

Editorial

Mark Elliott

First of all, apologies for the lateness of this volume. There are the usual excuses which could be offered in the form of stories of miscommunication, timings of summer vacations and so on, but it is nearer the truth to say that this summer has simply been too busy. Summer, the time for theologians to research, write and prepare for conferences and publications has been made even more 'hot' in this otherwise cold island by the need for every colleague in every department to have ready four high quality publications for the British government to check and reward with money for good performance. The Christian theologian as part of this world is part of this serious game. Fear of earthly judges and judgement-days begins to add stress and anxiety to those who already sometimes wonder: what *for God's sake* is my work for? In other European countries Christian colleges are working very hard to meet academic standards, or at least to fill in the right forms and say the right things to validating agencies and government bureaucrats, and are just as much under pressure. When we compare our fortunes with the (e.g.) South Asian Christian pastor who leads a bible college, works with the poor, has another job to support his family, oversees hundreds of believers in difficult situations, then we know we are not particularly burdened or worn down. Yet it is the fragmentation of vision, the absence of positive leadership and the loss of fellowship in the gospel at a local level that makes us in Europe turn to theological conferences, to national Christian festivals and to the internet to find people who might just understand us because they are experiencing the same problems. Relationships in the local church and community need time to be worked at. Personal and family ambition or just making the best of our 'marketable' skills makes us want to apply for new jobs elsewhere, get involved in larger causes, for perhaps *there* we will then be appreciated. It becomes easier to blame others in the office along the corridor for not 'getting' us, for contributing to the noise and confusion around us, for not listening to us. We envy students writing PhDs and MAs. They are

poor, but they have time and are focused on one main thing they have to do.

The RAE (Research Assessment Exercise) culture, or the wider one of competition between universities and between colleagues for promotion and prestige, has had a pernicious effect. It is theoretical to the largest degree. Within departments it is about being so specialised that intra-disciplinarity is frowned upon, since for an OT specialist to work with say someone in Christian ethics means inevitably to generalise, at least to start with. If the most valuable commodity is a peer-reviewed article in a distinguished specialist journal, then often this will be about joining in one of the lofty conversations already going on in the journal. The practice and practitioners of theology in Christian ministry are not in view for this 'serious play'. Other people can serve the pastors, it is imagined. Experts in 'practical theology', sociology of religion, communication studies and cognitive science step in to 'help'. The voice of biblical and orthodox theology is not heard, also because these brothers are taking part in the equivalent of internet chatrooms, discussions dedicated to minutiae, footnotes, pedantry, self-reference and the gaining of *Drittmittel* and EU funding.

So, where is the joy? Remarkably academics can still come up with interesting ideas and insights. Some of these can even lead to fresh or at least a renewed appreciation of the message of God's love and redeeming grace in Jesus, perhaps an awareness of the majesty of his doctrines, his faithfulness to Israel, the power of the Holy Spirit to an undeserving Church. Even better, theologians can feel themselves called to provide some amount of thinking leadership to complement the more managerial and business-world models which are popular these days in evangelical and also non-evangelical churches. We can serve to get the Church to put the theme of money in its place, we can help Christians to know what it means for God's Church to be visible and how it relates to 'the kingdom of God'.

In this issue of the journal there is a bias towards

biblical studies in the reviews section and a bias against it in the articles (although of course these are biblically informed!) I continue to value all sorts of contributions, not least that which has been written to take issue with a contribution from the last issue (Lydia Jaeger's response to Thomas Gerold, by which I am in good part persuaded, yet find there to be a few questions to which at least Gerold has merely proposed some hesitant answers). I would particularly welcome articles which attempted to join academic work on the bible and historical Christianity, with thoughts on doctrine for today and modern issues facing the Church. Perhaps rather than being trained in one

exclusive sub-department ('Christian philosophy of religion' or 'Biblical archaeology') each contributor could take a theme such as creation or sanctification and work at it with all resources. Or, we resolve to work as a team, as we have tried to do at FEET conferences – although too often we are happy to deliver in our one area and show little inclination of thinking things through, the philosopher of religion from the point of view of the archaeologist, and vice-versa. So maybe I would welcome co-authored pieces. This works well in the natural sciences, why not in our 'supernatural' one?

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