



Protestant Theological University

Editorial

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Editorial



The post communion prayer, following the giving of communion, often reflects our gratitude for the gifting of the Eucharist. The prayers are varied. Collectively, they explore and reflect on the uncapturable depth and breadth of meaning found in breaking bread and sharing the cup of wine together. As just one example, the Common Worship post communion prayer (published by the Church of England) for the Twelfth Sunday After Trinity, expresses our gratitude for the healing and the wholeness that is found in Christ through the forgiveness that is found in sharing in the holy sacrament, before exhorting those sharing in the meal to bring healing to our broken world. The flow of the prayer captures of sense of journey, from separation to oneness, from brokenness to wholeness, from oneself to others.

The papers in this edition of *Ecclesial Practices*, suggest a similar sense of journey on which the coming together of ethnological and ecclesial methodologies is shining an ever-brighter light. What is apparent in this edition is how the skilful and sensitive application of ethnological tools is powerfully informing ecclesial research. The wielding of these tools is empowering the participants in the studies, changing the nature of the research as well as the researcher. This is a challenging journey but, as these papers suggest, one that restores wholeness from brokenness, and well-worth undertaking.

In their rich paper, 'When '#xmas angels' Tweet', Steve Taylor and Shannon Taylor present their analysis of over one thousand tweets in response to a Christmas Angels project that skilfully brought together craft and activism. 'Craftivision' has a rich history and in this study the authors demonstrate how 'knit one, purl one' within an ecclesial participation of making, can be located in the being and acting of God as Maker, bringing a sense of blessing and of being found to both the senders of the knitted angels and their recipients. The authors explore a 'missiology of making', seeing the yarn-bombed Christmas angels as an ecclesial practice of witness in continuity with biblical texts. The

methodology engaged in analysing the many tweets also demonstrates the opportunities in using digital data within ecclesial research.

Photo elicitation and photovoice are powerful tools for ecclesial research. In their paper, Linda Hopkins and Eleanor Wort describe the application of these tools in their two separate studies. One evaluated understandings of communion among young Baptists, whilst the other explored understandings of culture among church leaders in Hull, UK. Two different contexts and yet both emphasise how photo elicitation and photovoice empowered the participants by turning them from 'passive objects' of study into 'emancipated co-creators of research'. This empowerment of the participants challenged the researchers to engage with dis-articulation and ambiguity, but through the noise, the participatory voices could be heard through 'feeling, image and sensation rather than in words' alone.

The challenge of multiculturalism within Canada and, in particular, the United Church of Canada, is the background to David Csinos' paper 'Speaking Back'. The church's vision is to become multicultural and the paper is a contribution towards this in an analysis of a qualitative research project into the theological meaning-making – with the lens of children – within the United Church congregations. Three flags are raised in interpreting the 'Transformative Vision' described in the paper: intentionally listening to voices on the margin, the risk of marginalisation of those individuals and congregations who hold hybrid cultural identities and, surprisingly perhaps, overlooking those congregations that are charting their own paths towards interculturalism through internal cultural diversity. David Csinos suggests that the United Church's understanding of culture within its 'Transformative Vision' is too narrow and simplistic to include the reality of life in some of the congregations and challenges its protagonists to include convergence both among different congregational cultures as well as within congregations.

In her paper, 'An 'Echo of the Soul'', Deborah Berhó explores the nature of worship music amongst the rapidly growing numbers of protestant Latino worshippers across the USA. In her detailed analysis of 25 Spanish language protestant churches in Oregon, USA, she shows that whilst the music in worship in these churches may have been introduced by non-Latinos, this is no longer the case. Bi-musicality is the norm, reflecting the diaspora and mission of the Latino Protestant Church, drawing from a wide variety of source, styles and musical instruments, many typical to Latin America. A comprehensive listing of the worship songs can be found via figshare.com: <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.13326329>.

In his paper, 'A Tactical Ecumenism of Shared Eucharistic Fasting?', Simon Hallonsten reflects on his experiences of joint worship between Lutherans

and Catholics at a Catholic school in Boston, USA. He describes himself as an 'imperfect member' of the Catholic Church, both belonging whilst not belonging. In exploring this tension, Hallonsten engages with the work of Michel de Certeau, arguing that ecumenical strategies and ecumenical tactics can create space for greater unity, complementing ecumenical dialogue. Attending the school catholic Eucharist, the 'fount and apex of the whole Christian life', as a Lutheran, he finds both an expression of unity and prohibition. He offers an ecumenical strategy of participation whilst observing a shared Eucharistic fasting as one possible approach towards a visible unity of the Church here and now.

James Butler asks what is the place of prayer within theological action research? Recognising that prayer practices add an important dimension to theological action research, Butler argues in his paper, 'Prayer as a Research Practice?' that theological action research itself can be considered prayer, and furthermore, far from being a radical proposal, this is rooted in an orthodox account of theology. In his theological action research programme, Butler moves away from the researcher-researched paradigm by bringing together a 'university reflector team' with a 'local reflector team' who discern the research question together and, in conversation, consider the research data, a process he refers to as corporate prayer. Referring to the work of Ashley Cocksworth, Butler suggests that all of theology should be prayer, for prayer is a participation in the eternal conversation within the Trinity to which theology listens. Corporate prayer not only echoes the divine conversation but is both worthy of, and open to, theological action research when the language of discernment resonates with spiritual practices.

In his Book Review, 'What Really Matters: Scandinavian Perspective on Ecclesiology and Ethnography in the Church of Sweden, Rein Brouwer welcomes the review of ecclesiology and ethnography across the 'Nordic countries' presented at the 2016 symposium in Uppsala, Sweden; their context shaped by folk church tradition and Evangelical-Lutheran theology. The papers are grouped into three sections: reflexivity, normativity and representation, with excellent reviews of each of the end of each group. Rein Brouwer draws particular attention towards one contribution in the book that addresses the role of ethnography on digital media. What, he asks, are the implications of the digitalisation of the church on ethnographic research? This, he says is a key question that will need to be answered post the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is a co-incidence that at the close of the seventh year there should be a paper on knitting as indeed there was in the very first volume of *Ecclesial Practices*! These have been a rich seven years. Looking back over the past editions, discernible trends are emerging, a powerful one being the empowerment

of participants, often as co-researchers, within the research studies. This has only been possible because of the continuing conversation between ethnography and ecclesiology and the gentle wielding of our respective tools. As we move into a post Covid-19 pandemic world, the church will 'feel different', challenging both the researcher and participants on this shared eucharistic journey. But it is a journey we will undertake joyfully, expectantly and together.

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