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EDITORIAL

If I may be allowed to begin my first Editorial with some personal reflection, it is a particular privilege to take on the rôle of Editor of the *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* for several reasons:

First, one of my earliest encounters with an academic journal as an undergraduate theology student was with a copy of *SBET*. Although I cannot pretend to have understood a great deal of the theological discussion, I began to see something of the value of the focus and immediacy of journal articles. I also greatly appreciated the extensive review section, which not only helped me to make wiser book purchases as a rookie theological student but also helped to turn me into a compulsive review reader and writer! I hope that *SBET* will continue to guide, inform and enthuse the novice as well as the seasoned theologian.

Second, I am delighted, once again, to have a more formal association with the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society, which provided me with a context in which I could not only hear constructive theological reflection and develop critical thinking, but also meet with others who shared a concern for evangelical theology in Scotland (and beyond) and learn something of what it means to do theology in community. I trust that the society will go from strength to strength and I look forward to including papers from the SETS annual conference in future editions.

Third, I am honoured to take the mantle from my esteemed teacher, Alasdair I. Macleod. Alasdair has been a mentor and friend since my student days in the Free Church College, graciously sparing time to a talkative student who could only (it surely must have seemed) talk about New Testament studies. I am delighted that he will continue to serve as an associate editor.

Fourth, it is a pleasure to work with a wider team of highly competent colleagues, working within the Church and the Academy in Scotland. I believe we share a concern for careful theological reflection that has the good of the Church at heart.

As I write this, the year 2004 is only two and a half weeks old. That we should now be living in the year 2004 is quite amusing to one who, as a child, watched a science-fiction television programme called *Space 1999*. Thankfully, I am still able to enjoy a tasty meal in the twenty-first century rather than the pills and pastes which the science-fiction writers envisaged!

That we should live in a time which is identified as 2004 years from the birth of Jesus Christ (even if the mathematics is a few years adrift!) might lead Christians to believe that things will continue as they always have done. How mistaken, we may think, were those throughout the ages who anticipated the return (or ‘parousia’, meaning ‘presence’) of Jesus in their lifetime. And so, in our determination not to fall into the same trap, the people of God of today may well dismiss from our day-to-day experience any thought of Jesus’ return, relegating discussion of the parousia of Jesus to those moments when we feel in need of a rip-roaring argument about ‘the rapture’ or ‘the Millennium’.

I suspect that if Paul had been told towards the end of his life in the mid-60s AD that Jesus would not have returned by the beginning of the year 2004 AD, he would have been surprised. I do not believe, however, that it would have led him to despair, because Paul (no doubt following Jesus’ own words) always recognised that his responsibility was not to know God’s timetable for Jesus’ return but to be prepared for it. But neither, I believe, would this news have led him to complacency. As he writes to his colleague Timothy towards the end of his final letter (2 Timothy 4:1-8), written perhaps some 30 to 35 years after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, he charges Timothy in the strongest of terms to carry out a task which will occupy him still for an undefined period into the future. Yet, he does so by charging Timothy ‘before God and Christ Jesus who is coming to judge the living and the dead’ and calling him to live out his ministry in the light of his ‘appearing’ (*epiphaneia*, 4:1, 8). As Paul describes his own experience, it is clear that this has much more than academic significance for him. Rather, he has lived and lives in hope of the ‘crown of righteousness’, the victory wreath which will be awarded to him in person by the Lord for whom he has longed. Like a highly focused athlete (*cf.* 4:7), Paul’s delight in this face-to-face encounter has been his motivation through all the arduous course he has completed.

I wonder what impact it may have had on Timothy’s ministry, if he lived in the light of Jesus’ return as Paul did. I wonder what impact it might have on our lives and ministries if we did so too, even in the year 2004. Will we really be among those who ‘have loved his appearing’ (4:8)?

In this number

We begin with a fresh perspective on the so-called ‘New Perspective’ from Professor Donald Macleod of the Free Church College in Edinburgh, who

argues that Luther may have had stronger support for his views on Jewish theology than some modern scholars have claimed.

From ancient Jewish literature, we are led into the recent contentious debate concerning the ‘Openness of God’ by Professor Stephen Williams of Union Theological College, Belfast, who raises important questions not only about the portrayal of God found in certain ‘Open Theism’ writings but also about how discussion of the serious issues which are undoubtedly at stake should be framed.

We are glad to welcome an article by the Revd Ivor Macdonald of Skye, who provides some theological reflection on ‘the land’ – an issue of considerable contemporary importance in the part of Scotland where he ministers, and of significance well beyond these borders.

The fourth article comes from Michael Bird, a PhD candidate at the University of Queensland in Australia, who surveys the way in which recent literature has related the resurrection of Jesus to justification, before providing fresh exegesis of some significant Pauline passages to support his own proposal.

Finally, the Revd David Strain, who has recently begun pastoral ministry in a new charge in London, provides biblical-theological reflection on church planting.

The Editors trust that these articles will so inform, encourage, stimulate and provoke readers that they will be of benefit to the Church and will enable readers to clarify further their thinking on these important topics. If they result in future articles for *SBET*, so much the better!

Alistair I. Wilson