



Editorial

For the Fraser Prize 2013 competition, submissions were invited on the theme of ‘*Does the Church in Scotland still need theology?*’ In partnership with the Scottish Church Theology Society we are pleased to be able to publish the paper by Liam Fraser which came first in the 2013 competition. The comments of the Fraser Prize Reading Panel are included as a preface to his essay.

The following papers in this issue were originally given at the First New College Church, Academy, Society Conference on ‘Mission and the Church’ held at New College, Edinburgh on 10th May, 2013. The purpose of the conference was to open up a range of perspectives and discussions – sociological, theological, and practical – on the theme of mission and its relation to church and society in the present day.

Professor Grace Davie writes regarding the nature of religion in modern Europe, and addresses factors of key significance. She identifies five significant factors affecting contemporary religion in Europe: the cultural heritage, the historical role of the state church, new models of the growing market in religion, the arrival in Europe of new religious groups, and the growth of the secular lobby. All of these subsist alongside each other. Davie makes the interesting case that the same factors are equally present in *unbelief*.

Professor Alison Milbank offers an aesthetic approach to models of mission and evangelism, arguing for a model which is responsive to cultural production. Drawing on Romanticism and the work of Novalis, she challenges those understandings of mission and evangelism which assume that the term *mission* is content free, and that message and communication are separate. On the contrary, Milbank argues that evangelism is embodied in Christ *and* in His Church. Drawing on Acts 17, she suggests an alternative approach through philosophical dialogue. By way of example, she outlines such an approach, drawing on Novalis’ novel *Henry von Ofterdingen*. In this (unfinished) novel, Novalis describes in literary symbolism the opening of the self to a sense of the mystery of being. Fittingly, the paper concludes with a meditation on the mystery of the person of Christ.

Tom Allan's book *The Face of my Parish* was written in the early 1950s. In the book he graphically describes developments as the congregation of North Kelvinside Parish Church began to engage in mission. In this paper, Sandy Forsyth examines both Tom Allan's missiology and its context. Allan was closely involved with the Tell Scotland movement and was instrumental in inviting the Billy Graham Crusade to Scotland. The great success of the crusade, however, changed the public perception of mission, as Forsyth shows. At the same time, the original vision of the local congregation as agent in mission also met with an increasing counter-reaction, and the problems of institutional conservatism. Forsyth concludes by reminding us that mission, nevertheless, is central to all Christian expression and that the local church in *authentic* community plays a central role in that mission.

In his paper, Paul Hammond investigates theological engagement with 'fresh expressions of church'. Examining the book *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2012), Hammond identifies a tendency to divide reflection on fresh expressions of church either into a presentation of different models to be followed *or* the development of overarching theological concepts. Hammond suggests a third way. He points out that, at this particular temporal juncture, analysis of the development of fresh expressions of church seeks to identify *implicit* theologies. The further development of practice-derived theological reflection, moreover, will require the active participation of those who are directly engaged with fresh expressions of church.

Dr John Flett begins his paper by proposing a set of crucial distinctions concerning the *missio Dei*. From these initial distinctions the paper offers a critique of the popular usage of the term *missio Dei*. In the popular usage, the primary definition of *missio Dei* is that mission is not something the church does, but *God does*. This is followed by two further affirmations: first, the formation of a correspondence between who God is and the calling of the church in and for the world – as God is missionary, so the community which worships Him is missionary. Second, mission is set within an eschatological perspective and becomes the determining factor 'between the times'. By this means, the *missio Dei* is transformed into

a fundamental critique of the church itself. Flett corrects this popular definition by drawing on the work of Karl Barth, arguing instead that reconciliation across boundaries lies at the heart of the *missio Dei*. To quote: ‘As Jesus Christ’s own coming as a witness to the Father is God living his own proper life, so the church’s own coming into the world under the impulsion of the Spirit to witness to the love of God in Christ Jesus is proper to its own life.’ This carefully constructed paper will repay further study.

Ian Maxwell
Editor