

April 3, 2024

Greetings from King's,

Sometimes, when we don't see people we know for a while, we wonder if they've changed. We see their updates on social media or reposts of what they think is funny, profound, or infuriating, and we don't always agree. We wonder if they are the same person they were when we met frequently. Our feelings toward our alma mater or the organizations we support can be the same way. If we don't know someone there, or attend events, or hear from someone we trust, we can worry that our values may not align anymore. I know there are those who wonder if King's is the same place it was, for better or worse, and they may even ask the most important of questions: "Is The King's University still a Christian university?" This uncertainty is exacerbated because society has decided that checking the correct boxes and making the correct public statements is the way to prove our commitment to a particular group or ideology. King's, as a university, stubbornly does *not* believe that following Christ is about checking boxes or making public statements. Do you wonder if King's is still a Christian university and if your values still align with ours? Is King's still the King's that you once knew?



*Dr. Kristopher Ooms*  
*VP Academics & Research*



As the envelope indicates, this letter intends to answer the question, “Is King’s still a Christian university?” Answering this question is central to our understanding of what we are striving for. It is a question that those of us who work here must ask all the time and we must “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks” (1 Peter 3:15).

As Vice President, Academics & Research, I believe that some of the best people to answer this question are those who work here each day. King’s asks its professors to be the primary

agents of defining and delivering Christian university education. They work daily to integrate a deep understanding of what it means to learn in light of scripture’s revelation and Christ’s redeeming work. They do this daily with students. They design curriculum, deliver lectures, and lead discussions that shape the education that our students receive.

We posed this question to Dr. Arlette Zinck, a professor of English here at King’s, who has helped me understand what Christian university education can look like ever since I sat in her introductory English class many years ago. Arlette has committed her career to the great project that is Christian university education and I believe she is an ideal person to answer the question — “is King’s still a Christian university?” In response, she wrote the following essay. I think it’s excellent and I’d love for you to read it. Its length and content invite you to settle in and take some time with it.

It will be time well-spent.

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## What Makes King's a Christian University?

*You've seen the claim. The King's University — Christian University Education. But what exactly does this mean? What is it about King's that makes us distinctively and undeniably Christian?*



*Dr. Arlette Zinck*

I want to begin with a story.

We are in a small seminar room with a group of thirteen senior students reading and responding to Plato's decision to exile the poets in *The Republic*. It is a puzzling decision. The discussion ranges across works from *Ion* to *Phaedrus*. Students debate with one another about why Plato is, on the one hand, so supportive of the dramatic readings of great poems — he argues the poets channel a form of divinity — yet he boots them from the Republic!

The debate continues until one student lands with two feet on an interesting question: *What did Plato mean by divine?* Exactly! How do his ancient Greek beliefs compare to Christian assumptions about God? In this classroom, unlike many others, the beliefs that animate the fundamental assumptions of our theories and practices are on the table. Our understanding stems from our convictions, which in turn arise from our actions — a perpetual loop that functions both forwards and backwards. In this Christian university, our distinctiveness is apparent in our willingness to read widely and ask deeper questions. For all the influence that neoplatonism has had on Christian churches, are Plato's beliefs the same as Christian understandings? Might Plato's response to the poets have been different if he believed that God was a personal God, not distanced and mediated, but intimate?

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The example above illustrates the types of questions students at King's engage with. In every course and in every discipline, they are challenged to think about the difference faith makes. Faculty and staff model the implications of a Christian understanding and students are invited to think about what they believe and how those beliefs affect all that they think and do.

## **BELIEVING IS CONNECTED TO KNOWING AND DOING**

Understanding the connection between faith and learning is the foundation of Christian education at King's. At the end of the day, our knowing always comes to rest against a set of unprovable assumptions about ultimate things. Faculty and staff are deeply devoted to living out the commitments that come from their Christian faith. Our Christian identity is apparent in our assumption that what we know about the world is connected to our belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that biblical scripture is a point of access into the tradition in which the full range of Christian beliefs find their roots. The project of Christian education begins with professors demonstrating to students how their own Christian assumptions work themselves out in the theories we put forward, the methods we choose, and the findings we offer. Having modelled this integration of faith and learning, faculty invite students to explore how their beliefs intersect with their knowledge and actions.



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### **WE ARE TRULY FREE**

Because we understand ourselves this way, being Christian at King's means granting one another full freedom to live out our faith. Faculty come from the full spectrum of Christian churches ranging from the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions to Alliance and Evangelical churches. It's a big tent, and we feel enriched, not threatened, by our differences. Ecumenism sets us free to be a university and to serve faithfully in this role. We are emboldened by the understandings of sphere sovereignty\* that animate the practices of the Christian Reformed Church, the denomination whose members' sacrificial offerings and expansive vision created this good place. King's does not pretend to be

*\*Sphere sovereignty is a principle that affirms and respects creational boundaries and historical differentiation. It implies that no one area of life or societal community is sovereign over another and each sphere has its own created integrity. Sphere sovereignty is an important concept within Reformed Christianity, which recognizes three primary spheres in this world: the family, the church, and the state.*

a church, though faculty and staff do strive to embody the character of Jesus. Christ is the centre of our believing, knowing, and doing, but we do not all believe, know, and do things the same way. These differences stretch us and keep us growing.

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## **Our degrees are built to equip students to earn a living, but they are also designed to cultivate their minds and nurture their hearts.**

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### **WE MAKE SPACE FOR THOSE WHO ARE NOT LIKE US**

We do our best to make space for others, to be an inclusive, equitable, and diverse academic community. We'll be the first to admit we have more work to do, but we are secure enough in our ecumenical self-understanding that we joyfully open our doors to any stu-

dent who is open to exploring their own beliefs — whatever they may be — and connecting them to their learning. You don't have to be Christian to come to King's, but you do have to be thoughtful about what you believe and why.



### **UNIVERSITY IS ABOUT MORE THAN BUILDING A CAREER**

For sincere Christians, the object of our learning can never be, first and foremost, the pursuit of money. Our degrees are built to equip students to earn a living, but they are also designed to cultivate minds and nurture hearts. Our Christian identity is apparent in our curriculum which seeks to educate students, broadly and deeply, to be com-

passionate and savvy problem solvers, ready to serve in professions, public service, or the business world. Our desire is that students will have *vocations*, a word that comes from the Latin word *vocare* which means “to be called.” We draw connections between more abstract learning and the places where it will find value outside of the university. We encourage students to imagine a life, not merely a job.

And it works!

Our grads offer some of King's strongest testimonials. Talk to Simon Elzen-Hoskyn, Partner at Denton's, a law firm in Edmonton. Or to Lisa DeMoore, Director of Community Lands Development at Indigenous Services Canada, or Hans Doef, co-founder of Blindman Brewing. They will tell you that our degrees look a little different than those from other schools.

We think that history matters and that imaginative literature can help us see things we might otherwise miss. We believe in studying philosophy and that a basic course in Christian theology is good for all students. We insist that students gain some appreciation for the special and distinct ways of knowing that undergird, for example, the natural sciences, social sciences, and fine arts. As Simon, Lisa, Hans, and our other graduates attest, these distinctives make *all* the difference. We are committed to the liberal arts because we believe that teaching students *how* to think is more important than teaching them *what* to think. A King's education cultivates an appreciation for the limits of human knowledge and nurtures humility. Academic humility, it turns out, is a rare species, but when cultivated in the rich soil of faithful inquiry, it can blossom into compassion and empathy. Take that out into the world, and you discover it is more valuable than gold!



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### **CHRISTIAN FAITH IS NOT ONLY OUR BELIEF BUT OUR PRACTICE**

None of us is perfect, but the distinctiveness of our faith commitment is evident in the care we take with our students and the ethics of confession and forgiveness that underlie faculty-staff-student relationships on campus. We, like other communities, go through rough patches. We are emerging from one now. There has been a sea change at King's over the last few years as the faculty renews itself. There are many new and exciting members of

the faculty, and many familiar faces are now retired. Change, no matter how positive, can be stressful. Add to that the pressures of pandemic and fiscal restraints, and the fault lines begin to open. We're human. We feel these discomforts. Occasionally they get the best of us and we err. But when we err, we press in. When something is wrong, we ask questions. We search our souls. We pray. We ask for forgiveness. And then we fix things.

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**We understand that the most important characteristic of our Christian distinctiveness is the love we bring to all issues and to all people.**

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**WE BELIEVE IN TRUTH**

We have a reverence for truth and understand that it is discernable in various ways. Some truth can be weighted and measured. Much of it cannot. Our Christian convictions poke and prod us to discern not only the most expedient approach but also the most loving responses to the challenges we face. In a world full of fractious debate, where one side cannot tolerate the other, we cultivate the practice of informed and civil discussion and deliberation. We educate for citizenship. We understand that the most important characteristic of our Christian distinctiveness is the love we bring to all issues and to all people. To be Christ-like is to care for the vulnerable, to feed and clothe the poor, and to visit prisoners. No matter which subjects students study, they will press into these big issues and be inspired and equipped to act, bringing renewal and restoration to all walks of life, just as Jesus did.

What does it mean that King's is a Christian university? It means that Christ is at the centre of all that we think and of all we do. We are passionately committed to:

- “the renewing of our minds” (Romans 12:2) and
- “teaching each other in all wisdom” (Colossians 1:28)

It's a project we are proud of. We invite you to join us in it.

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I couldn't agree with Arlette more: Christ is at the centre of all we think and all we do. This is what makes King's a special place. “We understand that the most important characteristic of our Christian distinctiveness is the love we bring to all issues and to all people.” It's voices like Arlette's that teach our students and guide them

as they learn. **Students that learn to think and interact with the world through the lens of love bring renewal and reconciliation to all walks of life, as followers of Jesus Christ. That is our aim. That is our mission.**



Is The King's University still a Christian university? It has always been so. This place, and more importantly, the ideas that King's represents, are so dear to me. As an alumnus, a faculty member, a vice president, and a soon-to-be parent of a student here, this is what motivates me to devote so much of my life and energy to King's growth and success. Like all things worth doing, it can be hard. **We need to know that we are not alone in our pursuit of this project. We need to know that you are with us.**

Do Arlette's words remind you of the things you love about King's and the importance of this Christian university we are working to advance? Whether you once walked the halls of King's as a student, entrusted your child's education to us, contributed financially, or supported King's through your church, **will you renew your support for Christian university education with a gift to the Stewardship Fund today?**

Arlette mentioned that we have seen rough patches; we are not unique in this. I'm sure that you have experienced your own rough patches. The past few years have not been easy for many. God has been faithful to us, as I pray He has been faithful to you, but that does not mean it has been painless. We are still dealing with the financial ramifications of a smaller incoming class as many young people delayed attending university after multiple years of online high school education during COVID. We're finding that these students require additional academic and mental health supports to help them thrive in a university setting. Record inflation in recent years has affected both our expenses and our revenue. We have had to make difficult decisions amidst uncertainty to ensure that King's thrives into the future.

Christian university education is not guaranteed without your support. Over the past decade, government funding for Christian universities has remained stagnant,



regardless of which political party holds office. Your support is critical to ensuring a thriving future for King's. **When you give to the [Stewardship Fund](#), you make this possible. For years, supporters like you have been walking alongside us, making an impact in students' lives. We could not do it without you.**

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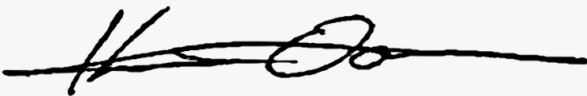
## **Your generosity breaks down financial barriers, ensuring more students have access to high-quality Christian university education.**

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Your support means students can continue to learn from experienced, tenured faculty members. Your donations provide academic and mental health services to students, allowing them to navigate the complexities of university life. Most importantly, your generosity breaks down financial barriers, ensuring more students have access to high-quality Christian university education. You can make a difference. **Will you make a gift to fund Christian university education and shape the next generation of Christian leaders?**

**You can make your gift today at [kingsu.ca/stewardship](https://kingsu.ca/stewardship) or by using the enclosed postage paid return envelope.**

Thank you so much for your support,



**Dr. Kris Ooms**

Vice President, Academics & Research

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