

EDITORIAL

Where do the ETS and its *Journal* stand the year after the membership challenge of Clark Pinnock and John Sanders? The answer to this question cannot be given in a single sentence, and probably not in a single editorial. Nevertheless, it may be helpful to take stock and sketch the implications of last November's vote for the various parties concerned and to survey the road that lies ahead.

The two members whose membership challenges were not sustained by the Society, one assumes, are relieved, though in one case the vote was so close as to hardly constitute a sweeping exoneration (one of those challenging the membership called it a "chastening vote").

There is presumably satisfaction among those who had argued throughout the entire process that expulsion from the Society was a punishment that did not fit the crime, because the case was entirely too circumstantial to be proved "beyond reasonable doubt" and in any case the nature of the Society ought not to be construed so tightly as to expel people who themselves affirm inerrancy.

Those who pressed the case in the end seemed satisfied that protocol had been followed and the Society's constitution had been upheld. Members of the Society were charged to continue to put a supreme value on inerrancy and thus honor the founders' legacy.

Those on the executive committee, one surmises, are relieved that the demands on their time required by this issue are over and they can go back to their scholarly work. They may also feel satisfaction that the fact-finding procedure was (as far as can be known) sincere and did not amount to the rubber-stamp process feared by some.

Those on the committee who authored the minority report contending that the inerrancy clause in the ETS doctrinal statement was not sufficiently specific to exclude John Sanders can be pleased that a sufficient number of members apparently followed their recommendation to vote against, and thus help defeat, the challenge to his membership.

Those on the committee who wrote the majority report in the Sanders case (as well as others among the about 63% who voted in favor of expulsion) can take a certain degree of solace in Russ Bush's motion at the closing business session of the Society. The former ETS president asked the committee to revisit the ETS doctrinal base to see if any changes are needed in light of the fact that the current statement apparently proved inadequate with regard to the meaning of inerrancy in John Sanders' case.

Among ETS members, some (though not many) expressed anger at the Society's lack of doctrinal fidelity (in their view) and resigned their membership. They will no doubt continue to keep a watchful eye on further developments in the Society.

Others think the issue has been settled and it is now time to move on. There are books to be written, and souls to be won, and ETS is broad enough to accommodate even those among its ranks who experiment, speculate, and seek to stretch the boundaries of the existing scope of views represented in ETS.

Yet others think that all is not (yet) well and question the value of a doctrinal base that is signed by all every year when even some on the executive committee (specifically, the most recent and the current ETS president) find that "inerrancy" lacked teeth at least in the Sanders

case. (Other cases were cited in that report where exclusion was deemed warranted on the basis of the existing statement.)

Where does that leave the Society? In one sense, the issue is “sort of” behind us, and the scenario of a divided society has been avoided (though some think this is still a future possibility). In another sense, however, whether or not this is recognized by all, the membership challenge did expose certain inadequacies in the current ETS doctrinal base that have yet to be satisfactorily dealt with. Thus, if the issue is settled in part, it remains in part (some may say, “in large part”) still unsettled.

The difficulty seems to be that “inerrancy” had a fairly well understood meaning (and implications) for the founders of ETS. In crafting the ETS doctrinal basis, they assumed things that, two generations later, can no longer be taken for granted. The battle they thought they won by defining and affirming inerrancy has been eroded through hermeneutics. One wonders if the IBCI Summit I statement on inerrancy (or a similar formulation) should not be taken up as the “definition” of inerrancy one affirms by annually signing the ETS doctrinal basis.

What of the *Journal*, then? Through this process *JETS* did not take sides and served as a forum for discussion. *JETS*'s primary commitment has continued to be quality evangelical scholarship in the biblical and theological disciplines. If anything, I believe that the *Journal* emerges stronger after the latest challenges (though as editor naturally I find it hard to be completely objective here).

As this editorial is written, efforts have begun to put back issues of *JETS* online. Eventually, we will attempt to put all back issues of the *Journal* online, albeit with a time delay to ensure the in-print circulation of the *Journal* in its present form. It is my hope as *JETS* editor that this will expand the reach of the many fine articles and book reviews published every year in our *Journal*.

At the beginning of this new year, I therefore renew my call for you to send me your very best material, so that the *Journal* can continue to fulfill its role as a beacon of first-rate evangelical scholarship. *Soli Deo gloria!*

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