

Society for the Study of Christian Ethics

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting, 4th September 2010 Westcott House, Cambridge

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Stephen Platten, David Cunningham, Bernd Wannewetsch, Hugh Beach, Robin Gill, Helen Oppenheimer, Nigel Oakley, and Neville Richardson.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were proposed and seconded as accurate.

3. President's Report

Reflecting on the past year, Robert Song noted the care with which the theme of the 2010 conference had been planned and executed by the committee, and the high quality of papers given. Thanks are due to the committee for their diligence in preparation of another successful programme. Relations with sister societies are healthy. The President of the Society of Christian Ethics (USA), Dr Douglas Ottati, was welcomed and invited to bring greetings from SCE and to extend an invitation to SSCE members to attend their next annual conference in January 2011 in New Orleans. Dr Neil Messer, serving as SSCE representative on the committee of Societas Ethica, reported on their annual conference and on their plans for the 2011 conference. Thanks was given to Dr Michael Black for his work as Hon Treasurer. Particular thanks was expressed to Dr Jeff Bailey, who has completed his three year term as Hon Secretary, for bringing the SSCE to new levels of professionalism, a new website, well-run conferences at Westcott House, and secure financial footing for the society. Thanks was also expressed to Robert Heimburger for successfully taking over the post of Conference Secretary, and to Matthew Arbo for his good work with the postgraduate forum, which continues to grow and develop with great success.

4. Financial Statement and Membership Report

The most important news for this year is that our financial procedures have been re-established after a period of uncertain responsibilities and that **we are in sound financial condition**. Some details:

- a) Banking arrangements are finalized. Jeff Bailey, Dave Leal, Luke Bretherton, and Michael Black are account signatories at the Cooperative Bank. Any two are required to authorize cheques etc. The PayPal account may be accessed by any of the signatories; but any movement of funds is notified to all. Michael has adopted a policy of minimum balance (>£500) in that account in order to ensure financial control. He has also emptied the savings account and the time deposit since at current interest rates the advantages of these accounts are virtually nil.
- b) We now receive (quarterly) bank statements electronically. These are available in principle to all of the signatories upon registration with the internet facility

of the bank. Unfortunately we have yet to obtain historical statements (2008-2009) from the bank but are hopeful of doing so over the next several weeks. The difficulty in obtaining statements is but a continuation of a less than smooth relationship with the Cooperative. Advice on the possible movement of our account elsewhere is welcome.

- c) We now maintain a consolidated off-line register of all transactions occurring through both the Cooperative accounts and PayPal. We therefore know our financial status fairly accurately between statements (with the exception of standing order credits). The detail of transactions is at the level of counterparties only. As yet we have no way of systematically separating payment of annual subscriptions, conference fees and donations. So we will have to continue to make estimates of these for reporting purposes.
- d) Robert Heimburger, as membership secretary, has begun the process of promoting the adjustment of member standing orders to current fee levels and estimating our true membership numbers. The increase in member fees could be as much as £1,000 per annum.
- e) **Cash balance as of 31st Dec 2009 was £9,300 as compared with £6,200 in 2007 and £2,900 in 2006.** (We're still waiting for the 2008 statements from the bank. Michael's estimate is that the end of year is slightly down on 2008 due to the 2009 conference loss of £2,800 noted below).
- f) Income stream to date for this year looks slightly better than last – at least 5% up – due to higher levels of conference fees and (it is suspected) adjustment of standing orders to current rates. Consequently **year-to-date** (i.e. 3 September 2010) **cash balance is just about what it was at the start of last year's conference (£21,400 vs. £21,686).**
- g) Conference expenses are likely to be somewhat lower this year because of a reduction in overseas travel expenses (over £1,000 last year), with a consequent likely (small) improvement in our year end position for 2010 if other expenses are maintained at last year's levels.
- h) Michael strongly suggests that **we establish a fixed budget for the 2011 annual conference at £12,000** and that this level is reviewed every year at the AGM for the forthcoming conference. Unfavourable variance from this amount should trigger a discussion among the officers. During our next year of operation Michael also suggests that **we start a budgeting process in order to anticipate and control other expenses. In this regard, it would be helpful if all officers could submit their spending intentions (including major line items for the conference) by Christmas.** We want to remain flexible in spending, so the intention is not to prohibit out of budget items, simply to keep ourselves collectively aware of them.

Sources and Uses of Funds 2009

All figures are approximate because of the unavailability of year end 2008 bank statements.

Sources

Membership fees	£1,000
Conference fees	£9,339
SAGE	£1,000
Other	£ 200

Total Sources £11,539

Uses		
Conference Expenses		£12,152
Of which:		
Westcott House =	£7,071	
St John's Dinner =	£2,777	
Speaker expenses =	£1,063	
Other =	£1,241	
Studies		£ 1,000
Website design		£ 679
<u>Total Uses</u>		<u>£13,831</u>
Net decrease in Funds Available		-£2,292

5. Membership of Committee

Jeff Bailey, Andrew Goddard, and Michael Black reached the end of their first term on council, and were nominated and accepted another three-year term. Luke Bretherton and David Cunningham reached the end of their second three-year term, and the by-laws require retirement. Warm thanks were given for their service and commitment over their past two terms of service. As their replacements, Esther Reed and Elizabeth Phillips were nominated and accepted for their first three-year term. Jeff Bailey reached the end of his three-year tenure as Hon Secretary, and Guido de Graaff was nominated and accepted as the new Hon Secretary. Robert Heimbürger continues as Conference Secretary, and Matthew Arbo continues as the Coordinator of the Postgraduate Forum, and thus both continue to be co-opted members of the committee.

6. Feedback on 2010 Conference

The feedback for the 2010 conference at Westcott House was very positive. Appreciation was expressed for the range and quality of speakers, and the timely nature of this year's topic. Concerns were raised regarding the geographical breadth of facilities used in the conference, the use of propane heaters in the cloisters (for environmental reasons), and whether there were too many cooked meals. All of these concerns were to be taken up with the appropriate people.

7. Discussion of Future Conferences

The topic for the 2011 conference was agreed—to be on Sport and the related ethical questions to be raised, from the role of sport in Western culture, to questions surrounding human enhancement, to such topics as 'muscular Christianity', to debates over the supposed economic and urban development legacies promised by Olympic organisers. The meeting agreed to allow the committee to go forward to inviting speakers deemed appropriate.

Discussion was also held regarding the 2012 conference. Various issues were suggested, from sexuality to immigration, but the greatest amount of energy seemed to coalesce around various lacunae related to 'theological anthropology', i.e., questions of 'what it is to be human' in relation to new challenges of neuroscience, trans-humanism, aging, food/consumption/consumerism, and so forth.

It was agreed that this was the general direction to go for 2012, and the meeting agreed to allow the committee to move forward with planning the particulars of the 2012 conference so that it could begin issuing invitations well ahead of the 2011 conference to ensure the greater likelihood of getting speakers that we want.

8. *Studies in Christian Ethics* journal

Susan Parsons was pleased to report on a good year for the journal. Production of the four issues has gone smoothly. The number of papers and book reviews has remained consistent over the past few years, but with the new page format now being used, we are not yet filling up the full allocation of pages that is available to us. In other words, as a result of new typesetting, there is room for more material than before which gives us space still to expand making each issue somewhat larger than before. The Book Reviews Editor and she have been keen to maintain the quality of material published and would want to assure the Society that standards will not be let slip.

Members may be interested to know that over the past 12 months, 15 papers submitted for consideration have not been found acceptable for publication after peer review, and 5 others are currently in the process of being revised, some extensively, following readers' recommendations. This suggests that the review process is working well, and she is immensely grateful to all those who give of their time and expertise to ensure the highest quality of this publication. There has been a noticeable increase in the number of submissions from postgraduate students and others hoping to secure their first publication, and a concomitant drop in the number of papers from established scholars in the UK following the completion of the RAE.

Volume 23 began with publication of the papers from last year's SSCE conference on Divine Law/Divine Command. The second issue also contained papers from a conference co-sponsored by the McDonald Centre for Theology, Ethics and Public Life (Oxford) and the Kirby Laing Institute of Christian Ethics (Cambridge) on Nicholas Wolterstorff's recent book, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*. She expressed gratitude to the Guest Editors of this issue, Jonathan Chaplin and Joshua Hordern, for their help in putting this collection together. Issue 3, recently published, is a diverse collection of papers, while the final issue due in late November will also be a special one bearing the title, *Grace in the Moral Life: Roman Catholic Enquiries*. This is the first year that two special issues have appeared, one of which has been specially commissioned, which is at least one consequence of the pattern of submissions mentioned above. Because she is concerned only to publish material at the leading edges of the discipline which actually advances debate on significant and lively topics, Susan noted that she would be glad to receive comments from colleagues about maintaining the journal's important role in research in this field.

It was noted that David Clough picked up the reins as Book Reviews Editor in a handover that should be the envy of an Olympics relay team. The reviews continue to be about the most popular and well-read pieces in the journal, and David was thanked for his splendid work in keeping up this reputation for the engaging, critical and searching book reviews with which each issue is concluded. Thanks also to the Consultant Editors whose advice and occasional suggestions have been invaluable.

9. Postgraduate Forum

Matthew Arbo reported on the state of the Postgraduate Forum. He notes that the forum has had a very good year, with a very good, well-attended forum in Edinburgh in March 2010, and among the most highly attended forums at this year's September 2010 forum in Cambridge with 23 attendees and a number of very good papers given. The Postgrad Forum has grown and developed into a central part of the SSCE.

Jeffrey W Bailey
SSCE Hon Secretary
4th September 2010