

Faculty of Divinity
AGM 10th November 2011
Chair's Annual Report

Faculty personnel

The year has seen a number of changes among Faculty Personnel. In the course of the last year Dr Jenkins was promoted to a Readership in Anthropology and Religion. At the end of the year Professor Graham Davies and Professor Nicholas de Lange retired from their University posts; both have served the Faculty well over a very long period of time. Professor de Lange is continuing as Principal Investigator for the ERC Mapping Byzantine Judaism project. Dr Margie Tolstoy also retired from her long association with the Faculty, particularly on the popular course on the Holocaust. Ms Martina Valova left her post as Office Administrator and we have now welcomed Dr Janet Moore in her stead. Mr Atance was succeeded by Mr Shell as custodian.

During the year congratulations were expressed to Jane McLarty on receiving her doctorate from King's College London; to Dr Re Manning on his appointment to the Lord Gifford Fellowship in Natural Theology at Aberdeen University; to Dr Simeon Zahl on his appointment to an JRF at St John's College, Oxford; to Dr Mark McInroy who took up a post in North America; to Dr Simon Gathercole on the receipt of a BA Mid-career Fellowship for 2011-2012; and to Dr Carly Crouch on her appointment to a post in Old Testament at Nottingham University.

The Faculty was delighted that Mrs Lasker-Wallfisch was awarded an honorary DD. The Faculty marked with sadness the death of Tess Maddock, a student of this Faculty and of Jesus College, on 30th October 2010.

Research in the Faculty

Members of the Faculty continue to be very active in their differing lines of research, publishing articles in leading international journals, and in significant edited volumes, as well as major monographs. A selection of recently published books are now displayed in a case in the entrance foyer, while down the corridor the Buzz Board celebrates the work, and shares the news, of past and present postgraduates from the Faculty.

Members of the Faculty have also been successful in attracting significant research funding. Professor Ford and CIP have been particularly successful, in no small part due to the energies of Dr Higton, including a grant from RCUK on 'Research in the Wild: Online Inter-faith Dialogue Platform', and one from the Templeton Foundation (TWCF) on 'Religion And The Idea Of A Research University: Phase 1', both commencing October 2011. Prof. Coakley has also secured funding from the TWCF for a scoping project for Post-doctoral Fellowships in Theology and Sciences.

Major signs of esteem

Among very many honours and special lectures, Professor de Lange, and Professor Gordon (FAMES) were elected as Fellows to the British Academy. Professor Eamon Duffy was awarded an Honorary Chair in the History of Catholicism at the University of Durham. Professor Janet Soskice was appointed to the REF Panel for Theology and Religious Studies. Faculty members continue to give major public lectures in the UK and overseas, as well as numerous seminar papers at other Universities.

Students

There were 46 candidates for Part I of the Tripos in 2011 with 10 firsts; 59 for Part IIA, 8 firsts; 57 for Part IIB with 17 firsts. There were 4 Diploma students.

The Faculty is continuing to work hard at improving application numbers for the Tripos. The web-site was an important contribution, and the access committee is now chaired by Dr Carleton-Paget as the newly-appointed Outreach Officer. The Faculty again took part in July 2010 in the Sutton Trust Summer Schools, and is exploring other ways of working with school and attracting applicants. Once our students are here we endeavour to ensure that they feel a sense of belonging to the Faculty; to this end, coffee at 11am, arranged by the students, is now a regular event.

In 2010-11, there were 25 MPhil students, 20 MSt students, 91 Research students, including 22 new students; 10 completed PhD degrees.

The Faculty continues to enjoy a fruitful relationship with the Federation, and looks forward to developing this further. There were 69 students for the BTh degree in 2011, distributed as follows: Qualifying Examination: 13; First Examination: 29; Second Examination: 27 (3 in Class I, and 24 in Class II).

Library

The Library has continued to provide printed resources to readers alongside extending access to a Virtual Learning Environment (CamTools), e-books and e-journals. The presence on 24-hour access of set texts and other extracts on the CamTools site has reduced multiple borrowing of the books themselves.

The results of the March 2011 survey of readers were encouraging, for example: 96% of respondents agreed that they were satisfied with the Library (89% in 2009); 82% of respondents indicated they use the Library on a daily or weekly basis (76% in 2009).

Computing facilities in the Library are well-used, for example: 32% make use of the wireless internet connection at least once a month (23% in 2009).

Mention should also be made that donations were high in the past year, partly because of the generosity of the Polonsky Foundation who provided funds for purchases in the field of Jewish studies. A display in the Library brought attention to this new collection as well as a feature on the Library web-pages.

Other Faculty events

The Faculty celebrated the tenth anniversary of the building on 2nd December and was delighted at the number of guests who joined us, including both past students and benefactors.

The Stanton Lectures were given between 19th January and 9th March by Professor John Milbank, under the title 'Philosophy: A Theological Critique'; Professor Milbank maintained an engaged audience throughout.

Professor de Lange gave his valedictory lecture, 'Books and Bookmen: the Cambridge Teachers of Rabbinics, 1866-1971', on 17th May 2011. Inaugural and Valedictory Lectures given in the Faculty are now available via <http://sms.cam.ac.uk/collection/675025>

The agreement for the endowment of the Sultan Qaboos Chair in Abrahamic Faiths and Shared Values was signed on 23rd February 2011. It is planned that the Chair will be advertised in Autumn 2011 for an appointment by October 2012.

During the year the long-planned new website was launched. It is proving a much more accessible portal for potential students and others interested in our work, and as a means for us to make known the rich variety of our activities.

Remarks

The year witnessed a number of challenges, which anticipate the pattern that we are likely to face for the immediately foreseeable future. The Browne Review of Higher Education was swiftly overtaken by the Government's spending review, which resulted in the removal of the teaching funding stream for most of the Arts and Humanities from October 2012. That Cambridge would decide to charge the maximum fee allowable, £9,000 p.a., was hardly unexpected, and even this does not cover the cost of educating a student at Cambridge. That so many other Universities would also charge the maximum was not anticipated by the Government, and one consequence is that the quality of individual teaching and the amount of funds available for bursaries and other support now make Cambridge no more expensive than many others. Nonetheless, despite the Government's insistence that Universities improve their access mechanisms, and the assurance that students will only repay their loans once they have a stable income higher than the present rate, there must remain a real anxiety that students, particularly from backgrounds where University education is less the norm, will be discouraged from applying. In general, the funding formula has continued to prompt the University to implement a less-than-inflation rise in the budget, which means that we face continuing restrictions on expenditure, and therefore on the replacement of posts. It was a particular disappointment that the Faculty was not given permission to fill the post in Old Testament Studies held by Prof. Davies, although some help will be given by the undertaking that the Regius Chair in Hebrew will be filled in 2012 with the requirement that it also meet some of our Faculty's needs. The only security for the future is if the Faculty can continue its good record of raising money for endowed posts; we have a long list of aspirations and always welcome suggestions of avenues that we might explore. At the same time we must continue to make the case to the School and University of the potential damage to its reputation for excellence in the field if a number of the posts likely to become vacant over the next few years are not filled.

At the Away Day held in April the Faculty began to consider how its MPhil programme might offer more flexibility while retaining its rigour and excellence, in order to attract more of the best students to Cambridge. Increased student debts after an undergraduate degree is likely to deter some from continuing at postgraduate level, and the future of fees at that level remains uncertain. We see it as a priority to raise scholarships and bursaries for postgraduate students from home and overseas.

Our relationships with other institutions are particularly important for all parties; we have been considering how our co-operation with the Cambridge Theological Federation can be enhanced, particularly in the difficult times they face, with the impact of the Higher Education fees on Church funding resources, and the consequent pressure from some corners to relax the ties with Universities.

The Faculty continues to consider it a priority to support research of the highest calibre by all its members. To this end it has offered small sums to support the completion of research projects, and, through the Research Committee, has endeavoured to encourage staff to apply for funded research grants. The REF, which will take place during 2014, is casting an increasing heavy shadow over our planning and recording, but it is our

intention not to let it dominate our research, which must always be driven by the highest standards of excellence, even where that does not adhere to a REF timetable. The regular research returns that UTOs now provide indicate that there will be a strong return of published research. The new category of 'Impact', which remains poorly defined, is exercising our minds; there can be no doubt that many Faculty members have considerable 'impact' outside the University, on international scholarship, through what is called 'knowledge transfer', through public lectures and courses for other bodies, but little of this counts under the stated definition. Here again, we must avoid letting these constructs change what we do, if that is already excellent and significant research.

We face challenging times and will need to be flexible and ready to seize new opportunities. However, that should not distract us from the core task of maintaining the highest possible excellence in research and teaching.

Judith Lieu
3.11.2011