

EDITORIAL

Editorial

Nigel Rooms

Sometimes remarkable things happen even to journal editors! Without even trying, a kind of informal Special Issue from Africa has emerged from recent submissions to the journal. Thus, all eight articles in this first Issue of 2026 are written by Africans, from West and South Africa, and taken together they represent wisdom, critical theological insight, and challenge not only to and for Africa, but much further afield as well. While we might only lament the lack of any female authors, there is a breadth of contribution from Catholic, mainstream Protestant, and Pentecostal traditions addressing a wide range of issues pertinent to the future of the local and universal Church in every place. Thus, we have critiques and theological reflection on “reverse mission”, African informal saving schemes, burial and cemetery practices, missionary passion and suffering, local, parish-based ecclesiology and mission, plus the importance of grounding all this in the Eucharist.

The first two articles (and the last two) in this issue are providentially paired together, and I invite readers to study them alongside each other. Thus, we begin with critiques of the term “reverse mission” from two quite different denominational and theological perspectives, the Catholic and the Pentecostal. Both agree on the inadequacy of “reverse mission” as a term to describe what happens when Christians migrate from the global South and take their place in the churches and societies of the North. Such critiques are not that new in some circles, however, what is fresh here are Catholic and Pentecostal theological reflections on the question. **Januarius Asongu**, who is based for his work in both Cameroon and Sierra Leone, notes the *kairos* moment we find ourselves in, as mission and missionaries flow around the world in “missionary reciprocity”. Evidence from the USA, Ireland, Germany, and Italy backs up the argument for a “polycentric Catholic Communion” characterized by a maturation in the worldwide Christian faith. **Solomon Kgatle**, from South Africa (and our Editorial Board), reframes reverse mission as “multidirectional mission”, and thereby offers a nuanced lens for understanding global flows of Christianity, particularly in Pentecostal and diaspora contexts. The use of concrete examples (from the Redeemed Christian Church of God, the Church of Pentecost, and the Apostolic Faith Mission) makes his framework tangible to readers of *Ecclesial Futures* coming from both the academy and the grass-roots of churches. The article also challenges

Eurocentric perspectives and highlights south-to-south mission dynamics, contributing to decolonizing mission studies and fostering comparative, cross-regional scholarship. Overall, both articles offer insights that are relevant for global mission studies, theological education, and the practice of world Christianity.

Kelebogile Thomas Resane brings into creative dialogue an African practice and a biblical notion in the next article. *Stokvel*, as described by Resane in his location in South Africa, is an informal credit union between a certain number of people, often women, as a way of alleviating poverty. Everyone contributes to a communal fund, and when a crisis or one's turn comes around, vital finance is made available. This practice is not restricted to South Africa, as I came across the exact same methodology in Tanzania, where I thought it was a simple yet elegant solution to how saving money and mutual accountability for that money could be ensured. Resane then critically engages *stokvel* with *koinonia*, particularly as it is found in Acts 2.42-47. This is a wonderful example of interdisciplinary practical theology and missiology from which there is much to learn. The two concepts mutually interpret one another in very creative ways, and I suspect the principles named here could be exported far beyond Africa to many other places. Solidarity, generosity, and unity are universal values that can strengthen society, Christian or otherwise, when it is threatened by poverty and want.

Kwaku Boamah presents, in my view, a unique article connecting funerary rites, church cemeteries, and the mission of God. Paying attention to death, one would have thought, would be of key concern to Christians, and Boamah shows how in the early centuries of the Church it was an occasion for public witness both during and after the burial. Why not then extend this reflection to Boamah's context in Ghana, where he conducts field research into the question of burial and the upkeep of church graveyards? The data presented gives us fascinating insight into what it means to be buried "among your people" as a practice of community. Moral weight is given to enacting burial properly and long-term care for the graveyard. This issue of the journal deals in several articles with the local, the "parish", and here again, we see that having the dead buried close by in an orderly and dignified fashion is another way of locating the church as the communion of saints between the living and the dead.

Felix Akintunde takes passion, in its ancient and contemporary senses, as the connecting bridge between the missionary activity of St Paul and that of Redeemed Christian Church of God missionaries in northern Nigeria, a region characterized by the violent insurgency of Boko Haram, which provides a constant and mortal threat to Christians. Passion, according to Akintunde, combines both serious and committed intent alongside the possibility of suffering, the difficulty of which is not to be underestimated. Akintunde presents a critical approach to both the Bible text and the small cohort of ten missionaries he interviews in the fieldwork for the article. What

we have here, as he points out, is the opposite of a “health and wealth” theology of blessing, rather a theology of endurance and resilience which looks suffering in the face and finds God within it, without any sense of the need to retaliate or fight back with equal force.

Ikenna Paschal Okpaleke constructs for us a kinship ecclesiology, grounded in, and for the sake of, African Catholic rural parish ecclesiology and African Ubuntu sensibilities. Okpaleke’s ecclesiological vision itself is significant, starting as it does not in the city, but in the rural. The family in the village – helpfully delineated and nuanced by the author as the rural extended family kinship network – provides a theological vision of the church bound together through sacrament, not blood. It envisions church as “kinship beyond consanguinity” and a eucharistic ethos that transcends confessional boundaries. This is a theological vision emerging from the wisdom of African Christianity that is for the whole of Christianity, and it offers a helpful critique of western ideas of the “nuclear family” and “individualization”. So here we have a distinctively African theological lens – that of kinship ecclesiology rooted in rural communal identity – as a framework for meaningful reform in the local church. This model not only challenges the dominance of Euro-American ecclesial paradigms but also enriches global discourse by integrating African communal values like Ubuntu, familial solidarity, and baptismal belonging. In doing so, the article provides both theoretical depth and pastoral application, which makes it valuable for scholars and practitioners alike. Moreover, its tripartite model – comprehensiveness, compassion, and celebration – offers concrete principles that are transferable across continents, particularly in parishes in Latin America, Asia, and parts of Europe facing challenges in community formation and ecclesial participation.

The Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa has been deeply influenced at local, synodical, and national levels by the so-called missional church movement in the past twenty-five years. The two articles that follow engage critically with this tradition and complement each other in suggestive ways, which is why I have laid them alongside each other here.

Dieter De Bruin, from within the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, offers a theologically grounded contribution to ongoing debates on missional ecclesiology, particularly within traditions grappling with post-Christendom realities and demographic change. Drawing on longstanding debates in England, De Bruin wishes to retrieve and reimagine the parochial model through a confessional Reformed lens. He therefore challenges network-oriented paradigms in a way that is both provocative and pastorally sensitive. By reasserting the theological significance of place and advocating for a renewed parochial imagination, De Bruin challenges readers – particularly church leaders, theologians, and practitioners within Reformed and post-establishment contexts – to reconsider inherited assumptions about mobility, choice, and ecclesial presence. The article encourages a deeper engagement with

the local as both theological locus *and* missional frontier, potentially reshaping how congregations understand their vocation in increasingly pluralistic and fragmented societies. This, it must be said, is not a call back to some golden age of Christendom, rather it looks to both the centrality of place and the possibility of God doing a new thing in and from that place.

Marthinus Havenga is aware that the idea at the heart of the missional church movement – that of the *missio Dei* – is meant to be a liberating one. Inviting congregations to participate in the prior work of the Triune God in the world ought to free them from frenetic activity, which they imagine will offer a bulwark for their church against the forces ranged against it. Yet such is the human propensity for corrupting something good that Havenga shows how the need to discover what God is up to in the world and join in can be equally as elusive and even exhausting. Utilizing a study of the Athol Fugard play *Boesman and Lena* in a truly creative and beautiful way, he calls us back to the Eucharist as the grounding of our missional work. The centrifugal force of sending has to be connected to an equal and opposite centripetal force focused on source. De Bruin helpfully quotes Pat Keifert's maxim that the church is called, gathered, centred, and sent. It is all four of these movements that are required in the missional church, and which are of course enacted in the regular celebration of Holy Communion.

About the Author

Nigel Rooms, Church Mission Society, Oxford, UK, and The Queen's Foundation, Birmingham, UK. Contact: nigel.rooms@churchmissionsociety.org.