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EDITORIAL

By the time the Autumn number of the *Bulletin* arrives, Scotland will have voted in its referendum, now known affectionately as ‘#indyref’ thanks to the power of social media. Whatever the results may be, Scotland will be a different place.

As expected, the level of public interest and intensity of debate have both been escalating. It all felt more relaxed, somehow, back in April 2012 when the SETS annual conference anticipated the need for thoughtful, Christian contributions to the issues posed by the referendum.¹ It was already clear at that time—and indeed it was inevitable—that there would be faithful Christians taking up positions on either side of the question: some in favour of a politically independent Scotland, some in favour of remaining a constituent part of the United Kingdom.

Nonetheless, it still came as a surprise to me back in February to encounter the launch of ‘Christians for Independence’ as part of a network of those campaigning on the ‘Yes’ side. Of course there will be Christians responding to the referendum question with a ‘yes’ vote, and equally Christians responding to that question with a ‘no’ vote. What came to me—surely naïvely—as a surprise was that there should be an organization promoting independence as the Christian option.

Perhaps I have just misstated the situation with my use of the definite article. Christians for Independence only ‘assert that the values of equality, fairness and justice associated with the gospel of Jesus Christ would be a firm foundation for a progressive Scotland’. Fair enough. My hunch is that such values would provide a welcome foundation not only for Scotland, but also for the UK, and indeed the whole family of nation states on earth. So it strikes me as odd that such a group should emerge under this banner: there is nothing particularly ‘Christian’, so far as I can see, about a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ vote. That was already clear at the SETS conference in 2012. So I believe it is a good thing that a corresponding Christian organization on the other side of the question has not emerged—or at least, if it has, it has managed not to register on my radar!

Purely anecdotally and unscientifically, Christian voices on both side of the question tend gravitate towards a few themes, at least to judge from own encounters. These can of course be elaborated in quite a number of ways, and may be invoked no matter which way one leans on the question

¹ SETS has mounted the audio resources from this conference together with the published versions of the papers from it as an online resource and contribution to the discussion in the run up to September 18th, available from <<http://j.mp/SETSidentity>>.

itself. I find myself wondering, though, how any of them give expression to the gospel.

One of the prominent themes considers the situation in which Scotland will be better off. Where's the wealth? Yet, as Peter said to the lame beggar at the temple gates, 'Silver and gold have I none, but what I have, that I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!' (Acts 3:6), not only relativizing wealth, but relocating power. And power itself is a second theme: in which political context will the church have the most influence? 'Do you seek great things for yourself?' the Lord enquired of Baruch. 'Seek them not, for I am about to bring disaster upon all flesh; but I will give you your life as a prize of war in all the places where you may go' (Jer. 45:5), a text which spoke deeply to an imprisoned Dietrich Bonhoeffer.² Similarly aspects of people and place feature at various points in the discussion: who best belongs where, and with whom? Yet people of faith know that they are 'strangers and exiles on earth', and 'make it clear that they are seeking a homeland ... [and] desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one' (Heb. 11:13-16).

And there are more themes than these, of course. Even these few serve to demonstrate that while Christians need not always sing from the same hymn sheet, their songs should at least be those of Zion. The referendum debate will continue on its *crescendo poco a poco*, and will offer the opportunity of sounding many discordant notes. In whatever political context the church finds itself come September 19th, Christ will still be its head, and its primary allegiance will be to that King and his kingdom. As the referendum debate generates 'heat', as it surely will, this gospel claim remains the 'light' for Christians participating in it.

² 'I can't get Jer. 45 out of my mind anymore.' *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, 8 (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 2010), p. 306.

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