PREFACE

'The Church and the Natural World' was greeted warmly by the Ecclesiastical History Society when Professor William Sheils chose it as the theme for his presidency of the society for 2008–09. As the papers in this volume show, the topic proved to be both timely (given the depth of public ecological concern in the early twenty-first century) and hugely informative about a great range of religious history. The contributions included here comprise the eight plenary papers given at the Summer Meeting in 2008 and the Winter Meeting in 2009, and a selection of the communications offered at the Summer Meeting.

The Editors are grateful to the members of the society who chaired communications sessions during the Summer Meeting, and who gave their time and expertise to reviewing those communications submitted for publication. We also thank the authors for their speed and good humour in responding to requests for revision, and wish to express our deep gratitude to the Assistant Editor, Dr Tim Grass, without whose efficiency in co-ordinating and copy-editing this collection would never have seen the light of day. We thank the Ecclesiastical History Society for funding Tim's essential post.

The society wishes to thank the staff of the National University of Ireland, Galway, for hosting the Summer Meeting in such a spectacular part of these islands, and is particularly grateful to Dr Barbara Bombi (the Conference Secretary), Dr Alison Forrestal and the university's conference office staff, for organizing both the meeting and the excursions to the ecclesiastical and other wonders of Connacht. It is also indebted to Dr Williams's Library and to its Director, Dr David Wykes, for accommodating the Winter Meeting in London.

We are proud to present this latest volume of Studies in Church History, a series which during its distinguished history has (we believe) proved a most valuable aid to the study of human religiosity.

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