



BRILL

## *Editorial*



It has been a while since this journal published several *reviews* of recently published books. We are glad that our colleagues take time and effort to read our publications and write down their professional opinions to highlight some insights. This time, we read about a sensitive topic: gender identity and the role of (toxic) masculinity within certain evangelical circles in the US. We will not discuss the review, but we want to stress that Ecclesial Practices welcomes voices that are perhaps not often heard to present them to the wider academy and theological scrutiny. The second review gives us an in-depth description of the United Reformed Church in the U.K. Perennial themes like congregational and denominational identity, change, and renewal are tangible and point to the need for careful ethnographic research. Thanks to the two reviewers of this current issue. If you want to review a recent publication in ethnography and ecclesiology, please contact one of our review editors, Dr. Malan Nel (malan-nelup@gmail.com) or Dr. Jonas Idestrom (jonas.idestrom@ehs.se).

The four articles of this issue form an exciting bouquet of what ecclesial research might look like. The first is about celebrating the liturgy in the Holy Week in ten churches in the Toronto area for four consecutive years (2020–2023). How did the pandemic change the celebration and reception of such (online) celebrations? Interestingly, it also touches upon the topic of ecclesial leadership: how do congregations take care of the continuing hybridity of their church services in person and online? What for many congregations started as a sudden necessity due to the pandemic became a regularity afterward. What does this require of leadership, especially regarding who is part of the worshipping community and how they relate to one another in worship? *Johnson* concludes with four elements that help to discern some decision-making processes in communities regarding the hybridity of their services. Discerning these may also help congregations navigate this issue.

The article by *Felner, Berg, and Hansen* takes us to the context of Denmark. We are introduced to a growing parish's practices and how it welcomes newcomers. The elaboration on the concrete practices of the project team and

their collaborative way of working highlights the structural importance of co-designing a church, which is described against the background of Danish folk-church ecclesiology. The discursive and practical working together, an example of ecclesiology *in via* as Nicholas Healy might call it, clearly stands out as a way forward for being church.

From Toronto, via Denmark, and again to the North American context, the third article focuses on the megachurch ministry of Robert H. Schuller. *Marti* and *Mulder* use the concepts of the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa. These concepts are increasingly being used and applied, and they certainly have a *prima facie* attractiveness as they verbalize what many (perhaps unconsciously) experience within at least Western societies but increasingly elsewhere as well. The authors use Rosa in their description and interpretation of one of the most famous examples of US mega-church pastors and ministries. Marti and Mulder here conceive an exciting venue for research that might 'resonate' well with many. It also thoroughly analyzes Schuller and his project, drawn from many different sources.

The final article in this edition is different. It concentrates on presuppositions and prerequisites for doing qualitative research. Especially research with non-speaking autistic people poses severe challenges to usual forms of conducting interviews and making observations for researchers. *Cundill* and *Van Ommen* take us to fundamental questions concerning philosophical interpretations of *empathy* and its consequences for hermeneutics. The illustrations that make this very tangible stem from broad-ranging contexts that vary from Singapore to the United Kingdom. Their collaborative account of empathy complexifies and challenges the task of understanding in practical theology. Yet, it also offers rich possibilities, even where language barriers obstruct such understanding.

*Hans Schaeffer*

Editor-in-Chief of Ecclesial Practices and Professor of Practical Theology,  
Theological University Utrecht, Utrecht, the Netherlands

*Hans.Schaeffer@tuu.nl*

*Andrew Kinsey*

Assistant Editor of Ecclesial Practices and Graduate Student in the Doctor of  
Theology and Ministry Program, Durham University, England

*andrewdalekinsey@gmail.com*