

EDITORIAL
Looking Back Over Three Years of ERSF
Calvin L. Smith

In the first editorial of the launch edition of the *Evangelical Review of Society and Politics* I highlighted briefly how Christians in Britain were beginning to awaken from a long slumber of privatised faith and noted the rise of public theology across global Evangelicalism. I concluded with the view that with religion playing such an increasingly prominent role in news and current affairs globally it was indeed an exciting time for the journal to be launched.

Looking back since the journal was founded some three years ago, it is quite clear this new-found prominence of faith on the social and political stage is no flash in the pan, with news stories featuring Christianity in the British public square appearing weekly (even daily at times) since. Simply consider the prominence of Christianity in the news for the week prior to when this editorial was written, with the Archbishop of Canterbury criticising the governing Labour Party for treating Christians as an oddity, Tony Blair's interview about his faith and how it influenced his time in office, a UK court throwing out the case of a Christian hotelier couple accused of religious hatred towards a Muslim guest (together with almost universal agreement in the press that, regardless of how one views their actions, the case against the hoteliers ought never to have reached a courtroom), and the impromptu prayer meeting led by Nicky Gumbel (founder of the Alpha Course) during a meeting of church leaders at Number 10. Away from these shores, European churches rang their bells in unison to support action on climate change, a Swiss plebiscite prohibited the building of new Muslim minarets (which France's President Sarkozy supported) for fear it might dilute the country's Christian culture, US Episcopalians selected a lesbian bishop, and church leader Rick Warren repudiated Uganda's new laws on homosexuality.

Clearly, faith in general and Christianity in particular are in the news more than ever which, while a global phenomenon, is all the more poignant in Western European societies that have traditionally espoused secularism and relegated faith to the private sphere. In the UK, there is considerable and growing Christian indignation at what is perceived to be an anti-Christian bias which has continued, arguably even accelerated, during the transition from Blair to Gordon Brown, while the current culture wars are increasingly being played out in the British courtroom. Meanwhile, a major change in US politics will likely herald (indeed has already begun to do so) culture wars similar to

those in Britain in the last 10-15 years, whereby values promoted by governing elites are problematic for Evangelicals. This also seems likely to be the case in Australia under the current administration. In short, far from diminishing in importance religion continues to grow in importance as a determinant of political behaviour, while Evangelicals are increasingly engaging the public square. Thus, now more than ever a broad journal such as ERSP is needed to explore Evangelical responses to and engagement with state and society.

Since its launch three years ago ERSP has become an established peer-reviewed journal serving the Evangelical academic community. It has built up a consulting editorial committee of respected scholars and theologians, attracted contributions from leading Evangelical thinkers, and published articles covering the whole spectrum of Evangelical political thought. Various colleges, universities and seminaries (including well-known non-Evangelical institutions such as Princeton and Tübingen) subscribe to the journal, leading Christian academic publishers seek reviews of their books in ERSP, and journal articles are abstracted by RTA. It is upon this important work we want to build during the next phase of the journal's development.

So what next for ERSP? One of our main priorities is to encourage wider debate on more issues of interest to Evangelicals. Too often, debates carried out in journals can be cumbersome, with theses, responses and counter-responses taking considerable time to air. With this in mind, this edition introduces a new regular feature – the ERSP Forum – whereby various scholars and leading practitioners are invited to express succinct views on a particular issue without seeing what their fellow contributors have written beforehand. The first forum explores Evangelical responses to war, with five quite different and wide ranging views expressed. The next edition will look at Evangelical responses to government involvement in providing healthcare.

Over the next year or two the emphasis is also on expanding the number of subscribing institutions and promoting the journal more generally across theological departments and Christian Liberal Arts institutions. Moreover, as well as seeking contributions from leading Evangelical thinkers, we want to encourage more young scholars to contribute to the journal. This edition also introduces a new section for doctoral candidates to provide information about their current research, and we would encourage supervisors and students to send us details of research which might be of interest to ERSP readers. Finally, in this edition we have improved print layout and quality in keeping with the next phase of the journal's development and wider promotion.

Clearly, the next three years for ERSP are going to be every bit as busy as the first three.