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Report on MATS 2017

Joseph Vnuk

Peer Reviewed Articles

**Motifs of Death and Hell in the Teaching
of Jesus. Part 2: An Examination of Gehenna**

Kim Papaioannou

**Wise Participation in the Divine Life:
Lessons from the Life of Daniel**

Tim Meadowcroft

**Church and Politics in the Social Doctrine
of the Catholic Church: An Application to PNG**

Douglas Young

Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools



EDITORIAL

This combined issue is unusual for a couple of reasons: the last volume (11) in which two issues were combined was published more than two decades ago in 1995; and this is the first time that papers presented at a MATS conference in the middle of the year have been published in the same year (see the articles by Tim Meadowcroft and Douglas Young), a welcome development indeed.

In his report on MATS 2017, Joseph Vnuk expresses appreciation for a return to Port Moresby. While noting that it can be difficult and more expensive to travel to conferences held in smaller provincial centres, Vnuk adds that MATS conferences must continue to be held at the geographical “margins” because “good theology grows out of” dialogue between theological colleges from all over the country.

In the first essay, Kim Papaioannou continues his examination of a controversial subject, the eternal punishment of the wicked. In this second instalment of a two-part study, he surveys the meaning and use of the word *gehenna*, the most prominent motif associated with “hell” in the synoptic gospels. Papaioannou finds that Jesus was referring his hearers to the Old Testament, and Jeremiah in particular, where the Day of Judgement occurs in the context of a final eschatological war. After careful consideration of all of the relevant passages in the New Testament, he takes the position that Gehenna is the “place” where God will completely destroy the wicked, and then concludes with the observation that this “appears to be a much more palatable, fair, and realistic option than the terrible idea that God will torment human beings throughout the ages of eternity.”

Wisdom is needed, and Tim Meadowcroft provides an exemplary model in the person of Daniel. He argues that Daniel and his friends function as agents of divine wisdom in Daniel 1, and that this wisdom is on display not just in the court tales, but throughout the rest of the book. The bases for making this argument are continuity in both wisdom terminology and the literary expression of participation, and the wise participation of the holy ones along with one like a son of man in the life of God (Dan 7). In the visions, where the certain outcomes of the court tales are wanting, the holy ones live with a view to the eschaton. Wisdom is hidden and the visions demand faithful participation in the divine life until the end actually comes.

By extension, God's people who are today facing similar uncertain times and/or circumstances can continue to participate in the ethical wisdom required by the visions.

Douglas Young makes a case, in the final essay, for the involvement of the churches and individual Christians in the political process. He adduces John Momis as an example. While serving as a Catholic priest, Momis became Deputy Chairman of the Constitutional Planning Committee and, thereby, brought some of the principles of Catholic social doctrine into the Papua New Guinean Constitution. Young goes on to suggest a number of ways in which the churches might work together to place concern for the innate dignity of each person and pursuit of the common good, instead of corruption, at the centre of political life in PNG. The churches need to demonstrate good self-governance, practise servant leadership, participate in consultative political processes, and speak and witness with a common voice. Individual Christians should also run for elected office. By these means, he argues, the rights that flow from respect for the dignity of individuals – equality, participation, and subsidiarity – might contribute to the creation of a more just society.

Scott D. Charlesworth