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EDITORIAL

Welcome to Volume 3, Issue 1 of the Journal of Religion and Public Life

Canon Dr Chris Sugden ¹

Articles in this issue come from all three continents of the Global South. They cover solidarity with the poor in eight Latin American countries, mutuality in mission in Colombia, the social identity and position of Christians in Malaysia, the history of Christianity in Indonesia and a discussion of the African rituals of death.

Themes covered are engagement with Islam in East Asia and with ancestor worship in Africa, cross cultural engagement in Indonesia and in Colombia and the role of Christians from other (mainly Western cultures) bringing the gospel.

All represent reflection on vigorous Christian activity seeking to engage with the cultures in which they are set in a distinctively Christian way.

A review is included of a book on current Christian experience in the United States which ascribes its apparent decline less to compromises with the surrounding secular culture than to the church's own internal moral failings and compromising political alliances. Lessons are drawn for the growing church in the Global South. A review of 'Reparations – Slavery and the Tyranny of Imaginary Guilt' examines another aspect of cross-cultural relationships. A study of the growth of the early Church in the Roman Empire is also reviewed.

This volume presents evidence that the Christian faith is alive and well, even though the numbers of adherents may be declining in some situations. The articles provide narratives of how the gospel imperative of neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free plays out in the cross-cultural engagement that is part and parcel of Christian mission, for better or for worse. This is also seen in the New Testament, where while following the command to 'go into all the world', some Jewish Christians required their Gentile converts to become Jews as well. So the process whereby, for example, in Indonesia some Indonesians became Dutch in their Christianity, was not a new phenomenon in the history of the faith. The article from Colombia shows how Christians from different

¹ Canon Dr Chris Sugden is head of the Ph.D. programme at OCRPL, member of the OCRPL Academic Council, and a member of the JRPL Editorial Board.

cultures can grow through pain to work together in beneficial mutuality. And while indigenous Christianity has grown in some situations following 'independence', that does not mean that cross-cultural mission is to be frowned on. Indeed it is arguable that cross-cultural mission is taking place in Europe as believers from Africa and the Caribbean take their place in European society.

It is a deistic approach that insists that it is inappropriate to 'interfere' in another culture on the basis of Christian ethical standards. This was the clash that took place in India where missionaries in the days of the British Raj, motivated by the way the gospel enhanced the position of women, argued for higher status for women in society. British civil servants, with a deistic view of God, argued that it was not appropriate to interfere in the culture of the day on the basis of Christian ethical standards. The missionaries insisted that the gospel standards were God's intention for all societies. This prompted significant gratitude in Indian society and prompted Hindu reform movements. Consider today what would have happened if all Christians had argued that it was not appropriate to interfere in apartheid, or racism on the basis of Christian ethical standards.

- a. Global cross-cultural partnership is the recognition that Jesus taught us to love those who are different from us as evidence of the love of God.
- b. Global cross-cultural partnership is the evidence that Christ has broken down the dividing walls of hostility between groups.
- c. Global cross-cultural partnership is the demonstration that Jesus has indeed risen from the dead, that his death on the cross overcame the powers of evil, that he has defeated all the powers of death in life, and that given his Spirit to dwell among us and build a community where there is neither Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female.

The question that this poses to churches is whether we are able to be partners. Or do we subtly thank God that our nation, whichever it is, is not as other nations; that we have the knowledge and information to make the best decisions, and the resources to ensure they are carried out?

Partnership is not an issue of strategy, or efficiency or resources. It is an issue of the very nature of the Christian community.

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