



Editorial

Janet Morley

This issue has attracted a fascinating range of articles. I am delighted that there is a balance of contributions from very eminent authors and those whose scholarly or ministerial vocations are in their early stages.

Given the theme of Holiness & the Body, it is perhaps not surprising that the discipline of practical theology is most strongly represented. This means that 'embodiment' is not just discussed as a vital concept, but is used explicitly as a method of theological reflection. Narrative stories, often arising from the personal experience of the author, are used to explore and advance theological understanding, in a way that goes well beyond traditional 'illustration' of a conceptual point. Not only ministerial practice or empirical research, but areas involving personal physical vulnerability (motherhood, disability, illness, eating habits) are found to provide illuminating perspectives from which to reflect on incarnational theology and the practice of holiness.

The reader will find that there are often strong resonances between articles that have of course been independently written – for example, the importance of presence, of where the body is placed; the significance of the asymmetric human brain, with its diverse but mutually interdependent hemispheres; the relationship between believing and practising; the refusal to inhabit a false dualism and to separate the body from the self.

We have two peer-reviewed articles in this issue. Hannah Bucke's 'Moving into the neighbourhood: embodiment, sacrament and ritual in urban mission' begins with the narrative of her experiment in providing Holy Week prayer stations/installations in a shopping centre in Southend-on Sea, UK. From her observations of how people participated (or not), especially in relation to the invitation to eat and drink bread and grape juice, she explores the meaning of sacramental behaviour and sacramental presence in such a context. Jill Marsh,

in 'Towards an ethnically diverse British Methodist Church', gives an account and interpretation of her empirical research among ministers working in ethnically diverse British Methodist congregations. She argues that the key challenge is to enable power-sharing, and a willingness for all members to allow the whole 'body' of the church to be changed by those who are 'other' and 'different'.

Two of the short articles deal with the matter of food. Charles Wallace, in 'Confessions of a Methodist foodie', draws on his extensive knowledge as a historian of the Wesley family to share some surprising insights into the 'foodways' of the early Methodist movement, and to reflect on what the Wesleys' practice can offer to our practice of holy living today in this area. Greg Obong-Oshotse, in 'Dying to live', offers a passionate personal reflection on the spiritual discipline of fasting, a practice he first developed within the Pentecostal tradition in Nigeria, but which he continues within the context of British Methodism.

There are also two articles explicitly written from the experience of living with bodies that are chronically ill or impaired. Charity Hamilton, in 'When bodies "fail": illness and incarnation', uses her own experience to challenge the common assumption that in this situation your body has 'failed' or 'let you down'. She strongly resists the dualistic separation of the body from the self, and reflects on the nature of embodied identity during illness, in the light of incarnational theology. Heather Noel-Smith, in 'Divine defragmentation', works from within her own lived experience of Parkinson's disease, with its frequently disordered connections between brain and limbs, to reinterpret three familiar biblical passages that read quite differently to her now: Paul's metaphor of the Christian community as a body of members who need each other; Isaiah's image of the suffering servant from whom people turned away; and the gospel contrast between Martha and Mary (now that activism is no longer a choice).

Heather Walton's reflective piece, 'And a sword will pierce your own soul also', again uses intensely personal reflections on her own experience of motherhood and its ambiguities, as she explores the narrative of the holy mother and the holy child in the presentation narratives of Luke 2. She draws on cultural theory and artistic representations of this passage about maternal connection and separation, arguing that the recovery of this ambiguity is necessary not only for understanding this biblical event but also our relations with the divine.

The last two articles in this section both reflect on a practice of ministry that has involved innovative ways of recognising the primary place of the body in

Christian life and spirituality. Barbara Glasson, in 'Falling over and walking anyway', uses her extensive experience of imaginative community projects using bodily sharing for spiritual purposes (eg collective breadmaking and quilting) to question our contemporary ideal of a 'balanced' life. Rosemary Power has led a pioneer ministry in County Clare, Ireland, and her article 'Modern pilgrimage in the west of Ireland' reflects on an ecumenical project opening up ancient and new pilgrim paths along walking routes there. Using the human body at its own walking pace, and putting ourselves literally on the paths of those who went before, can lead to deep conversations within and beyond the Christian community and be transformative in a range of ways.

In our continuing series on 'What have the sermons of John Wesley ever done for us?', Frances Young considers Wesley's sermon on the Duty of Constant Communion. Beneath the difficulties the contemporary reader may find in eighteenth-century language and preoccupations, she detects surprisingly relevant advice for those who, for whatever reason, resist regularly putting ourselves in the way of receiving this sacramental means of grace.

Finally, the reviews section in this issue has been entirely given over to a longer review article of a book that has become a modern classic. Clive Marsh, in 'Knowing your right from your left: brain science and the future of Christian mission', gets to grips with Iain McGilchrist's book, *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*. As he concludes:

The value of Christian story, attention to affectivity, a balanced approach to theology, and a recognition of limitations: all of these, then, flow from attention to the brain. Who would have thought it?

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Lent 2016

