



Editorial

In this issue of *Theology in Scotland* for Autumn 2015 we have four papers of interest.

In his paper “Practical theology: the past, present and future of a concept”, David Grumett argues that if practical theology is to be sustainable in the academy it must engage more closely with Scripture, doctrine and tradition and, in so doing, attempt to address the whole of material life. More particularly, he argues, there are dangers in a purely pastoral understanding of practical theology, since the temptation is to derive this from secular sources. Practical theology, however, is also closely related to Christian ethics, opening the further possibility that one of the tasks of practical theology might be to study and critique aspects of the secular social and political order. Turning to the nature of practice itself, Dr Grumett reflects on Alasdair MacIntyre’s definition of practice as a complex, socially rooted, co-operative activity, through which goods intrinsic to that endeavour are actualised in the course of attaining the standards of excellence native to that activity. Dr Grumett suggests that MacIntyre is too dependent on Aristotelian ethics which are, ultimately, epistemologically self-referential, proposing instead a proper dualism of practice and doctrine. The implications of practice as a (pre)condition for understanding are then unfolded in a profoundly illuminating way.

In “We need to talk – a meander”, Ian Fraser reminds us, that despite modern cultural assumptions to the contrary, the Book of Genesis states that human beings are expressly forbidden ‘to work their own will on the world’. We are to fulfil God’s will, not ours, for the development of the world. On the basis of Genesis, he argues, human beings are not simply to *subdue* the Earth, but to take care of it and cultivate it. This cherishing of the Earth and its living beings is, therefore, our human responsibility. Referring to the development of the universe, Fraser explores the meaning of ‘creation’, and argues for the importance of dialogue between the disciplines. He returns to the text of the first chapters of Genesis which presages the history contained in the Old and New Testaments and concludes by offering a further five cosmological points for further consideration.

In his paper “Not simply pastor-teacher, but also apostle, prophet and evangelist”, Neil Dougall sets out the five leadership roles for ministry in the Church as detailed in Ephesians 4:11, the ministries of: the apostle, the prophet, the evangelist, the pastor, and the teacher. In the Reformed churches, he reminds us, the pastor and the teacher are regarded as the ordinary, traditional offices. The apostle, prophet and evangelist are considered to be extraordinary offices of the Church, and have now ceased. Dougall argues that this emphasis was, perhaps, historically appropriate for the context of Christendom. There is a growing recognition, however, that a change in the role of the minister is becoming more necessary. Dougall offers first of all a theological rationale for new ministries, developing towards implementation of the ministries of apostle, prophet and evangelist. While there is a practical rationale, which relates ministry in the Church of Scotland to the need for order, and recognises calling from God, in general, says Dougall there is no obvious reason why ordination might not be extended to apostolic, prophetic, and evangelistic ministries. Dougall, finally, explores the theology of T. F. Torrance concerning Christ’s High Priesthood, and argues that ministers share *in* the ministry of Jesus Christ. To conclude, Dougall advocates a move within the ministry of the Church towards recognising and adopting prophetic apostolic and evangelistic ministries.

While in some Presbyterian Churches, discussion and analysis of Assembly debates and decisions are common, in the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America for example, this type of analysis is far less common here. In the concluding paper, “The General Assembly Of 2015”, Johnston McKay offers us a survey of the debate concerning same-sex relationships in recent years, culminating in the 2015 General Assembly. He traces the history of the debate from 2009 onwards, in the events, discussions and debates following the decision of the Presbytery of Aberdeen. McKay describes the divisions and tensions apparent in the Church of Scotland, but also demonstrates the way in which the introduction of a model of the Church as a ‘mixed economy’ and, then, the use of the concept of ‘constrained difference’ contributed towards a major resolution of the discussion.

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Editor