

Looking to the future without forgetting the past



Two of the besetting sins of humanity are found in our attitudes to the past and the future. At one extreme we cling to the past, decrying the present and fearing the future; the cry of our heart is 'Things are not what they used to be!' At the other, we decry the past and look only to a golden future; the cry of our heart is 'Let's not get dragged down by what went before!' They are both forms of idolatry.

What we learn instead from Scripture is to remember from where God has led us through the cross of Jesus,¹ and to hold on to the hope that we have in his resurrection.²

Above all, we live in the present moment – built on a foundation of what God has done, looking to a future God has promised, but living and serving in a present that God has given us for his glory.³

So, while it won't have escaped your attention that the National Health Service (NHS) turned 70 last year, many of our readers may not realise that CMF reaches the same milestone this year.

Growing out of an increasing recognition of the need to equip Christian medical students to grapple with the ethical and professional issues of their day in a godly and biblical manner, CMF was formed out of the Medical Prayer Union and the IVF Graduates' Fellowship movement in June 1949.

It was a time of turmoil – four years after the Second World War, and eleven months after the founding of the NHS. Europe was still living in the wreckage left by seven years of brutal warfare and nearly two decades of unrest and political tyranny. Children still played in the craters and burnt-out shells of buildings destroyed in the Blitz; an impoverished nation that had once been at the centre of a globe-spanning empire was now having to painfully rebuild its infrastructure and learn to find a new place in the world.

The NHS was an expression of a desire to retain the national solidarity hard won in the war. Born out of a belief that none should be denied essential medical care because of poverty or social status, the NHS was one of a raft of changes that created the welfare state.

But these changes also had an impact on the Christian faith. Previously church-run and faith-based institutions became secular, state-run hospitals and clinics. The church was being moved to society's margins, and Christians in medicine and nursing found that they were having to express their faith in an increasingly secular workplace and wider culture.

When CMF started therefore, it faced some of the same challenges we are familiar with today – a country facing huge social and political change, recovering from over a decade of austerity, and a culture moving further and further away from its Christian roots. When CMF was founded it was felt that there needed to be a space for Christian medics to come together and address the ethical and spiritual challenges of their day. That need is, if anything, far greater now than it was 70 years ago. We face a rapidly changing world of new medical and communication technologies, upended social norms and values, and a nation facing significant new social divisions and political uncertainties.

We have much to learn from what God did through our predecessors and how CMF has navigated these waters before.

CMF has grown and changed a lot from that small group of doctors who met together in central London in 1949. We now include nurses and midwives as members, and have a global focus through our membership of ICMFA (an international network of Christian medical fellowships that CMF helped found in the 60s). We have hundreds of members working in global health and mission, and thousands more working at every level within the NHS.

We continue to look at this changing world and ask how we should respond as Christians. Our one constant is God himself and the gospel of Jesus – the greatest hope we have to share with this hurting world. So, we remember and learn from our past with thankfulness to him, prepare for the future in hope of him, and live and work in the present for his glory.

CMF remains a fellowship with a simple vision – to unite and equip Christian doctors and nurses to live and speak for Jesus Christ. This year, we have a new Chief Executive, Mark Pickering. Mark shares his thoughts on the past, present and future of CMF in the spring edition of *CMF News*.

We face new and uncertain times, but as we look back we see that this is nothing new.⁴ We serve a God who remains unchanging, who upholds the foundations when they shake,⁵ and it is in him, not in our organisation, our culture or our profession that we place our trust and hope.⁶

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references

1. Acts 7
2. Philippians 3:13-14
3. Matthew 6:33-34
4. Ecclesiastes 1:9
5. Psalm 11:3-4; Psalm 75:3
6. Psalm 20:7