

Mid last year in Fremantle, delegates gathered at the University of Notre Dame, Western Australia, for the ANZATS 2014 Conference to consider “The Eclipse of God: Theology after Christendom.” Keynote speaker Graham Ward gave three very well-received lectures, two of which we are delighted to reproduce here, along with revised versions of several papers from the conference. “What I am suggesting here is that the structures of what we believe and what makes a belief believable have changed,” says Ward. Arguing that there has been an epistemological shift in relation to the act of believing, Ward explores contemporary culture, in particular the way theological and religious signs are present but without content, and then draws implications for “embedding theology” today. Philip Kariatlis argues that Eastern Orthodox traditions offer an important focus on experience of God as central methodologically to the scholarly undertaking of theology. In a context of globalization and movement of peoples, Kamal Weerakoon proposes that Christians with personal experience of cultural hybridity can become intercultural mediators in contextualizing the gospel for mission. Biblical scholar John Olley makes a case that is also a plea for recovering the Psalms as a Christian songbook with the power to make contemporary worship and prayer transformative. Frank Rees recommends looking beyond Sunday church worship to recognize the variety of ways in which people keep the Sabbath, affirming—but not uncritically—the life-giving values that underpin the new Sunday “rituals” of many contemporary Australians.

The current issue also includes several general articles. Considering the Gospels of Mark and John, Dorothy Lee compares the way “signs and works” function in the two gospels, to convey narrative and theological meaning. In their own ways, Lee suggests, both Mark and John draw “on the same symbolic impulse in the Jesus-traditions of the earliest communities,” to enable their audiences to experience the life-giving power of Jesus’ works. For Andre van Oudtshoorn, preaching prophetically is difficult but essential for the contemporary church; he develops a model for prophetic preaching by which “a congregation is helped to gain and withdraw social capital to transform the world.” To what extent is the church necessary to the mission of God? This is the question Adam Dodds addresses, arguing that the church is “fundamental to the *missio Dei*.”

We round out this bumper issue with a special section on “Visual Exegesis,” a relative newcomer to biblical studies, but one which may well become an essential tool in the kit of biblical scholars. Rosemary Canavan opens the discussion helpfully with a brief survey of the field and a description of her own recent research. Harry Maier’s response highlights the potential of visual exegesis for study both of ancient and contemporary texts in their respective cultural contexts. Visual exegesis reminds us that readers’ engagements with texts is sensory. Art historian Claire Renkin calls us to respect the image on its own terms, asking how scholars move effectively and respectfully between word and image.

As I read and reread the articles in this issue, I was struck by two things: the question of engagement with contemporary culture and the question of method in theology. There can be a tension between these that our contributors in their different ways are both addressing and leaving unresolved. The word humility came up more than once; I affirm the need for humility at this point of tension, especially where contemporary culture might be calling us to more compassionate action than particular methodologies might seem to allow.

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20 February 2015