"The Present Moment"
An Interdisciplinary Conference for Postgraduates in Theology

This conference was held in Oxford September 30 – October 1, 2010, funded as a result of a successful grant application to the University's Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. The idea was to offer postgraduates in theology hands-on training in drafting competitively reviewed proposals and (if selected presenting conference papers to an interdisciplinary audience of colleagues and senior scholars from various disciplines of theology.

About half of our participants came from Oxford, while the others arrived from Aberdeen, St Andrews, Edinburgh, Cambridge and Budapest. We were also supported by seven senior academics from various theological disciplines – five from Oxford and a further two from Durham and St Andrews. Conference sessions focused on Christian Scripture and its aftermath as well as on political, historical, philosophical and dogmatic theology. The sixteen papers covered a fascinating range of topics from Ecclesiastes to biblical hermeneutics, from Irenaeus to Christian perceptions of the rise of Islam, from the theology of the Luddite revolts to the present moment in thinkers like Bloch, Heidegger and Barth.

Two Oxford postgraduates were in overall charge of each day, and each of the four sessions was chaired by a postgraduate assisted by a senior scholar (in case discussions were to dry up or otherwise run into difficulty – which they did not!). Speakers presented for 20 minutes followed by 10 minutes of invariably lively discussion, in which both junior and senior scholars equally participated. A wine-and-cheese-enhanced "virtual" fireside chat featured Oxford's Dr Bernd Wannenwetsch and Durham's Prof. Walter Moberly on "What I wish I'd known when I started". Dr Fiona Groenhout of the Oxford Humanities Division gave a talk on "How to get a postdoc" over morning coffee and stayed for individual questions. The conference concluded with a proposal for online publication of peer-reviewed papers in the Oxford Research Archive in 2011.

Following this conference, participants interested in having their work published in conference proceedings on the Oxford Research Archive were asked to submit their revised pieces for anonymous appraisal and peer review by senior academics in their fields. Papers deemed publishable were then subject to further revision and reformatting before publication in the present form.

We are grateful to all participants for their support, and especially to our (known but unnamed!) senior colleagues who gave generously of their time in assisting the peer review process.

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