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

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

EDITORIAL: SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF THEOLOGY

Scottish: 'Scottish', as native to or making one's home in Scotland, plus Scots of the diaspora and friends of Scotland. Not every piece in the Bulletin has to be on the Reformed tradition in its north British Presbyterian garb. However the local and the particular can be overlooked too easily. To try out an analogy: Scotland isn't famous for its indigenous cuisine in the sense that it's more delicious eating-places tend to have a strong influence of Italy, South and South-East Asia, to mention just a few. Yet of course without Scotland there might never have been a tikka masala. Now, there are recipes of dubious antiquity, but which contribute to the dining experience in an unmistakeable way: haggis, for example is something everyone might want to try at least once. Likewise with Scottish theology, only more so because we do have a lot more recipes going back, which come out of the spiritualities and crises to the deposit of the Faith once delivered to the saints. Think 'haggis pakora'. This theological creativity has not ceased, it is not like some dormant let alone extinct volcano. But universities can sometimes homogenise theologies hand in hand with chasing intellectual and cultural trends, not least through internationalizing and having something to say to 'world issues': all this is not to be dismissed, but the context of living church and living theology in a particular living-place might well be salutary. Where Deuteronomy 6:11 has "drink from wells you did not dig", in other words benefitting from those who went before us, Bernard of Clairvaux (in *De Consideratione*) had: 'let him drink first of the sources of his own well' (*bibet de fonte putei sui primus ipse*) and then Gustavo Gutierrez adapted this to be the title of his 1983 *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, where he urged that 'drinking from our own wells' in terms of drawing from a native theology is essential. How much creative while faithful theology is happening in the Scottish context today? Let us find out!

Bulletin: I have to say I like the word 'bulletin', which means a summary, a bit like a newsletter. Of course in saying 'it's just a wee bulletin', we could be tempted by a sneaky false humility (2 Cor 4:2) while actually taking ourselves quite seriously indeed. Maybe it's less about 'bullet points' and more 'bullet on target'. (It's a metaphor, it's ok.) But does Scotland need this theological bulletin? *Theology in Scotland* in particular and the *Scottish Journal of Theology* (not as Scottish in flavour as it once was, but one can still smell the traces) both serve. Theology can be found also in the pages of the *Innes Review* and in the Records of the *Scottish Church History Society*. Although lacking any clue in the name, theology of a Scottish flavour can be sensed in *The Expository Times*. So

what has this particular theological journal to contribute? It's tempting to be somewhat ambivalent about the serious, heavy, 'peer-review' ethos of a journal when it plays into the totalising university research culture, but even so, critical rigour, comprehensive knowledge of the field, clarity of argument and analysis that feels creative ---all these are necessary and desirable. However this Bulletin will be a 'general practice' type of journal, written by experts (let it be hoped) but *for* non-experts, and for that reason attempting to connect rather than to silo. Here biblical specialist, expert in doctrine and philosophical discourse, practical theologian and preacher can play together, and a little child might lead them.

There will be a balance between reviews of books written by professional academics and those written as 'Christian books' for the church bookstall. That is to be welcomed, I think.

Evangelical: This is key term in the name of this periodical, the word that will catch the eye, or cause both eyes to roll. Is that word 'evangelical' derivative of 'Evangelicalism' a sociologically perceptible movement or a set of ideals that would shape people, such that 'evangelical' is both a descriptive or a prescriptive term? Yet is Evangelicalism as a movement one whose shape and motion are more discernible with hindsight through considering the form that it became? In fact in Eighteenth-Century Scotland it was probably easier to say what a *Moderate* looked like (with help from John Witherspoon's *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*) rather than delineate the distinguishing features of his opposite number, who in any case was still at that point better known as a member of the Popular Party rather than an 'evangelical' (John McIntosh). Some decades ago now David Bebbington came to our aid with a four-fold descriptor, since then often disputed but seldom bettered, that was descriptive of a piety: a pietist believes the same things as any Orthodox Reformed (or Lutheran) but it is how she believes those things, viz with a fixation on the Cross, conversion, activism, and Scripture.

Shifts in meaning occur, so that Evangelicals today cannot with good conscience say that the term simply means 'people of the gospel', even if that is a core or seed, or component ingredient of the descriptor. In any case even if we could define the term, we'd then have to recognise that there are open evangelicals, affirming evangelicals, conservative evangelicals (not necessarily the original flavour), political evangelicals, even cultural evangelicals. Now that is no reason for not attempting to retrieve the term as a noun. But perhaps all the smoother (albeit not quite 'plain sailing') if we use it an adjective, not a noun. And an adjective that precedes Theology as it does in the name of this journal.

"The qualifying attribute 'evangelical' recalls both the New Testament and at the same time the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century" (Karl

Barth, *Evangelical Theology* 1963, the first five chapters corresponding to the Warfield Lectures at Princeton); in German *Einführung in die evangelische Theologie*, Zürich: TVZ,). ‘Evangelical’ ...refers primarily and decisively to the bible, which is in some way respected by all confessions... Not all so-called Protestant theology is evangelical theology...Wherever he [God] becomes the object of human science, both its source and its norm, there is *evangelical* theology.’ Barth rounds off this introduction to the lectures by claiming that evangelical theology majors in: (1) the self-revealing God, the God who proclaims himself in the Gospel; (2) the Faith of those confronted by the gospel; (3) God revealing himself in his deeds; (4) no lonely “absolute” God. ‘By definition, the God of Schleiermacher cannot show mercy’. The free love of God that evokes free love and gratitude. This, Barth reminds us, is *Theanthropology* not *anthropotheology*. The Humanity of God does not mean that God is ‘all-too-human.’

Hence the adjective qualifies the substantive, but the choice of noun affects what the qualifier means. Between (a) evangelical church and (b) evangelical theology the meaning of the term ‘evangelical’ will mean something different. Hence a theology that is evangelical could well be not totally identifiable with the theology for, or by, theologians who attend and even lead evangelical churches.

Also, there is the problem of how to define the Evangel, the Gospel. One could criticise Barth for his apparent avoidance of coming to terms with what the word from which ‘evangelical’ is derived, the *euangelion* or gospel. It is a small step from receiving this evangel to evangelising (‘telling others where to buy bread’) and then to mission (‘telling others what they need to think and become’). Creeds and confessions for doctrine are one thing, but how much are we called to proclaim and defend a ‘evangelical-gospel’ mindset for interpreting the world and living in it? Is that what it means to ‘missionize’: *kerygma* (Christ died for our sins and rose for new life) followed up with *didache*: instruction in what to do and think? Perhaps that moral and intellectual consequence of faith (along with the grace to make some progress with it) is part of the ‘fuller gospel’.

One should not try to re-pristinate. Would one want to be so evangelical, and not carefully Trinitarian, be more like Erasmus than Calvin, be so much desirous of getting so close to the source of faith that we burn up? In any case we cannot be very much like people from centuries ago because so much has changed. Scripture might be our channel of a foundational revelation, but that stream will reach us through tradition, experience and reason. Still, we think that Scripture, even if not immediate, can be direct and present, not only as an authority for our thinking the faith but also as something inspiring, a resource for living that faith out. Brevard Childs spoke of the Pastoral Epistles as a supplement where a

living Pauline voice helped Pauline churches interpret what it means to live out the Pauline gospel enunciated in his earlier epistles.

Scripture has to be interpreted of course. Literalism is a matter of degree: what is said is understood not simply in cognitive-linguistic terms, but also in terms of what is being opposed or briefed against, such as when 1 Timothy's Paul says: 'I do not permit a woman to teach' What needs to be said as a priority? We are impatient and want to see our non-negotiables sounded first and loud. It might not be about disagreeing but rather with remembering other things that also need said. Hard cases make bad law, or even the force of the law is not so much in what it rules out as what it sets up and marks out as spheres of blessing, although clearly there cannot be zones without any limits.

Theology: The church right now is both the same as and different from the churches of the 1980s. Theology has to be different, while building on the pre-millennial good stuff. There is today a diffident hesitancy towards writing great systems of theology, towards moving from exegesis to application of the bible, towards trusting movements and their spokespersons. The theological scene is paradoxically smaller, yet more is said about more things. *Quot homines tot sententiae*, as Calvin once put it. Caught between the need to hear a message that will illuminate and an experience-driven *prima facie* suspicion of those who claim to hear God, people vacillate and cling to what seems certain, even the moral certainties, like floating planks once parts of a great galleon called 'The Faith'. Negative theology and deconstruction can often combine. Well, if the result is one of fear and trembling and the silence of salvation being worked out deeply and non-verbally, then all well and good. However, for all the call for ignorance before the Mystery, there is still a fair amount of strident expressions of certainty and strong views with resultant 'theological antipathy' (*odium theologicum*.) Sometimes this (the social media spat, the 'Antiochian incidents' featuring modern-day apostles, the legion of podcasts) might all well be a bit of good fun, 'good for the ratings', and a good shop window for *Theology Inc.*, and yet...

Practitioners might need to invite theologians to help think through things rather than engage in social media salvos on the non-negotiability of belief in penal substitutionary atonement versus the need to believe in salvation contingent on non-violence and the force of love and life. Both these positions can be asserted, often because there is a sense that this truth is in danger of being forgotten, of the ship lurching to one side. And a reluctance to countenance that truth is in the middle since while there can be unity despite the differences by the operation of love and the Spirit, there cannot be unity *in* the disagreement, as the respective underlying valuable points of each position gets to be considered at least.

With all that said, what follows are articles both learned, as engaging with theological thought, and relevant to some aspects of church life and ministry. Take, read, delight, profit!