

Editorial

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WELCOME TO THIS ISSUE of *Ecclesial Futures* and five articles that each in different ways provide original research to guide the work and witness of local Christian communities in the world today.

We begin in Korea, with a missiological reflection on the impact of COVID-19. Bokyoung Park shares two stories of profound personal loss. She then skilfully uses narrative theology, drawing out the “footprints of God” in these stories, in order to develop a contemporary missiology of healing through hospitality. To follow Christ in a world suffering from the global pandemic requires the Church to recognize itself as wounded. As the body of Christ dwells in the pain of humanity, hospitality can be offered to others. The result is healing as pain is reframed in the story of Jesus. Jesus is the “wounded healer” in which we experience a “hospitality in the hope of resurrection.” Hence hospitality has a missional dimension. Park issues a prophetic call to the church in Korea and a theological challenge to more propositional theologies. Her work is poignant and prophetic, a rich demonstration of the power of narrative theology and missional wisdom for the Church encountering the wounded world.

A central theme of this issue is imagination and a trio of articles offer imagination in ecclesiology, hermeneutics and missional practice. It is imagination that enables us to contemplate alternative social projects that “nourish the conviction that things *can be changed*” (Kearney 2001, 370–71). For Kearney, nourishment comes from the awakening of imagination that is simultaneously ethical and poetic. The call of the other is needed to cultivate an imagination that is ethical. An inventive making is needed to liberate an imagination that is poetic. Both are evident in the ministry of Jesus. A poignant example is the moment when Jesus playfully writes on the sand, an imaginative act that liberates an imaginative and ethical response to the woman breaking the Law of Moses in John 8:1–11.

An imagination that is ethical is evident in Ian Robinson’s hermeneutical proposals in relation to the use of business analogies in leadership formation. An imagination that is playful is evident in Bradbury’s use of the metaphor of wilding and James Fox-Robinson’s approach to writing in researching ways in which a monastic lifestyle might embody the Church’s understanding of mission in our time.

Paul Bradbury argues that the metaphor of wilding offers significant resources for the future of the Church in mission. Wilding is a process that offers a new paradigm for land management. As nature leads, human agency is re-centered as facilitative rather than directive. Bradbury outlines a way that wilding might be a generative metaphor for the Church, providing an “ecclesial imaginary.” Bradbury develops Jürgen Moltmann’s paradigmatic shifts in the ages of the Church in dialogue with Charles Taylor’s articulation of the “social imaginary” in secular Western contexts. The metaphor of wilding provides a way to develop ministerial life and contextual ecclesial forms, as the Church understands herself as a co-agent with the Holy Spirit. This involves embracing humbler and more collaborative postures in order to participate with the already-present-and-active Holy Spirit in the building of the kingdom of God. Hence, the Church finds herself participating in the emergent life generated through the power of the Spirit.

The article invites further research, not only empirical research of wilding as it might apply in the lived experience of the Church in mission, but also the biblical and theological probing required of any contextual ecclesiology.

Hence, it is helpful to place the article by Ian Robinson after the work by Paul Bradbury, given the way Robinson examines the hermeneutical implications involved in the imaginative use of analogy and metaphor. Writing from Australia, Robinson courageously enters the field of business. Having experienced the misuse of business analogies, Robinson analyses the hermeneutical principles in Jesus' parables. Given ten parables include analogies about leadership in business, Robinson examines epistemologies of analogy in education and inter-disciplinary studies and develops seven hermeneutical principles. These principles provide an analogical hermeneutic which is then tested against two contemporary business analogies. The kingdom of God is like Kodak. The kingdom of God is also like Toyota. The article is playfully generative, yet cautiously wise. The seven principles can be applied iteratively to illuminate leadership insights and enhance the effectiveness and fidelity of a congregation and a denomination. Equally, these seven principles can prevent the Church from taking analogy too far, too little, or too analytically. The result is a wisdom for the Church that is practical and imaginative.

A third article in this imaginative trio is provided by James Fox-Robinson, who researched contemporary monastic spiritual practice. Fantasy fiction, in particular the character concept from *The Pilgrim's Progress*, is used to develop characters directly from Fox-Robinson's research into new monasticism. This enabled the lived experience of participants, including their words and expressions, to be re-presented in a dramatic script. Fox-Robinson's creative dialogue drew on wider literature and included an imaginative conversation with characters from the Franciscan tradition. Fox-Robinson's characters demonstrate how values of simplicity, contentment, generosity, and hospitality might be lived in everyday life. His research shows that emerging new monastic communities are engaged in the task of drawing the wisdom from

more traditional monastic and mendicant orders and embodying it into their own contexts and experiences. Monastic spiritual practices become a call to each and every one of us. They involve not necessarily the joining of a monastic order but the living of an alternative lifestyle. This article is thus an imaginative pushing of the boundaries of academic writing and an argument for the ways in which a monastic lifestyle might embody the Church's understanding of mission in our time.

Such an imaginative approach to research and writing raises significant questions about the nature of academic writing. In an act of remarkable serendipity, the fifth and final article examines the craft of writing. The article is a collaboration by four authors across three countries and multiple time zones. The genesis for this work of reflexive praxis was the willingness of four members of the *Ecclesial Futures* editorial board to accept an invitation to offer short spoken reflections on the craft of writing for the Missional Research Workshop 2021. Following this online event, the four contributors worked to further develop their thinking on writing, including in conversation with Helen Sword's research into academic writing. For Sword, writing is behavioral, artisanal, social, and emotional. These dimensions are used to argue that writing is a missional and emergent task: first, as writing seeks to encourage and enhance the participation of ourselves and others in the mission of God, and second, as writing is developed "on the job" through reflexive practice. The article affirms diversity—"no one way of writing"—and yet examines shared feelings including fear, stuckness, and reviewer feedback in the process of writing. What also emerges is the social nature of writing and the potential for collaboration across the entire writing process; whether wise others, early readers, editors, and peer reviewers. The article offers a vulnerable, and at times tender, meditation on writing as a missional and emergent task.

In order to ensure academic integrity, the proposed article was de-identified and sent to four (rather than the normal two) peer reviewers. To ensure further academic integrity, three of the reviewers were external to the journal. All four reviewers were

established writers. Each was unanimous in affirming that the article was worthy of publication. Pleasingly, they also observed things they had learned for their own craft. We are glad to offer this article, so filled with practical insights that can “help you find and grow in your own unique approach.”

DEVELOPMENTS IN *ECCLESIAL FUTURES*

A driving commitment for *Ecclesial Futures* is to encourage authors new to publishing. To make that commitment practical, in June 2021, the journal hosted the Missional Research Workshop, a writing workshop. The Workshop filled a space left vacant by the postponement of the International Association of Mission Studies conference and the resultant impact on the vitality of the Christian Communities and Mission Study group, which is an important partnership for *Ecclesial Futures*. The Missional Research Workshop created an online space for feedback on work in progress. To encourage writing, the *Ecclesial Futures* editorial board members were invited to participate, first by sharing their learnings about the craft of writing, second by providing constructive feedback to research in process. A number of articles for review have resulted from the Missional Research Workshop.

Another development during 2021 has been the *Ecclesial Futures* MA Prize in Mission. This results from a partnership with Churches Together in England (CTE), who seek out good-quality research at the MA level from students completing their studies at a UK-based college or university around the topics of mission, evangelism, and church planting with a particular focus on mission in the UK context. A panel of CTE judges read all the submitted theses and decided on a winner. *Ecclesial Futures* extend our congratulations to the 2021 winner, Daleen Ten Cate, for her MA dissertation, “A Critical Examination of the Theological Basis of a Christian Charity Engaged in Community Ministry.” This edition of *Ecclesial Futures* includes a description of her abstract, along with information about four other shortlisted finalists. For all our

readers, the judges' comments are a window into exemplary practice in contemporary research.

THANKS

In closing, my thanks to a range of people. First, my co-editor, Nigel Rooms, who provided prompt advice and wise counsel. Second, the publishers at Wipf & Stock, who continue to receive plaudits regarding the visual presentation of the journal. Third, the reviewers who work to provide constructive feedback in ways that aim to improve each article. Fourth, Patrick Todjeras, who constantly remains eager to receive book reviews. Finally, you, our readers, who engage with our journal in such different ways. Please be in touch with your comments, thoughts, and questions. And do follow us on Twitter—@EcclesialF.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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