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SETS (AND SBET)

WHERE HAVE WE COME FROM, AND WHERE TO NOW?

After 60 years, the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society (SETS) is winding up. Last October's Annual Meeting was a poignant affair, yet we were unanimous that our time to disband had come. Thankfully we didn't rush it, and took time to express our regrets and our hopes to take our commitment to fostering 'theology in the service of academy and church' with us.

As former SETS members serve in these settings, SBET will lead the way for us. We're very thankful that Prof Mark Elliott is editing and leading as HTC take add preparing the Bulletin to their growing portfolio; his wide connections and broad sympathies will maintain a robust theological journal with a Scottish focus and an international reach. I know he'll be glad of our prayers, and eager to receive contributions as we move into Volume 42 this year.

When we met, Andrew McGowan read from Ezra 3:8-13 and Haggai 2:1-9 and spoke about the two contrasting attitudes we were feeling: grieving for the former temple at the dedication of the new, aware of what seems to have been lost; yet receiving the promise of a future in which the glory of the new house exceeds the former. Our decision was emotional because of our heritage; however, that was also a cause for thankfulness and we shared a sense of hope as we recognise other groups emerging with similar values, goals and ethos.

His words were a good guide. We have stood on strong shoulders: originally the Scottish equivalent of the Tyndale Fellowship, and shaped by Roderick A. Finlayson, I. Howard Marshall, Geoffrey Grogan, David F. Wright, Fergus Macdonald and numerous other significant players on the Scottish scene. With successive members, committees and presidents from churches and academic settings, we've been able to '*promote Scottish theology which serves the churches, is faithful to Scripture, grounded in scholarship, and catholic in scope.*' We trust these priorities will remain in play as we move out to share and model them in churches, groups and theological conversations.

While cultural changes stretch us, we are grateful there's always another story of God at work in and through his people. Hopeful signs are available: the Edinburgh Theological Reading Group has kept meeting, and is exploring Justin Brierley's '*The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in*

*God*¹ and *‘Coming to Faith through Dawkins’* edited by Denis Alexander and Alister McGrath.²

In theological conversation, we’re seeing a growing desire for refreshment to keep structural change in perspective; and numerous learning opportunities to be equipped to serve, engage with culture and witness to the risen Christ.

Here are just a few examples, with apologies to the church groups and networks I fail to mention. Theological reflection is central to Gospel Partnerships and charismatic Network churches alike. The Scottish Bible Society now have two people full-time in Bible-based trauma healing training. A taster evening for Westminster Theology Centre combined inspiring music with a riveting journey through Ruth as Ali Blacklee Whittall connected us with allusions to similar Old Testament journeys to help us see the deep changes God was working through Ruth and Boaz. The Chalmers Institute’s learning community and conferences aim to ‘resource and equip (us) to exercise faithful Biblical leadership in church and society... educate and form servant leaders who will be disciples of Jesus and make disciples of Jesus’. Among the university theology faculties and study centres, lectures and conversations are often open to all. HTC offers access courses, BA’s, and an MLitt in ‘Theology, worldview & culture.’

Valuable input is available through the Crieff Fellowship to Cornhill to Forge and Cairn. Tyndale House is on the road, bringing ‘World of the Bible’ overview days to Scotland, adding to Tyndale Fellowship and biblical studies gatherings. The Kirby Laing Centre focuses on ‘Christian scholarship and public theology’. And the newly-formed Scottish Church Planting Network held their first conference in April.

As SETS made its decision, so too did the Rutherford Centre for Reformed Theology (RCRT). Its resources are being transferred to HTC, keeping the name in play, with HTC hosting the next Edinburgh Dogmatics conference in 2025 on ‘Creeds, Confessions and the Church’. The planning group includes me on our behalf; the Finlayson Lecture will be included as an evening event. Before then, we’re pleased to commend the Scottish Dogmatics Conference, launching at King’s College Aberdeen May 29-30.

¹ Tyndale House Publishers, 2023 £14.50, 272 pages. ISBN-10:1496466772; ISBN-13:978 1496466778

² Kregel Publications, 2023 £13.75, 272 pages. ISBN-10:0825448220; ISBN-13:978-0825448225

Last October, we prayed for the glory of what is to come to be greater than what we lose in closing. We're thankful to God for these and other initiatives in Scotland.

Mike Parker, former chair of SETS