The great nineteenth century theologian John Henry Newman famously observed, 'to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often', adding that the Church 'changes in order to remain the same.' Newman was writing in an era when change was seen either as the positive march of progress or the disastrous erosion of tradition. He argued that while change, even in the field of Christian doctrine, was inevitable, Christians needed to exercise discernment on the basis of sound criteria. Since Newman’s time, the Christian landscape has been reshaped several times over and in many ways. Simplistic models of change – the missionary expansion of the church or the steady decline of religion through secularisation, for example – have proved inadequate and misleading. Change is complex in both its causes and effects.

Change and transition are obvious features of contemporary Christianity, in all parts of the world. This issue of Holiness addresses change and transition in a number of ways and in several different situations. Alice Mwila, a bishop in the Methodist Church in Kenya and recent doctoral student at Wesley House, analyses changing patterns of church affiliation in her home district of Nyame, Kenya, finding the form of Christianity brought by white missionaries to not be entirely adequate in meeting the spiritual and material needs of contemporary Kenyans. This is an insight that already had an impact on Christian missions in some parts of Africa. To underline the need for Christianity to be embedded within each culture, John Pritchard charts the contribution of two indigenous African missionaries, William Wade Harris of Liberia and Apolo Kivebulaya of Uganda, showing how they linked their cultural settings with the changes brought about by the Christian faith. It is helpful to place a contemporary survey, such as Mwila’s, alongside Pritchard’s historical work.

Anthony Reddie, a British Methodist theologian, offers a challenge to his own church in the Fernley Hartley Lecture, an address commissioned each year and associated with the church’s annual conference. Reddie, well-known as an exponent of Black theology, suggests that the British Methodist Church, despite its insistence that it has moved beyond racism, still embodies a form of white privilege in its leadership and structures. The challenge it faces is to move beyond good intentions in order to find a more radical response to racial injustices.

John M. Haley and Leslie J. Francis take a different, more phenomenological approach to ecclesial change. They track recent changes in British Methodism by comparing surveys of its ministers which suggest a changing approach to worship (less formal but more eucharistic), social issues (more positive about same-sex relationships), and ecumenism (less enthusiastic for institutional unity).

Two articles bring us to the key theological insight that it is God who is the instigator of change, both within human persons and human communities. David Carter, who has been a long-standing participant in and commentator on the ecumenical work of British Methodism, addresses a theme that emerged from the Methodist-Roman Catholic International Commission’s report, The Call to Holiness. Carter uses a survey of the biblical witness to argue that holiness is part of the human call to live in the image of God. He links this with the need for holiness to be socially and structurally embodied in Christian unity. Dr. Gordon Leah’s article closely focusses on personal spirituality, inviting the reader to enter the gospel narrative of the walk to Emmaus and to experience the change that can occur through the recognition of the risen Christ. Leah’s background in English literature comes through as, in the closing paragraphs, he cites Flannery O’Connor and her affirmation that the spiritual journey, and the changes it involves, continually moves forward.
Holiness is a journal that draws on and develops the Wesleyan tradition of theology and scholarship. It is appropriate, therefore, that the final article in this issue is by the eminent Wesleyan scholar, Paul Chilcote. Chilcote examines the way in which Charles Wesley’s hymns employ the language of renewal and restoration, invoking multiple images and analogies, mostly from the Christian scriptures. Taken together, these suggest a complex change that has its origin in the divine will and has its endpoint in God’s kingdom of love, peace, compassion, and justice. It is a change summed up in one of the Wesleyan verses Chilcote cites:

Cloath me with thy holiness,
   Thy meek humility,
Put on me thy glorious dress,
   Endue my soul with thee;
Let thy image be restor’d,
   Thy name, and nature let me prove,
With thy fulness fill me, Lord,
   And perfect me in love

Richard Clutterbuck, Interim Editor.