

Enough said

Mike Ovey introduces this edition of *Commentary* by reflecting on the unchanging sufficiency of scripture, in a culture which creates new issues and situations for Christians to navigate



When we planned this edition of *Commentary* we wanted an emphasis on how theory and practice meet. There's limited value in having orthodox thoughts without those working through in real life. That's very much motherhood and apple pie, I think, and not the most controversial thing we've ever said. But it does relate to a point that is highly controversial: the sufficiency of scripture.

For as we put the articles together it struck me again how ambitious it is to think of having a theory that can work out in practice at all. The reason for that is that practice in the 21st century is so varied. That comes out in the range of the articles in this edition.

Ray Porter tackles the relationship of Christian and state marriage, drawing on his missionary experience from Indonesia. Julian Hardyman reflects on what relational qualities are needed day-by-day in pastoral ministry. John Putt writes on the way we can take unconscious class behaviour into our churches on a Sunday morning and, all too unawares, exclude others.

Caroline and Rob Bridgewater think through the impact of work on the life of women in our churches. Chris Green provides a snippet about our joint life as Christians taken from his new book on church. Glynn Harrison explains some of the tragic flaws in the self-esteem movement.

And last but not least, Rich Aldritt and Ash Carter write about the Bible, the book held together by its testimony to Jesus Christ.

From church-state relations to work to class to self-esteem. The sheer range of practice we face is bewildering. And no doubt to someone who doesn't believe, the sheer *chutzpah* of tackling this range must be equally bewildering. So why do it?

The answer takes us back to the sufficiency of scripture. The first sermon in Book 1 of the Homilies puts it this way: 'Unto a Christian man, there can be nothing either more necessary or profitable, than the knowledge of Holy Scripture; forasmuch as in it is contained God's true word, setting forth his glory, and also man's duty.'

One of the striking things here is the emphasis on the way that God's word instructs us on how to honour God as God,

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in our treatment of him and of each other. This is precisely what Romans 1:21 points out we fail to do. Sometimes we fail because we very obviously worship created things rather than the Creator, and sometimes when we worship the Creator in ways that actually dishonor him.

Martin Luther perceptively pointed out that Romans 1:21, with its stress on honouring God as God, opens up the prospect that we may offer a false honour, an insulting honour. This is one reason why the scriptures are so precious: they instruct us in honouring God rightly, and they do so because they are his word.

That takes us to the sufficiency of scripture. This is necessarily implied by Paul's description in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, with its emphasis on God's word instructing and correcting us, that we may be 'complete, equipped for every good work'.

Sufficiency doesn't mean that scripture contains all information in the cosmos, nor that it explicitly addresses every situation in detail that a human being could conceivably face. But it does highlight that scripture has, among other things, a very practical aim: how we should live. It gives us enough to honour God as God in our lives.

And that's when the sufficiency of scripture becomes controversial. If God has said enough for me to be equipped for every good work, then I cannot claim that since I am in a new situation, I have to make my own mind up, because 'scripture doesn't contemplate what I am facing'. When I do that, I may not be explicitly denying scripture, but I am undermining its sufficiency.

We need to make our attitude to the sufficiency of scripture clear here, because as our culture continues to change and innovate, the temptation to lean on our own understanding and claim that we face things scripture just can't deal with will get stronger and stronger. It's easy to erode the authority of scripture if you rule out its sufficiency.

We hope that as you read this edition you are encouraged in the sufficiency of scripture as we face such a diverse range of practice.

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