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## EDITORIAL

A question that students often seem to find illuminating is, 'What kind of authoritative textual tradition did each of the three "Abrahamic" faiths produce?' Judaism and Islam both tended to produce *codes*. Whether the Mishnah and Talmud of Judaism, or the Hadith literature in Islam, both codified traditional practice for the guidance of the life of the community. Christianity, however, produced *creeds*. These formed statements of right belief, rather than right practice. This was in part a Christ-centred activity: at the heart of many credal statements Christological cadences may be found, bounded by formal statements on the character of God and nature of humanity and hope.

It is not that Jews and Muslims are uninterested in aspects of belief, nor that Christians are uninterested in ethical living, but the comparison brings to light something noteworthy all the same. It is safe to say that it is trickier to derive 'guidance for living' from creeds than it is from codes. The code will (often) simply tell you what to do under given circumstances, from prayer to property, handling corpses or crops—instructions have been provided. It is different for the Christian believer (there is a clue in that term). The leading concern is with orthodoxy rather than orthopraxy—with belief. Theology of the 'systematic' or 'dogmatic' flavour rather than 'moral' claims pride of place.

At one level, this gives Christian mission some clear advantages. It has often been noted that the lack of detailed prescription regarding worship practice for the nascent churches in the writings that would become the New Testament has led to widely divergent practices embedded in equally divergent cultural settings. The stirring vision of such worship being offered by innumerable worshipers, 'from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages' (Rev. 7:9)—like the evangelists' record of Jesus' ministry in Greek rather than Aramaic—lends authenticity to the translation of Christian scripture into every language, rather than restricting 'Scripture' to its original languages. A contrast here is often drawn to the traditional Islamic teaching that the fixed form of the Qur'an must be Arabic.

At another level, however, there can be frustrations. Derek Webb's incisive lyrics in his song 'A New Law' capture this sense with an acerbic undertone: 'I don't want to know if the answers aren't easy / So just bring it down from the mountain to me.' Painting is so much easier when it's done by numbers. Caricature? Perhaps. But like all good caricature, it has readily recognizable elements within it that tell some home truths.

The Psalms provide glimpses of another way of thinking about the relationship between 'creed' and 'code', between belief and behaviour.

Like many others, I have found helpful John Piper's catena of prayers from the Psalms with the acronym 'IOUS' (see [http://j.mp/pray\\_IOUS](http://j.mp/pray_IOUS)). In my personalized version, I inject a 'T' before the 'U'—but still from the same verse in the Psalms, 86:11, 'Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name.' If I had been composing that Psalm, I would have inverted the terms in the first part of the verse: 'Teach me your *truth*, so I may walk in your *ways*.' The psalmist's inspired prayer has different priorities. It is the rightly orientated and ordered walk that inclines the psalmist towards the truth that otherwise would be missed. And that truth provides the avenue along which the psalmist walks. The indissoluble relationship between the way and the truth leads to life. The second part of the verse reinforces this perception. It is not, as might it might seem at first blush, a prayer for 'unity'. Rather, accurately diagnosing the fragmentary shards splintering the mind turned in on self, the psalmist prays for the unified, whole heart (86:12) which has at its centre the fear of the Lord.

So perhaps I got it wrong as I began this brief reflection. For the Christian, it is not a matter of deriving right action from right belief. From the psalmist's perspective, character and clarity are very much of a piece. I wonder if it would make a useful thought experiment to consider what it might mean for moral theology to provide a framework for systematic theology, rather than the other way round? Or rather, for that dividing wall to be broken down completely!

## IN THIS NUMBER

Among the articles in this number, the first two have their origins in the 2010 Spring SETS Conference, held at Rutherford House from the 6th-7th of April. Tom Houston was this year's Finlayson Lecturer, addressing the conference theme of 'Globalization' out of his many years of international experience with of British and Foreign Bible Society, World Vision International, and the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. Ken Ross, now minister in the west of Scotland, but formerly professor in the University of Malawi then General Secretary of Church of Scotland World Mission Council, offers an analysis of the southward drift of Christianity's 'centre of gravity'.

The relationship of justification and sanctification, treated in the Spring number of the *Bulletin*, attracts contributions attending to different facets of that relationship, now from the vantage point of the writings of the magisterial reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin: John Fesko, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Seminary

California, examines Luther's views, while Ashish Varma, pursuing doctoral studies at Wheaton, tackles Calvin.

The potential contribution of Hans Frei to an evangelical handling of Scripture is explored by Bruce Ashford, Dean of The College at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and David Nelson, Chief Academic Officer at the University of North Carolina's School of the Arts.

Our reviews in this issue cluster around those latter two topics. First, an array of titles relating to the Calvin Quincentenary are reviewed, followed by a number works focusing on aspects of Scripture.

*David Reimer*