Editorial

This edition of *Holiness* is the first for which I have editorial responsibility. I am grateful to my predecessor, Andrew Stobart, for the work he did in establishing our relationship with Sciendo and developing our global and inclusive approach to the Wesleyan theological tradition. I hope that this issue of *Holiness* exemplifies both of those qualities.

The global dimension is illustrated by Gladys Wang’s article on the theme of childlessness in west Africa, particularly in southwest Cameroon. The Presbyterian Church in the Cameroon, to which she belongs, has been a partner church of Methodism in that country ever since Methodist missionaries arrived at the end of the German colonial period. It is good to welcome this ecumenical collaboration. Methodist theology has never existed as an independent theological tradition, but has always been developed through interaction with the Roman Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran, Anglican, Pentecostal, and Orthodox streams of Christian thought. Dr Wang’s work takes a profound pastoral and existential issue—the experience of childlessness—and develops a powerful interaction between indigenous culture and the reading of scripture. Without losing respect for her cultural context, she reminds us that the Bible has the potential to challenge cultural assumptions and offer alternative ways of dealing with childlessness, even when the prevailing hermeneutic has confirmed inherited prejudice. The result is a theology of family life that affirms rather than stigmatises those who have experienced childlessness.

From theological issues surrounding the beginning of human life to those involved in its end: John Lampard shares his long engagement with funeral ministry to offer theological reflection on the way in which we deal with the bodies of those who have died. In the UK, cremation, usually in a crematorium managed by local government, has become by far the most common way of disposing of dead bodies. The Covid-19 pandemic has focussed attention on this, with families often having to wait several weeks for an appointment at the crematorium and the opportunity for a funeral. Just as Wang urges members of her culture to revise their theology of childlessness, so Lampard asks churches to think theologically about the ashes that are collected after a cremation. They deserve, he says, the respect due to the human body, and burial is the most appropriate way of disposing of them.

The Fernley-Hartley Lecture is a long-standing fixture in the life of the British Methodist Church. Each year—most often around the time of Conference—a theologian is invited to develop a topic of their own choosing. Many of these lectures have initiated book-length projects that have enriched the thinking of the British church and influenced those in other churches. During the lifetime of *The Epworth Review*, Fernley-Hartley lectures were usually published in that journal and I am pleased that *Holiness* is taking on that role, with the 2019 lecture in this issue and the 2020 lecture due to appear shortly. Joanne Cox-Darling writes as a missiologist, reflecting on some of the ways in which Methodist and Anglican churches in Britain have tried to address the steep decline in traditional church attendance with what have become known as ‘Fresh Expressions of Church’. She asks that we open ourselves to the ‘dance of the Spirit’ so that the Holy Spirit’s work of liberation, peace, and inclusion may infect and transform those called to share in the *missio Dei*.

The pastoral, cultural, and missiological reflections of the first three articles all refer (though in very different ways) to the Christian scriptures. The contemporary assertion that all theology is contextual, and the realisation that even biblical studies need to be decolonised, do not detract from the need for a disciplined study of the biblical text, informed by knowledge of ancient languages and developed in dialogue with a community of scholarship. It is therefore appropriate that a substantial section of this issue of *Holiness* celebrates the work of one of the outstanding biblical scholars of recent decades: Professor Morna Hooker. Professor Hooker (the first woman and first Methodist to hold The Lady Margaret’s Chair of Divinity in the University of Cambridge) has combined rigorous,
evidence-based study of the New Testament with a faithful ministry as a Methodist Local Preacher. She has also served as Chair of the Trustees of Wesley House, helping the institution negotiate the many changes in theological education that have challenged it in recent years. To celebrate Professor Hooker’s recent ninetieth birthday, an online seminar took place in May 2021. Those who contributed (Professor John Barclay, Dr James Carleton Paget, as well as Morna Hooker herself) kindly agreed to the publication of their contributions. These convey something of the joy and informality of the event itself and remind us that theological study is essentially conversational. They celebrate a life dedicated to the rigorous pursuit of accurate scholarship, combined with a strong (and strongly nonconformist) Christian vocation.

If conversation within theological disciplines is essential to their health and development, so is conversation between disciplines. While narrowly specialist journals have their place, *Holiness* is unashamedly eclectic. It is proud to host a global conversation, loosely defined by the Wesleyan tradition, but embracing pastoral, historical, biblical, missiological, and doctrinal topics, addressed from a variety of perspectives. I look forward to the conversation continuing in future issues of *Holiness*, a conversation in which difference is respectfully acknowledged, new voices are welcomed, and critical thinking is encouraged.

*Richard Clutterbuck, Interim Editor.*
Contributors

The Revd Dr Gladys Ekone Wang is an ordained minister of the Presbyterian church in Cameroon. She is a lecturer at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Kumba, and Head of the Practical theology Department.

The Revd Dr John Lampard is a supernumerary Methodist minister, who has written and lectured on funeral and death issues for many years. He was vice-chair of the ecumenical Churches’ Funerals Group and served on two Home Office advisory groups on the disposal of body parts and burial and cremation issues.

The Revd Dr Joanne Cox-Darling is a presbyter of the British Methodist Church, currently serving in the Wolverhampton Circuit.

Professor John Barclay is Lightfoot Professor of Divinity at the University of Durham and a leading interpreter of the writing of St Paul.

Dr James Carleton Paget is a Fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge, and a Senior Lecturer in the Divinity Faculty of Cambridge University. He is a specialist on early Jewish-Christian relations.

Professor Morna Hooker is The Lady Margaret’s Professor of Divinity emerita, a Methodist Local Preacher, and the author of numerous monographs and commentaries on the New Testament.