2020 is hindsight.

But we will feel its impact for years to come. Throughout this year of distance, loss, division, and loneliness, we were surprised to find collaboration, communication, and an opportunity for future hope. God was in the midst of the storm.

Even in the harshest of circumstances, our work flourished this year. We have continued our work to help people envision and pursue lives worthy of our humanity. We continue discerning, articulating, and commending visions of flourishing in light of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. And we continue to foster truth-seeking conversations among the contending visions in our world today.

Thank you for your support and partnership in 2020. We invite you to read about the impact our work has made. It was the result of a joyful partnership with you.
My friends,

Christian faith has an inalienable public dimension. And the past year should be evidence for all of us that the substance of that public expression matters deeply.

Our work at the Yale Center for Faith & Culture is to provide a faithful witness to the person and work of Christ, as we repair the broken bridges of a divided country, divided world, divided church, and divided humanity.

We've produced this annual report for you—our partners, supporters, collaborators, and friends—to express our gratitude for the joyful work you and others have made possible, and to celebrate the opportunities for stewardship that we have been given, even in one of the most challenging years in recent memory.

In this brief report, we offer an overview of 2020 projects and activities at the Yale Center for Faith & Culture. You'll find highlights from teaching Yale Divinity and Yale College students, our research and writing, updates on our Christ & Flourishing and Life Worth Living initiatives, grant project updates, speaking engagements, and media and communications development.

Most of the artwork you'll find throughout this report was originally featured alongside episodes of our podcast For the Life of the World—you can find more on our newly redesigned website, faith.yale.edu. We have also included reflections, anecdotes, and soundbites from our staff, students, faculty partners, and contributors.

As we find ourselves in the wake of 2020, many of us still feel an abyss of uncertainty and anxiety about the state of our country, our world, our church, and even our species. Early on in the pandemic crisis, I spoke to our team and the wider public about living hope rooted in the resurrection of Christ. It is the same kind of hope that we see in Abraham: hope when there is reason to hope, and decidedly hope when there is no reason to hope. It is this hope that sustained us during this year.

In the spirit of that same hope, I invite you to the same conviction and resolve which founded the Yale Center for Faith & Culture: to seek lives worthy of our humanity—constantly discerning, articulating, and commending visions of flourishing life, and doing so in light of the life and wisdom of Jesus Christ, who I believe remains the key to human flourishing today.

Thank you for your partnership in 2020; may we find peace in 2021.

Yours,
Christ & Flourishing

Highlights

• Redesigned the Yale Divinity School Christ & Being Human syllabus, including the addition of new sessions exploring “Sickness & Healing” and “Boredom & Entertainment,” subjects that have become particularly significant in the world of the COVID-19 pandemic
• Developed and taught a hybrid course model—both in-person and online; Christ & Being Human was one of only a few classes at YDS offered in hybrid
• Launched a three-year, $330,000 grant from the Texas Methodist Foundation to revitalize theological education across Christian colleges, universities, and seminaries, both in the U.S. and abroad; the program is building a network of faculty partners and scaling the Christ & Being Human approach to theological education
• Our 9 pedagogy fellows have all begun designing courses utilizing the Christ & Being Human approach at their respective schools, with new classes being offered this Spring at Baylor University and Nashotah House, and several more planned for this coming Fall semester at Villanova, Westmont College, St. Mellitus Theological College (UK) and University of Fribourg (Switzerland)
The idea that the person and work of Christ are keys to the whole of human flourishing is an indispensable feature of Christian identity. It is also an idea that has historically proven equal parts beautiful and dangerous. We find it embodied in the ideologies of both Gandhi and Hitler, animating social movements of both black liberation and white Christian nationalism, underwriting Christian participation in both inter-(and non-)religious cooperation and sectarian violence. To nevertheless look to the contested legacies of Jesus and his way and attempt to wrestle from them a blessing for our troubled time—not only for ourselves but for the life of the world—is therefore a daunting prospect. This is what makes the work of YCFC such a valuable resource.

In curating communities of discernment across institutional and disciplinary boundaries, the Christ and Being Human project affords me spaces for focused reflection and critical scrutiny on a question central to my faith: What do I make of Christ and why might this be genuinely “good news” to anyone? Our work together is equipping me to do “public theology” more responsibly than I could otherwise manage on my own, whether in my institution or my guild.

Sameer Yadav
Associate Professor of Religious Studies, Westmont College
Christ & Being Human Pedagogy Fellow
My relationship with religion is fraught. Malformed by a Christian fundamentalism that bore its disciples more by the sword than the cross, Christ & Being Human allowed me to encounter a Jesus molded not to the image of doctrine, ideology, or philosophy, but the breath of Scripture, discipleship, and a wealth of sacred and secular texts that gesture toward the bright sadness behind the world's dark glass. I am an atheist sympathetic to religious people who prostrate themselves before a God who sends rain upon just and unjust. Christ & Being Human invited me to reflect that such prostration engenders a greater, or, at least, better freedom than a secularism that stands apart from religion, arms-crossed, instead of amidst religion, arms-extended.

Eric Holland
Yale Divinity Student,
Christ & Being Human (Fall 2020)

Christ & Being Human in Fall 2020 presented new challenges for teaching. It was an experience unlike anything we’ve ever had at Yale—for faculty or students. Each class we were forced to confront the terrible reality of the global pandemic, sitting in masks for two hours at desks six feet apart and anchored to the floor. At the same time, each class felt like an act of what Willie Jennings calls “resistance against despair”—upholding the hope of communal belonging even in the face of death-dealing circumstances. “Hope,” as Dr. Jennings said in an episode of For the Life of the World, “is a discipline. It is not a sentiment.”

Drew Collins
Associate Research Scholar and Director, Christ & Flourishing Program
“Hope is a discipline; it is not a sentiment ... living the discipline of hope in this racial world—in this white supremacist-infested country called the United States of America—requires anger.”

EPISODE 13 My Anger, God’s Righteous Indignation / Willie Jennings (Response to the Death of George Floyd)

Willie James Jennings
Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, Africana Studies, and Religious Studies, Yale Divinity School
“The reason why flame wars, hostility, the trolling that happens online... the reason why people can say such horrible things... the reason why there is so much bullying, shaming... is because we diminish one another’s humanness. We have to learn how to integrate those very human needs of compassion, listening, and love—things we do in person—into digital spaces.”

EPISODE 32 Always, Always On: Technology, Digital Life, and New Media / Angela Gorrell

Angela Gorrell
Assistant Professor of Practical Theology, Truett Seminary, Baylor University
Christ & Being Human Pedagogy Fellow
Life Worth Living

Highlights

- Spring 2020 Yale Life Worth Living course taught 101 Students in 8 sections (3 YCFC faculty + 5 graduate student instructors), pivoted to online instruction over Spring Break.
- Trained 5 new Yale graduate student LWL instructors this summer (bringing the total to 12 over the last three years), allowing us to offer 9 sections in Spring 2021 and, more significantly, making a strategic development in the early career of these scholar-teachers, which will, in turn, impact the students these instructors teach.
- Education and the Life Worth Living helped set the trajectory for 15 first-year Yale students, placing questions of meaning and purpose at the center of their education.
- Received a $234,700 planning grant from the John Templeton Foundation, which will allow us and a team of 9 existing faculty partners at 8 institutions on 3 continents to develop an effective strategy to bring the LWL approach to more pluralistic undergraduate institutions.
I just completed teaching Life Worth Living for the fourth time. Each class has been exciting, and my students have prompted my own intellectual growth. The shared experience of learning with students, not ‘instructing’ them, is one reason why I’m so passionate about Life Worth Living. This year—with such upheaval in politics, public health, and the environment—made the subject feel all the more important. At least, that’s what my students said. One wrote that Life Worth Living ‘is the most important and fascinating module that I’ve ever taken and studied in all of my years of education, and I’ve enjoyed it immensely’. Another said it ‘has definitely been the most interesting module I’ve taken so far’ at Sheffield. That’s high praise—but a true representation of how I’ve seen students respond to the opportunity to invest their best intellectual efforts into exploring what is really worth wanting.

Casey Strine
Senior Lecturer in Ancient Near Eastern History and Literature, University of Sheffield (UK)
Life Worth Living Project Member
My transition to life at Yale this fall was a whirlwind. As a ruralite, I felt disoriented by the energy of urban life; as a woefully undecided student, I felt overwhelmed at times by my classmates’ drive. Amidst this churn, the intimate, clarifying discussions I shared in Education & the Life Worth Living were a godsend. It was incredibly refreshing to reaffirm the value I hold in life’s most simple joys—an intimate connection to nature, a strong sense of belonging, the familiarity of close friendship—as a counterpoint to the pressure I feel to overlook these joys at Yale. I am emerging from Education & the Life Worth Living with a clear, fundamental purpose to my Yale education: regardless of the field of study I choose, I know that I want to pursue a wholly fulfilling life, where my professional success enables, instead of precludes, the simple joys that give life its color.

Jacob Slaughter

Yale Undergrad Student, Education & the Life Worth Living (Fall 2020)

2020 was the year I realized just how large and important the growing community of Life Worth Living teachers is becoming. At Yale, there is no way we could have pivoted to online instruction in two weeks (as we did!) if we hadn’t been a team of eight instructors. And the new grant from the John Templeton Foundation and the work it will support would be impossible without the growing international network of educators committed to the mission of Life Worth Living.

Matthew Croasmun

Associate Research Scholar and Director, Life Worth Living Program
Public Engagement

Highlights

- Redesigned faith.yale.edu with new brand expression, podcast content, and optimized user experience
- 64,549 pageviews and 27,033 unique visitors to faith.yale.edu
- 44 episodes, 73,076 downloads and 32,651 unique listeners in the first 9 months of our podcast, For the Life of the World
- Miroslav Volf appeared in 18 remote speaking engagements, invited lectures, or interviews, in addition to YCFC’s teaching and media offering
2020 Election Event: Marilynne Robinson with Miroslav Volf on Living Faithfully in this Political Moment (October 30, 2020)

The newly redesigned faith.yale.edu, launched September 2020
After last year, I am more convinced than ever of the value of drawing together wise voices into truth-seeking conversations that orient us toward flourishing in a disorienting world. I’m grateful for all those conversations—in our (virtual) classrooms, our dialogical volume *The Joy of Humility*, and on *For the Life of the World*—and for the opportunity we at YCFC had to share them with our students, our fellow scholars, and the public.

*The Joy of Humility* Edited Volume

The true meaning of humility persistently drives debate, largely because we cannot agree on the word’s definition. The “correctness” of normative terms matters, and humility carries a distinctive normative weight. How we understand humility is not a matter of mere semantics. It is a pursuit of inquiry with the potential to inform—perhaps even to transform—our lives. *The Joy of Humility* takes up this task with a view toward the perennial question of what entails a truly flourishing life. Here, philosophers, theologians, ethicists, and psychologists work to frame the debate in such a way that the conversation can move forward.
We need sanity and clarity in this world. There is a joy and excitement that comes from hearing a voice cut through the noise, reading words that grab you by the collar, seeing an image that captures an essence—when these can bear witness to our humanity and encourage us to hope together against despair—well, that's why I love what we do at YCFC.”

Evan Rosa
Assistant Director for Public Engagement, Producer and Host, For the Life of the World
As we look back at our work in 2020, we’re humbled and honored that you’d join us as partners. As we look forward to 2021 and beyond, we’re hopeful and resolved to remain faithful to our founding purpose of seeking and living lives worthy of our humanity.

Thank you.

faith.yale.edu/give