

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_sbct-01.php

GUEST EDITORIAL: THIRTY YEARS ON

With this issue the *Bulletin* enters its the thirtieth year. This milestone provides an opportunity to reflect on the history of the *Bulletin* and on its ongoing mission in the world of theological publishing. Before casting an eye over its contents throughout the past three decades, it might be helpful to recall that the *Bulletin's* roots go back to the late 1950s when its direct predecessor the *Scottish Tyndale Bulletin* made its appearance. The Scottish Tyndale Fellowship (STF) was initiated in 1958 under the inspiration of R. A. Finlayson and G. W. Grogan and, as the name of the new body suggests, it was associated with the Tyndale Fellowship south of the border. The activities of STF were focused on an annual conference where theological teachers and researchers met with practising church ministers interested in theology. Speakers at the conference frequently included one of the prominent members of the Tyndale Fellowship, but the majority of papers were given by people ministering in Scotland, either in academia or in the pastorate. The *Scottish Tyndale Bulletin* was launched to make the conference papers accessible to a wider audience.

While relations with the Tyndale Fellowship have always been friendly and helpful, by the late 1970s our colleagues south of the Tweed-Solway line became concerned that the disparity between the two bodies sharing a common brand was confusing. They suggested that the STF should either become a body for evangelical academics teaching or doing theological research, or reconstitute itself under a different name that would facilitate its desire to provide an interface where evangelical academics and church leaders could interact on theological issues. So in 1981 the Scottish Tyndale Fellowship became the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society (SETS). At the same time the *Scottish Tyndale Bulletin* metamorphosed into the *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* (*SBET*) in partnership with Rutherford House which was founded that year by William Still and Sinclair Ferguson. The link with Rutherford House provided a much needed administrative base for the new journal which enabled it to become a professional, highly respected publication that would build up a readership furth of Scotland, particularly in the rest of the UK and the USA. The first editor of *SBET* was Nigel Cameron, Warden of Rutherford House. Nigel and his immediate successor—David F. Wright—between them edited the journal for half its life span. There have been seven editors in all.

SETS has always been aware of its origins in the STF; in fact its 1988 conference was promoted as a celebration of SETS' thirtieth anniversary.

And it continued to invite members of the Tyndale Fellowship as speakers, including Gerald Bray, F.F. Bruce, David Cook, Dewi Hughes, Howard Marshall, Gordon McConville, Bruce Winter, Chris Wright, and D.F. Wright. The papers given by most of these were published in *SBET*, which from the beginning has honoured the core commitment of SETS to bridge academia and church by also publishing contributions from ministers, like Howard Taylor and Gordon Palmer, actively working at the ecclesial coal face. SETS was founded with the primary aim 'to promote within Scotland the advance of evangelical theology in the biblical, doctrinal, historical and practical fields'. *SBET* has interpreted somewhat broadly the geographical reference, for articles from Scotland, England and Wales have been supplemented by contributions from Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Holland, India, Ireland, Nigeria, and—easily more than any of these—the USA. Not surprisingly many of the articles have focused on the discipline of dogmatics with perhaps the most popular topics being the Trinity, Christology, atonement and adoption. In addition, articles on historical theology have explored the early church fathers and the reformers, especially Calvin and Luther. But Owen, Edwards, Bavinck, and Barth have by no means been overlooked. In addition, the Bulletin has frequently dipped into Scotland's own Christian heritage. Celtic Christianity and Scottish revivalism have been scrutinized by Donald Meek, while other writers, including Donald Macleod and T. F. Torrance, have highlighted aspects of the theology of Duns Scotus, Robert Leighton, Thomas Halyburton, the Marrow Men, Edward Irving, J. McLeod Campbell, George Adam Smith, James Denney, and H.R. McIntosh.

Although there has been a strong emphasis on dogmatics, the theology articulated in *SBET* has been light years away from abstract scholasticism. The journal has sought to honour the objective of SETS 'to promote theology in the service of the church', with articles on preaching, the pastor, the church as a witnessing community, deacons and elders, women's ministry, and discipleship, as well as others on baptism and the eucharist. On reflection, more could have been done on eschatology, and perhaps the ministry of women required more in-depth treatment, given the sea change taking place in evangelical practice. Another SETS goal manifested by *SBET* is 'to promote theology faithful to Scripture'; the journal has featured pieces on commitment to Christ and the doctrine of Scripture, the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures, engaging the Scriptures, and biblical hermeneutics, as well as numerous articles on specific facets of biblical theology. *SBET* has also sought to fulfil a third SETS aim, *viz.*, 'to promote theology grounded in scholarship, informed by worship, sharpened in debate, catholic in scope, with a care for Scotland and its people'. There have been articles on the theology of worship and of prayer;

catholicity has been evident in the broad denominational and global pool of contributors. A contemporary Scottish focus has been evident in articles like those on Scottish nationhood and on the practising of theology in a Scottish housing scheme.

SBET has had a family feel to it. This may be because many of the articles originated as papers given at SETS conferences where participants find a forum in which thought can be sharpened in debate and earthed in the lived experience of the group. In a sense, today SETS fulfils a role somewhat similar to that of the ‘Schools of the Prophets’ in the books of Samuel and Kings. In these ancient prophetic companies theological reflection and proclamation was a matter of urgency, for in the time of Samuel the prophetic companies were called to reconstitute national life in the wake of the religious disintegration of the Judges period. Later, in the time of Elijah and Elisha, the prophetic communities had the divinely given responsibility to resist and repulse the most determined political attempt in the history of Israel to supplant the worship of Yahweh. The ‘death of Christian Britain’ on the one hand,¹ and the blitzkrieg by the new atheists on the other,² suggest that parallel challenges exist today for SETS and other similar bodies.

Because many of *SBET* articles are written in the church and outside the academy their potential to serve ‘as a catalyst for theological reflection and evangelical action’ (another SETS’ aspiration) has been enhanced. The subjects of some of the contributions cited above highlight their focus on praxis, and in addition a cluster of articles on the interface between gospel and culture written by theological practitioners has offered valuable insights on contextualising the gospel in the culture while at the same time confronting the culture with the gospel. All in all, the almost 290 articles that have been published—not to mention the 960 plus book reviews—constitute a veritable theological encyclopaedia that is well worth consulting. Alas! probably only relatively few individuals have a complete set of issues, but thankfully some theological libraries in the UK and the USA do. Hopefully soon it may be possible to extend the availability and accessibility of the journal by posting back numbers

¹ Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000*, London / New York, 2001. In a letter to Scotsman Newspapers, 2 January 2011, Brown claims that the Scottish Household Survey indicates that in 2008 40 per cent of Scots self-identified as ‘no religion’, up from 28 per cent in 2001,

² ‘So religion appears to be a vulnerable target waiting to be demolished by a few well-aimed tank shells. What the atheist militia have actually unleashed in the past couple of years has been a blitzkrieg.’ (*In God we Doubt: Confessions of a failed atheist*, by John Humphrys, London, 2007.)

online. An index of article titles is in preparation to facilitate searches for particular themes.

In the year that the Scottish Tyndale Fellowship began, Collins Fontana published a popular *Handbook of Christian Theology* for which Ronald Gregor Smith of Glasgow wrote the preface. The handbook identified and expounded in alpha order 103 theological themes authored by as many Protestant theologians of the time. The STF and SETS between them may not have covered all of these topics, but they have come close. And, of course, the breadth of coverage can only expand as, in its fourth decade, *SBET* tackles issues thrown up by postmodernism in the West and dramatic church growth in the global South. Surely *SBET* will wish to encourage theology to recapture its symbiotic relationship with spirituality which sadly it lost under the dominance of Enlightenment thinking, while affirming persuasively and with conviction the unique and exclusive truth claims of Christianity in a prevailing climate of religious pluralism and *laissez faire* tolerance. Additionally, by widening the net of contributors, *SBET* could support the growing number of theologians from the global South, as they borrow from the conceptual vocabulary of their distinctive cultures in order to create expressions of Christian theology that will be new, yet will cohere with the theological DNA of the early ecumenical creeds, the reformed confessions, and twentieth-century formulations such as the Lausanne Covenant.

Furthermore, as *SBET* travels further into the twenty-first century it will require to foster a new apologetics that will facilitate and strengthen Christian witness in the face of increasingly strident secularist attacks. Of course, *SBET* will do all of these things most effectively as it fosters a genuine evangelical ecumenicity that will boldly affirm what is primary and humbly acknowledge what is secondary. *SBET* and SETS are pledged to meet these challenges by articulating and practising the evangel in terms of biblical conviction rather than simply reflecting popular consensus, always heeding the apostolic advice to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). Hopefully, by publishing the papers given at the 2011 SETS conference, this issue helps to set the tone of theological discourse in the foreseeable future.

Fergus Macdonald
SETS Chairman