

## IN THIS ISSUE

This inaugural issue of the *Bible and Contemporary World* journal reflects the diverse backgrounds and interests of the graduates of the MLitt program of the same name at the University of St Andrews.

- Tom Skelton describes himself as “father to three and husband to one.” He has worked as a minister in the Elim Pentecostal movement for almost ten years, the five most recent years in Aberdeen. Public theology is his primary area of theological interest, and his work in Aberdeen, readily available on the church website and as podcasts, reflects the most fundamental of themes: how do we exist together?
- Graham Deans, whose writes about discipleship in the Book of Revelation, was ordained to the ministry in the Church of Scotland, and served in parishes in Fife, Dumfries, Orkney and Aberdeen, before retiring to Kirkcaldy in 2017. In addition to his ministerial service, he is a published hymn writer, has been a member of the Hymn Society of Great Britain & Ireland since 1993, and was the Commentator at the Festival of Hymns when the Society visited St Andrews in 2016.
- Irena Widmann, in addition to her MLitt from St Andrews, holds a PhD in Musical Composition from the University of Leeds. She is a minister in Kreuzlingen, Switzerland, with special interest in Christian spirituality and pilgrimage in particular. She is a certified pilgrim guide for European Routes of St. James (EJW1) and walked its Swiss section from Constance to Geneva before setting on leading church groups herself. Originally from Kiev, she used to compose music in different genres and for various instrumental combinations as well as to play organ for churches before being ordained in the Swiss Reformed Church in 2012.
- Constanze M.F. Schummer holds a First Class Honours degree in Medieval History in 1985 and a Ph.D. in History in 1990 from St Andrews. After years as a journalist in the field of design and architecture in Germany, Italy and Britain, she now is IB-Coordinator and teacher of History and Theory of Knowledge at Schule Schloss Salem in southern Germany.

The articles are similarly varied. Deans' article takes Scripture itself as its topic. Schummer's recounts the life of Hermanus Contractus, an 11<sup>th</sup> Century Benedictine monk, scholar, and writer in the community of the Reichenau, who suffered a lifetime of disability, most likely ALS, but never fully lived the life of the monastery as a participant, not a patient. Widmann's topic, the medieval Camino de Santiago, comes out of her avocation as a pilgrim leader. Skelton's by contrast, addresses the thoroughly contemporary issue of religious influence on public discourse.

Yet, at the same time, all the papers address the question raised by the prophet Ezekiel, and pondered by theologians ever since: how then shall we live? How do persons of faith make their way through a skeptical world? As Schummer's title asks, what, when all is said and done, constitutes a successful life? Certainly, with the recent death of Jean Vanier, the special place in God's heart occupied by the disabled challenges us to reevaluate how we regard the disabled person's place in the world. Deans' portrayal of Revelation as "a robust critique of a world dominated by Roman power and ideology," which "calls on the Christian community to confront the religious, political, and economic idolatries of the time" casts John's final book of the New Testament as precisely the sort of Christian engagement with the world that Skelton describes as a pneumatologically based utterance that "deploy(s) ... the words that are being spoken by God into a given temporal and spatial context." And Widmann's article shows how pilgrimage is at once a deeply personal endeavor and one that connects the pilgrim with others across both time and space.

All four of our authors are both serious scholars, studying and writing about serious topics, and at the same time deeply engaged in the Christian vocation in the world. They reflect the mission of the Bible and Contemporary World program to help us understand how culture shapes, and has been shaped by, Christian belief, practice and theology. I trust they will help the reader along his or her own pilgrimage down that path.

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