



Editorial

The topic for the Fraser Prize 2018 – *The Spiritual Nurture of Children* – was the main theme of the Scottish Church Theology Society conference held in January of this year. The winning paper was by James Thieke whose essay is published at the centre of this issue.

In “Adam Smith, Thomas Chalmers and the Formation of a Moral Economy” Bill Thomas argues that one of the tasks of the church is to restore and develop moral behaviour in business life. While the contemporary church is now much less engaged with the moral training of secular society, during and shortly after the Scottish Enlightenment Adam Smith and Thomas Chalmers demonstrated the rationale for church involvement with regard to ‘seemingly unrelated, even conflicting, moral and economic systems.’

Adam Smith analysed the simple manufacturing systems in Scotland and evaluated them and, in so doing, became the founder of Political Economy. In this economy virtue is also essential, expressed through rules of perfect prudence, strict justice and proper benevolence.

Chalmers understood that the inherent tendencies of self-interested commercial activity must be attenuated by the general, social development of a moral character which views others as important. As producers, services and customers are all linked, and each transaction relates to a wider economy, so a moral framework ensures that moral and ethical obligations are upheld. In his *Seven Essays* Thomas Chalmers discussed the development of the virtuous individual based on the text of Philippians 4:8. In *On Political Economy* he further insisted that character is essential to the well-being of an economy, and that Christian education is the key to development of character.

The aim of Smith, Chalmers and the church was to prepare individuals to implement virtuous business transactions, under the guidance of an invisible, virtuous hand. Thomas argues that the Church still has a role to play today in the development of a virtuous community that will contribute to a critique of the secular economy.

One could add to this the task of the further development of a Christian moral critique of capitalist society in relation to global ecology.

In “Looking for Lament in the Church of Scotland: Theological Opposition and Liturgical Alternatives” Malcolm Gordon uses the liturgical legacy of Augustine and Calvin and, guided by Nicholas Wolterstorff, examines *the loss of lament* in the worship of the Church of Scotland. Quoting John Swinton, Gordon says, ‘lament suggests that a person who is lamenting has a genuine grievance’ directed at other human beings, or concerning the acts of God. Wolterstorff, in particular, has explored why some major Christian traditions have ‘stifled’ lament in their theology. This tendency can be traced back as far back as Augustine and, later, to John Knox. Gordon also examines Calvin’s approach in which an emphasis was laid on patience, forbearance and gratitude. In more recent liturgical publications in the Church of Scotland, e.g. *Prayers for Divine Service* of 1929, the dominant tone is one of acceptance of suffering, since it results ‘in inward sanctification and reward.’

Gordon then outlines alternative responses to suffering by reflecting on the work of Millar Patrick, who was involved in the preparation of the 1928 *Book of Common Order* for the United Presbyterian Church. In this liturgical volume the psalms of lament were heavily edited, retaining anguish of the soul, but leaving out the anger. Similar redaction was also used in the *Book of Common Order* (1940) of the Church of Scotland. Gordon argues, in conclusion, for the inclusion of both the outrage and hope chiefly notable in the psalms as these are essential ‘acts of meaning enabling the faithful living that lament offers.’ Gordon’s research may well remind readers of the more general historical and cultural traces of the repression of lament in the traditional stoicism of Scottish personal responses to sorrow and grief.

Jock Stein, in “Poetry, Paradox and the Psalms”, introduces us to a variety of types of paradox, along with a discussion of the use of paradox. In terms of poetry, the poet can use paradox to inhabit a character, or to create poetic statements that do not resolve themselves. Paradox, notes Stein, can be found in a whole range of areas.

This leads to a consideration of paradox in the psalms, alongside the use of chiasm, parallelism and acrostic. In general, the psalms

offer fruitful ground for considering the contradictions inherent in faith – more than this, in the contradictions inherent in life itself (see Psalm 37). Psalm 22, of course, contains a personal declaration of agony at God’s absence which then moves into a profound affirmation of his presence.

Stein then turns to the psalms and their historical influence on Scottish writers, drawing on Hogg, Allan, Burns, Jacobs and Henryson to name but a few. In addition, Hugh McDiarmid’s “A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle” is full of carefully structured examples of paradox, or *antsyzygy* as McDiarmid chose to call it.

Turning to the present, Stein quotes Karla van Vliet, and John Deane and offers some profound examples of the widespread use of paradox. As Stein suggests, paradox may offer a better way, ‘to recognise the mysteries at the heart of the universe and human life, let alone Christian theology.’

In “The Language of the Church: Westminster in Review” W. John Carswell reflects on the discussion concerning the Westminster Confession of Faith at the General Assembly of 2018. Helpfully, he places this discussion in the wider context of similar historical debates within the PC(USA) and puts forward the PC(USA)’s *Book of Confessions* as a model for development. The *BoC* includes the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicean Creed, parts of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Barmen Declaration among others and is intended to offer general guidance. At their best, says Carswell, confessions offer the church teaching on what to believe, what to do, and how to live faithfully. Contemporary statements of faith, however, still remain of central importance. Carswell uses Alister McGrath’s four uses of doctrine as further categories for discussion, that is: doctrine as social demarcator, as narrative, as an interpretation of experience and as a source of sapiential value. A contemporary statement of faith would serve, firstly, to illuminate the fact that the church *inhabits* a narrative different from that of contemporary culture. Secondly, as an interpretation of experience a contemporary statement of faith would act as an account of what the church *believes*. Thirdly, the notion of doctrine as sapience would assist in clarifying what the *church* resolves to do through *knowing and living in* Christian faith.

Carswell concludes by suggesting that the Church of Scotland develop its own contemporary confessional answers to the current situation in ‘language commensurate with [...] the contemporary era.’ Carswell’s paper itself makes a valuable contribution to that ongoing and essential discussion.

Ian Maxwell
Editor