

# Editorial

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IT IS ALWAYS REMARKABLE to me how a journal issue comes together from disparate sources, but when the articles are placed alongside each other, the whole offers many connections and therefore new insights. This issue is no exception to such a rule. Thus, themes of poverty, engaging in mission with the other, the nature of research in searching out the hidden with curiosity and ingenuity, plus the fine detail of the practices involved in participating in the mission of God characterise what is laid out before us in six engaging articles. I'm also immensely pleased that we have the most female authors we have had so far and that the majority of those writing have African and Asian location or heritage. At the heart of this issue are authors being published for the first time, three of whom, I think, have crossed boundaries and borders to locate themselves in a place not of their birth. Such movement, in my experience, always offers tremendous insight for everyone involved, not least because the task of participating in God's mission is always an intercultural enterprise which changes all of us.

Beatrice Churu and Mary Getui from Kenya begin this issue with a deeply compassionate call for not so much liberation theology (though there are many echoes of that project in the paper) as

a theology for breathing amidst poverty. It is the Holy Spirit who is described as breath in our scriptures, yet George Floyd was unable to breathe under the weight of the oppressor and COVID-19 has squeezed the breath out of millions of people, especially the poor. Recovering a gospel based on the courage to simply breathe is the task the authors set themselves. They present searing analysis of the double-edged alienation that poverty brings on both the “wretched of the earth” and the “lords of poverty” who are the cause of it. They show how the incarnate Christ addresses both sides of the poverty divide and offers a way for redemption and reconciliation, which demonstrates the principle that God has provided all the resources both within the church and in the wider context and culture for the flourishing of everyone. They pull no punches, however, in showing how those resources, especially the cultural capital inherent within Africa, are so often denied and ignored and urgently need to be recovered. What emerges is a truly African missiological response to their context, and they finish with a beautiful example of how this is embodied in one local Christian community. This article deserves to be widely read and reflected on throughout the continent of Africa and further afield.

Staying with poverty and an author who began life in East Africa, I am pleased to share Daniel Njuguna’s article with our readership, not least because it is suggestive to lay it alongside the previous one and note similarities and differences. Njuguna addresses questions arising from his context as a Church of England parish priest in an area of significant poverty and in anticipation of a research project which he will undertake for a professional doctorate. There are inevitable questions which Churu and Getui do not have to deal with in the same way, such as the decline and closure of churches, but nevertheless what emerges is not dissimilar. Njuguna is convinced of the need to complexify questions of mission and discipleship, and he does so suggestively by turning to a theology of baptism and *theosis* following Steve Bevens’s lead. This means that Njuguna refuses to separate personal and social transformation in the way that the Enlightenment project has so often done. And then it is in going to the edge of the church and

its world and by creating common spaces that the messiness of life has to be dealt with in all its confusing complexity, but that is where the life of the new age is to be found breaking in.

Sheila Akomiah is also part of the African diaspora, in her case West Africa, and is now living in Scotland. She presents, in the article, data from her recent PhD thesis which studied the growth of new churches in Glasgow, Scotland, between 2000 and 2016. She presents a fascinating picture of the fast-changing scene in a major British city which is under-researched. As mainstream churches continue their inexorable decline, new churches spring up. Two things stood out for me in this work. First, the detailed detective work Akomiah has to undertake to find and catalogue new churches. This is painstaking, ground-up work, and it is noticeable that larger national church surveys completely miss the data she is uncovering. More concerning, however, is her finding that the vast majority of these churches are ethnically homogenous. Inevitably, she references McGavran and Wagner's theories of church growth, which claim that people like to gather around those who look and act like them. I have always thought that giving in to such sociology is theologically disastrous given the witness of Galatians 3:16 and Revelation 7:2. It is not Akomiah's task in this article to address what to do about what is clearly happening in Glasgow's new churches, but it is an urgent and pressing question for the worldwide Church, and does lead naturally in to the next article.

Sinwoong Kim also presents an aspect of his recent doctoral research in a fascinating paper sharing how Korean missionaries in Britain have engaged with the phenomenon of nominalism, something they have not really encountered before. It is helpful to place this article after Akomiah's as there is a sense in which it addresses what happens when a diaspora community breaks out of its homogeneity and engages with its British context, a journey all such communities will have to go on if they are to sustain themselves across generations. What is also interesting to me in this work, since I have been engaging with this post-Christian reality for many of my ordained years, is how the outsider, the missionary, the etic person views my own English/British reality,

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and how helpful that perspective is; we need more of this. Having defined sociological approaches to nominalism, Kim presents detailed analysis of his research subjects' approach to the nominal Christians they find in abundance around them. Then, in a sophisticated missiological reflection, he begins to make sense of the phenomenon and make some proposals as to how to respond to it. What is suggestive to me here is the "cognitive dissonance" the nominal Christian brings to the missionary encounter; they upset the unhelpful binary between the saved and the unsaved, creating the requirement for curiosity, inquiry and a discernment of God's activity—which isn't always there, but might just be. Thus, an open inquisitive stance to the other emerges—which takes us to our next article.

In fact, Nick Ladd's research (not unrelated to his doctoral research thesis, of which we hope he will write more in the future) picks up several themes in this issue of the journal. If missional discipleship is related to practices that complexify the relationship between mission and discipleship (Njuguna), what is the nature of those practices? All mission is encounter with the other in public space, however strange that other may seem to us (Kim), so what is happening when we form a public relationship across the boundary of the church? Ladd picks up a research question from one of the groups related to this journal, the *International Research Consortium*, and runs with it in the UK context. The practice of Dwelling in the World, which is part of the missional change journey of the *Partnership for Missional Church* process, is examined in detail by interviewing those who have practiced it and asking what was happening as they were forming relationships in public with "people of peace"—a concept drawn from Luke 10:5–6. What is the exchange that is going on as peace is shared in public? Such a question takes us into the fine detail of crafting the missional church—just as a craftsperson has to pay attention to the smallest element of their work. Given our inheritance in the West, such encounters are fraught with pitfalls on both sides, yet what emerges from the research demonstrates that the God of mission is to be

found in the mutual space between two people forming a relationship which participates in that very mission.

Our final article is a new departure and a little different to the others, not least in the way that it wasn't peer-reviewed in quite the same manner, as that would not have been possible given its autobiographical nature. It is a truism that there is no theology without biography, and therefore telling the story of how one church leader grew into embodying a missional stance in their life and ministry should be mightily instructive. I am grateful to Coenie Burger from South Africa, therefore, for offering to write the story of his personal journey for us in this issue. We learn many things from Coenie as he shares his story, not only in the de-colonizing of his denomination, the Dutch Reformed Church, which has its clear failures and successes, but also, again, picking up a theme of this journal—a life lived in curiosity, always looking for new ways of seeing things—and reading and producing an enormous number of books and written material, some of which the reader may wish to follow up.

Once again thanks to Patrick Todjeras for putting together a wide range of book reviews, not least our first contribution from an Orthodox source. Another new departure is my co-editor, Steve Taylor's foray into reviewing "grey literature"—we'd like to see more of this kind of review if readers are interested in sending us their reflections on resources they find generative in participating in God's mission.