

Editorial

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We are pleased to present this sixth issue of *Theology and Ministry*. Much of the editorial work has taken place in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, which has highlighted the need for the church to reflect quickly, instinctively, and faithfully on its experience and practice in the light of the resources of Scripture and tradition. Articles on Covid-19 and the church may well feature in future issues; for now, our contributors all engage the interface between theology and ministerial practice, on a wide range of important topics.

In the first piece, 'Offering What is Precious', Timothy Armstrong reads the account of Abraham's binding of Isaac (the Aqedah) in Genesis 22 as Christian Scripture, specifically as a basis for a Christian theology of giving which he argues is more fruitful than turning directly to passages about tithing. Christians should approach giving with an attitude of fear and awe that leads us to respond to God by giving — indeed, sacrificing — what is costly and valuable for us. This is a participation in God's promise, which ultimately serves the longer term good of the individual as well as the kingdom. Christians are offered not percentages of income but a challenge to adopt a more fundamental attitude towards God, on the basis of which we are to work out how to give sacrificially.

There follow two articles in the domain of doctrine. In 'On Doctrine and Discipleship', Nick Comiskey notes the gap between Christian belief and practice, and through the work of Medi Ann Volpe and Ellen Charry explores ways in which doctrine might inform practice. Doctrine preserves mystery, giving boundaries

within which creative theological reflection occurs; it enriches our understanding of God, helping us make sense not only of him but of all of life; and it helps us internalise deeply what a Christian response should look like. The practice of theology is also likened to the practice of medicine, not scientific in a positivistic Enlightenment sense, and yet holistic and healing, requiring wisdom in moving from a body of knowledge and dogma to the real and individual case in hand. Finally, he examines the integration of both of these themes in Julian of Norwich, who explores the psychological impact of doctrine at an accessible level. In the following piece, Joshua Jones turns to the question of pneumatology, exploring the deficiency of practical theological engagement with the Holy Spirit. He traces some reasons for this, then engages Dostoevsky's Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov* as a negative example of Spirit-less theology, before arguing alongside Moltmann that the Spirit suffers in his costly, redemptive superintending of the world. This is, ultimately, a call to practical theologians for a more developed pneumatology.

Our next two pieces engage in historical work to address live questions within the Church of England, though with relevance to all churches. In "'Do You Believe that God is Calling You to this Ministry?'" , Cara Lovell explores the historical origins of the subjective and objective sides to discernment of vocation. Whilst offering a critique of both traditions, she argues that the external call of the church should play a greater role in the Church of England's vocations process. This would not only have a bearing on overall numbers of vocations, but may additionally increase vocations from under-represented groups who have a tendency to self-select out of the process. Turning to the equally pressing questions of mission and church growth in the post-Christendom West, and especially in the light of the Church of England's 'Renewal and Reform' agenda, Samuel Crossley in "'No Ground for Discouragement'" draws on Lesslie Newbigin's missiological thinking. Specifically, he highlights Newbigin's emphasis on mission as centrifugal rather than centripetal, and as a humble and open rather than a triumphalist endeavour. This led him to a sharp critique of the Church Growth Movement with its obsession with numbers and measurable forms of growth. Newbigin's theology may, ultimately, represent a partial picture, but it nevertheless offers a helpful

correction which speaks to the early twenty-first as much as to the mid-twentieth century.

Finally, in 'Death in *Fortnite*', Matthew Pulis takes us into the online worlds that large numbers inhabit in the domain of gaming. He explores the representation and experience of death and afterlife in this Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game. He does so through qualitative research with a group of Maltese youth, highlighting the different modes of death, connections with non-Christian notions such as reincarnation, and the playful, fun side of what happens after death in *Fortnite*. He explores these themes in conversation with Roman Catholic teaching, arguing that Christian youth work needs to engage seriously and constructively with online gaming as a context that is deeply formative of worldview, practice, and discipleship.

We also carry reviews of books on such important topics as Christian initiation, John Wesley's period in Georgia, prayer and Scripture, the church's engagement with autism, and perhaps most timely of all on race and British churches. It remains for us to express our thanks to the editorial board and all our peer reviewers. Finally, this issue marks Joss Bryan's last as editor. As founding editor, she has had a significant role in the establishment and development of *Theology and Ministry* over the past eight years. As she hands on the baton, we are thankful for all that she has done, and look forward to her continuing contribution as a member of the editorial board.

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