well as Church, Ecumenism, and Religious Studies. His dissertation, published in German, explores Gustav Siewerth's work on Thomas Aquinas and G.W.F. Hegel. His expertise includes Metaphysics, Thomism, Medieval Philosophy, and Aesthetics. He currently lectures at Blackfriars' Studium and is a member of Faculty at Memoria College (KY, USA). He has taught at The Catholic University of America (Rome Campus), Christendom College (Rome Campus), and IES Study Abroad. Dr. Bentz has an extensive journalistic background, producing TV coverage for EWTN Global, contributing to Catholic News Agency, The Catholic Herald, Inside the Vatican, Jüdische Rundschau, and currently CATO and working as a freelance docent tour guide in art in Rome and the Vatican for over eight years.

James Matthew Wilson

Form as 'Ontological Secret'

James Matthew Wilson is the Cullen Foundation Chair in English Literature and the founding director of the MFA program in Creative Writing at the University of Saint Thomas. The author of fourteen books, his most recent collection of poems is *Saint Thomas and the Forbidden Birds* (Word on Fire, 2024). *The Strangeness of the Good* (2020) won the poetry book of the year award from the Catholic Media Awards. The Dallas Institute

<https://www.mbit.cam.ac.uk/events/event/item/thomism-creativity-and-the-arts-jacques-and-raissa-maritain/>

of Humanities awarded him the Hiett Prize in 2017; Memoria College gave him the Parnassus Prize, in 2022; and the Conference on Christianity and Literature twice gave him the Lionel Basney Award. In addition to his role at the University of Saint Thomas, he serves as poet-in-residence of the Benedict XVI Institute, scholar-in-residence of Aquinas College, editor of Colosseum Books, and poetry editor of *Modern Age* magazine.

Katja Frimberger

Learning to just be there: Film as Public Pedagogy

Katja Frimberger is Senior Lecturer in Education Studies at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow. Her research interest lies in philosophy of arts/ aesthetic education. She is particularly curious about the formative nature, purpose and practice of film and theatre. Her most recent publications look at the German concept of education as 'Bildung' (self/formation) through the film 'Of Gods and Men' and Meister Eckhart's Bild-based theology; explore Hans-Georg Gadamer's and Jacques Maritain's understanding of the formative nature of the arts; and investigate German theatre maker Bertolt Brecht's philosophising theatre pedagogy of estrangement.

As performer, producer and educator, she regularly participates in film/education projects in collaboration with non-academic stakeholders. The recent Sci-Fi feature film "The Silent Messenger" (Dir. Simon Bishopp), in which Katja collaborated as performer, was nominated for the Heimspiel award at BIFF (Braunschweig International Film Festival, Germany) in November 2024.

Albert Robertson OP

Raïssa Maritain at Prayer: Suffering, Virtue, and Religious and Creative Perception

Fr Albert Robertson, OP is an assistant chaplain at Fisher House, the Catholic Chaplaincy to the University of Cambridge, and is assigned to the Dominican House in Cambridge. He completed his formation for the priesthood at Blackfriars in 2022. Before entering the Dominican Order, he studied anthropology at the LSE and University of Oxford.

Emma Mason

'Nocturnal navigations': Raïssa Maritain's poetic and mystical gifts

Emma Mason is Professor of English and Comparative Literary Studies at the University of Warwick. Her research and teaching focus on poetry, theology, and philosophy and she has published widely in the field of Christianity and literature, including *Christina Rossetti: Poetry, Ecology, Faith* (Oxford University Press, 2018), *Reading the Abrahamic Faiths* (Bloomsbury, 2015), *Elizabeth Jennings: The Collected Poems* (2012), and *The Oxford Handbook to the Reception History of the Bible* (2011). Her current project is on Catholic mysticism in the poetry and philosophy of Raïssa Maritain, Edith Stein, Simone Weil, and Caryl Houselander.

Christopher Grey

Maritain, Jones, and Ratzinger on Art and Liturgy

Christopher Grey is a Research Fellow at Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology, and Lecturer in Theological Aesthetics at London School of Theology. He studied first at the Royal Academy of Music but has spent most of the subsequent years teaching in secondary and higher education. His principal interests are in philosophical / theological aesthetics, and Christianity and the Arts, notably from a Thomist perspective. His recent research activities aim at promoting the life and work of Jacques Maritain in the UK. As a convert to Catholicism – in no small part due to Jacques and Raïssa Maritain – Chris is committed to furthering their spiritual and intellectual legacy as a point of personal witness as much as scholarly endeavour. He is a co-convenor of this conference.

Gregory Kerr

Imitation and Distortion: Jacques Maritain and Flannery O'Connor and the Power of the Story

Greg Kerr is Associate Professor of Philosophy at DeSales University, received his B.A. and M.A. in philosophy from Boston College and Ph.D. from Fordham University, where he did his dissertation on Jacques Maritain's aesthetics and the "useless" benefits of the aesthetic experience. He was former editor of the *Maritain Notebook*, the official newsletter of the American Maritain Association. He has published articles on aesthetics, the transcendentals, philosophy of music, laughter, Aquinas, Flannery O'Connor, Charles Taylor, David Bentley Hart, Michael Allen Gillespie, and on Metaphysics and the scientific method in the AMA's book series and elsewhere. He was a guest speaker for the Inaugural AMA's Podcast, speaking on Maritain's *The Degrees of Knowledge* (July 11, 2024). Currently, he is looking to publish a book on Maritain's surprising view of the different forms of human knowing and the blind spots of each. He is married to Cindy, and they have four sons and five grandchildren.

Margarita Mooney Clayton

Imitation and Creativity: Music as Formative and Expressive

Margarita is an Associate Professor in the Department of Practical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, where she teaches on topics such as philosophy of social science, religion and immigration, ecumenical devotion to Mary, and aesthetics and Christian education. She is also a Research Fellow at Blackfriars Hall and an Associate Member of Las Casas Institute. She read psychology at Yale University and gained her PhD in sociology at Princeton University. In 2016, she founded The Scala Foundation, whose mission is to restore meaning and purpose to culture by focusing on the arts, liberal arts education, and worship.

Her Publications include: *Mary Mother of All: Woman, Image and Christian Wisdom* (Forthcoming), *The Wounds of Beauty: Seven Dialogues on Art and Education* (2022), *The Love of Learning: Seven Dialogues on the Liberal Arts* (2021), and *Faith Makes Us Live Surviving and Thriving in the Haitian Diaspora* (2009). Her articles have appeared in scholarly journals and publications that reach outside the academy such as *Church Life Journal*, *Plough Magazine*, *Comment Magazine*, *America Magazine*, *Public Discourse*, *First Things*, *Hedgehog Review*, *National Catholic Register* and *Scientific American*.

Sir James MacMillan

Setting the words of the Mass to music in the secular environment of our time: a Catholic composer's experience

James MacMillan is the pre-eminent Scottish composer of his generation. He first attracted attention with the acclaimed BBC Proms premiere of *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie* (1990). His percussion concerto *Veni, Veni Emmanuel* (1992) has received over 500 performances worldwide by orchestras including London Symphony Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, New York and Los Angeles Philharmonics and Cleveland Orchestra. Other major works include the cantata *Seven Last Words from the Cross* (1993), *Quickening* (1998) for soloists, children's choir, mixed choir and orchestra, the operas *Inès de Castro* (2001) and *The Sacrifice* (2005-06), *St John Passion* (2007), *St Luke Passion* (2013) and *Symphony No.5: 'Le grand Inconnu'* (2018).

He was featured composer at Edinburgh Festival (1993, 2019), Southbank Centre (1997), BBC's Barbican Composer Weekend (2005) and Grafenegg Festival (2012). His interpreters include soloists Evelyn Glennie, Colin Currie, Jean-Yves Thibaudet and Vadim Repin, conductors Leonard Slatkin, Sir Andrew Davis, Marin Alsop and Sir Donald Runnicles, choreographer Christopher Wheeldon and stage director Katie Mitchell. His recordings can be found on BMG/RCA Red Seal, BIS, Chandos, Naxos, Hyperion, Coro, Linn and Challenge Classics.

Recent highlights include MacMillan's *Stabat Mater* for The Sixteen streamed from the Sistine Chapel and premieres of the 40-voice motet *Vidi aquam*, *Christmas Oratorio* streamed in 2021 by NTR Dutch Radio from the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam and recorded by the London Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir, and the anthem *Who Shall Separate Us?* commissioned for the funeral of HM Queen Elizabeth II in 2022. The annual Cumnock Tryst festival was founded by the composer in 2014 in his childhood town in Scotland.