

Editorial

STEVE TAYLOR

Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership and Flinders University, Adelaide,
Australia
steve.taylor@flinders.edu.au

WELCOME TO THE SECOND issue of *Ecclesial Futures*. This journal is a new initiative in missiological publishing that provides a particular interest in the future of local Christian communities in relation to the world as it is, not as it was.

We prioritize research that offers a dialogue between current literature for academics and practitioners, all the while taking seriously:

- i) A *locus* in which theology is generated with the local church.
- ii) The relationship between ordained and lay leadership in local Christian communities.
- iii) How and where leaders are identified, discerned and theologically educated for mission.
- iv) The relationship between a local church and its “world” or context. Issues of contextualization or as some prefer “cultural negotiation” or “intercultural mission” require urgent attention.
- v) The place of local churches formed outside of Christendom and modernity

As editors, we (Nigel Rooms and Steve Taylor) have been encouraged by responses to Issue 1. There has been affirming feedback about the visual appeal (“attractive, easy to handle,” “looks great”), the readability (“well pitched”) and connectivity (“interesting research and reflections on mission and the church and crucially it relates to what is happening on the ground”). We have been delighted to receive requests for extra copies of articles for use in training and formation of ministers, along with affirmations from an acquisition librarian in an internationally recognized University regarding the quality and craft.

We continue to seek articles in areas that include:

- Longitudinal studies in congregational development over five to ten (or more) years
- Diagnoses of why different churches flourish or die
- Ethnographic studies of the cultural changes required in flourishing churches
- Methodological treatises on how to research in this field
- How local churches can learn to experiment and fail
- How might a whole denomination transform itself towards embodying the mission of God?
- Astute, hermeneutically aware bible scholarship on the future of the contemporary church
- Implications for theological education of the local church “as the hermeneutic of the gospel”
- Contextual studies of transformative churches from wide-ranging places—from the deeply secular to say, animist/shamanist contexts and everything in between
- What kind of leadership is required for the local church to embody the mission of God?
- What does a local church need to know before it can engage in mission?

- Systemic studies of local churches and the systems that support them.

We want to encourage new authors who have not published before. To make this commitment practical various members of the Editorial Board are happy to mentor potential writers in the process of submission to peer review. Indeed, we have been privileged to witness the delight among contributors to this issue new to academic publishing.

THE ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE

This issue contains five articles from four continents and various denominational backgrounds, including Mainline, Anabaptist, and Pentecostal Churches. All the articles in different ways are working with local contexts, providing “thickened” descriptions of the local church and the implications for their future in mission.

This issue begins in the Southern Hemisphere, with particular attention to the earth. From Australia, Matt Anslow develops a theology of *krisis*. Anslow examines how the prophets in the Old Testament and Jesus, particularly in John, understand *krisis* (judgment) is an as opportunity for repentance. The idea of judgment as an opportunity is then applied to agriculture and the environment. The result is a missiological reading of climate change as an invitation to make decisions that can shape present actions and the planet’s future health. Anslow develops this theology of *krisis* as a call for the conversion of the Church. This is a practical missiology. Christian witness must recover elements of food production and eating, locating them in an eschatological frame as acts of Christian mission that embody relationship, contextuality, and participation. What Anslow offers is a *missio Dei* of earth-making, centered in the local church.

We move from Australia to the continent of Africa. From South Africa, Thinandavha Derrick Mashau examines the extent to which David Bosch enacted his missiology of alternative church in his own context. The scholarship of Bosch has been significant

to many in the missional church conversation. Nevertheless, how liberated was Bosch's missiology of church in light of his ecclesiological praxis? Mashau is careful to locate Bosch in his times, in light of the decolonial agenda of the late 1970s. Bosch is affirmed by Mashau as a "prophet of paradigms," offering a creative missiology rooted in the *missio Dei*. However, Bosch's praxis contradicts his missiological creativity. He was able to reimagine church as an alternative community intellectually but to was unable to engage in a journey that liberated him from his whiteness. (There are connections between Mashau's article and the article by Taylor and Johnston, who deploy African scholar, Teresa Okure, in seeking to subvert the whiteness of the scholarship that surrounds the missional church literature.) Amid this critique, Mashau offers instructive insight. These include the value of learning an indigenous language in order to amplify indigenous knowledge and indigenous voices, prioritizing acts of solidarity with the oppressed and enacting a "hermeneutics of madness" as a liberating framework in the face of injustice.

We move from the continent of Africa to Asia. C. Nelson Jennings, an American who lived in Japan and Korea for many years, provides a contextual study of how a particular local church in Japan negotiates its "world" across cultures. "The Love Sonata" as an evangelistic mission is analyzed, with particular attention to contextualization and "intercultural mission." A Korean TV soap opera, exported to Japan, becomes, through "The Love Sonata," a contemporary altar to "an unknown God" (Acts 17:23). The article probes the complexity of crossing cultures. Pop culture is clearly glocal—shifting across cultures, yet received in different ways in different local cultures. Also on display is the remarkable organizational capabilities that empower contemporary Christian witness and enable contemporary churches—in this case-study, Pentecostal—to mobilize for mission. At the same time, C. Nelson Jennings is sensitive to relationships that are historical and hence memoried. Again, we see how mission creates possibilities for the conversion of the church, with senders and receivers both finding themselves challenged through "The Love Sonata."

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The next article moves us from the continent of Asia to the continent of Europe, with another case study of a local church, this time concerning how and where leaders are identified, discerned, and theologically educated for mission. (Co-editor Nigel Rooms writes) Here I am “butting in” to this editorial since the next article is jointly authored by my co-editor, Steve Taylor. Rightly Steve assigned the article to me for processing through peer review and for comment here. Mark Johnston and Steve Taylor as practitioner and academician combine beautifully to embody in this article what our journal is all about, not least in the way they move seamlessly between action and reflection on Mark’s work in long-term mission at one particular location in Scotland. We need examples like this in the contextualization of mission at the local level, which ground the ideas encapsulated by the *missio Dei* in concrete action. Thus, presented here, we have the implementation of active processes of listening, discernment, and action in dialogue with international and ecumenical theologians, resulting in missiological reflection and teaching materials from a live example within the Scottish context. The article deserves a thorough reading, for it contains much wisdom and three particular things stood out for me. First, the use of metaphors in discernment—I really like the way the missionaries here were able to step back, assess the “thick description” data of their listening period, and make sense of it through creative imagery. Second, it is worth noting the courage and patience required for this kind of work, the project under consideration began in 2003, and here we are learning about it almost twenty years later. Finally, to return to where I started, here is a perfect example of how the “academy” and the local church can be in mutually beneficial partnership—where both sides are learning.

(Co-editor Steve Taylor returns) We remain in Europe with a fifth and final article. As in Issue 1, we conclude with a methodological reflection. What type of methodologies are needed to ensure a *locus* in which theology is generated with the local church? To research the practice of pioneering, Paul Bradbury analyzes epistemology in the field of practical theology. His concern is to understand rightly spiritual experience as a missiological factor in

the discerning of *missio Dei*. Bradbury probes the possibilities and limits of critical realism, arguing that pneumatology provides valuable resources and enables experience to have a voice. He argues that practical theological research offers a participative methodology that is spiritual discernment. What is required is prayerfulness and attentiveness on the researcher's part as they "eavesdrop" on the voice and presence of God in the lives of people and local communities. A highlight is the way that Bradbury "walks his methodological talk." This is evident in how the article draws on a personal dream in demonstrating a methodology attentive to the Spirit's role in mission.

BOOK REVIEWS

In this issue, the book reviews section invites creativity and diversity. One of the books that is reviewed at first sight looks unrelated to the interests of this journal, yet closer attention suggests otherwise. Keep on reading! Another review engages three books together in a round table discussion, while a third reviews one of those three books. As editors, we celebrate these trajectories.

It causes us to reflect on the focus of this journal. There are two thoughts. On the one hand, the journal fosters dialogue between current literature for academics and practitioners. While the academy produces books, ecclesial organizations resource practitioners differently, through resources like Lenten Bible studies, video resources and position papers. The technical term is grey literature, which describes materials from organizations where publishing is not the primary activity of the producing body (Schöpfel and Farace 2010). Thinking about the focus of *Ecclesial Futures*, examples of grey literature include the Fresh Expressions DVDs, produced in the UK by the Church of England, Faith Stories and Mission Stories, produced in Australia by the Uniting Church, or the "Mission Is" card game produced by CMS in England. Other examples of grey literature would include denominational resources that focus on funding mission or relate to the closing of churches. All of these are grey literature and all are

articulating a missiology. Hence they invite review with regard to their missiological strengths and weaknesses.

On the other hand, the journal looks beyond the borders of missiology. This is evident in one book review which looks through the lens of missiology at other disciplines (in this case Dogmatics and New Testament Studies), to extend our horizon and our learning. You will see a further expansion of what might be reviewed as you read through this issue. This is evident in the challenge (from Radcliffe) for missiology to be engaged with hip-hop music. It is also evident in the research (by Jennings) that documents a local church in dialogue with a TV soap opera. Together, what is suggested is that popular culture is a site for missiological dialogue.¹ This invites reviews of the missiological value of popular culture artefacts like films, video games and comics.

DEVELOPMENTS IN *ECCLESIAL FUTURES*

In this volume, we welcome four new people to our editorial board. In alphabetical order:

Therese D’Orsa from the Broken Bay Institute, Sydney, Australia

Solomon Kgatle from the University of South Africa (UNISA), Pretoria, South Africa

Fundiswa Kobo also from the University of South Africa (UNISA), Pretoria, South Africa

Bokyoung Park from the Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary, Seoul, Korea

As our first volume was published, we were rightly challenged, given our commitments to being an international and ecumenical journal regarding our editorial board’s diversity. As Anthony Reddie (2020) argues so powerfully, any ecclesial future must include a more critical, postcolonial deconstruction of whiteness and its genealogical links to “Mission Christianity.”

1. For more, see, e.g., Marsh 2018.

As editors, we are deeply concerned about the whiteness of much of the missional church literature. We are encouraged by the strengthening of our editorial board, and we hope for further expansion and diversity as we move forward. We are excited about the focus of several articles in this issue, along with further articles currently under review.

A CALL FOR PAPERS

In this regard, we find instructive the trajectories for missiology outlined in the recent work of Dwight Radcliffe. Radcliffe documents the lack of a Black missiology. However, a missiology exists: “an existing catalogue of Black scholarship that deals, directly and indirectly, with mission but is often not given the same latitude and review that White scholarship is afforded” (2020, 169). Helpfully, Radcliffe identifies ways forward for researchers. First, to prioritize theologies rooted not in notions of a sending God, but in theologies of Incarnation. Second, valuing theologies that articulate the particularities of lived experience, particularly voices on the edges and other-sides of dominant cultures. Third, to value global cultures, including the missiological work that for Radcliffe is present in contemporary hip-hop cultures (an argument which resonates with themes in the article in this volume by C. Nelson Jennings). We offer these trajectories as we seek papers for *Ecclesial Futures*. In particular, we hope for contributions that respond to these instructive trajectories offered by Reddie and Radcliffe as they apply to local Christian communities’ future.

NOTEWORTHY

Under the title “Ecclesial Futures,” Whitley College, a theological college of the University of Divinity, Melbourne, are offering two PhD scholarships that aim to generate critical innovation and creativity in order to inform and shape the practices of mission and

ministry by, with, and among the Baptist churches in Victoria and elsewhere in Australia.

A BUV Scholarship of up to \$10,000 per annum will help support study toward a PhD at the University of Divinity. Applicants must demonstrate how their research can contribute to the strategic research objectives of the Baptist Union of Victoria and Whitley College in the area of Languages Other Than English (LOTE) congregations and initiatives. A Cities of God scholarship of up to \$10,000 per annum will help support study toward a PhD at the University of Divinity. Applicants must demonstrate how their research can contribute to understanding and engaging with the urban mission practice and ecclesiology of churches, congregations, and initiatives in the culturally and religiously hyperdiverse cities of Australia. Enquiries to Rev Associate Professor Darrell Jackson, Director of Research, Whitley College, University of Divinity.

THANKS

Finally, in closing, there are numerous people to thank in relation to volume 1, issue 2. First, my co-editor, Nigel Rooms who provided prompt advice and wise counsel. Second, the publishers at Wipf & Stock who deserve all the plaudits for the positive feedback regarding visual appeal. Third, each reviewer for this issue has so ably taken up our invitation to review in constructive ways that aim to improve each article published in *Ecclesial Futures*. Fourth, Patrick Todjeras (who constantly remains eager to receive book reviews). Finally, you, our readers who have begun to engage this journal with such enthusiasm. A new journal relies on all of us: each one to spread the news, write an article or pen a book (or following Radcliffe, a hip-hop album review). Please be in touch with the editors with your comments, thoughts, and questions.

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