

Editorial: Hopeful Stories, Anxious Cultures.

Since Issue 7 of the Journal those of us living in the UK and NA have been overtaken by a series of events that have accelerated, beyond our expectations, the levels of fear, crisis and anxiety among citizens. It is becoming clear that trust in the structures of state and economics to address current challenges is tumbling. It is now apparent that elites and thought leaders have largely failed to foresee or account for recent events. Indeed, their responses feel like the shock of the entitled that can't believe the "rabble" would behave the way they are in terms of democratic decisions. Recent events are revealing a churning just below the surface of everyday life among Western peoples. Something is going on, off the public stage and beyond the access of leaders and media gurus. In the *JMP* we've been raising questions about how the Christian narrative, an increasingly minority perspective across Western countries, can contribute to and cultivate spaces for the common good across increasingly pluralistic communities fraught with economic, social, racial and political divides. Issue 7 engaged the question of how we participate in forming mediating spaces across these complex tensions. We have sought to discern how the gospel can be earthed in the local by listening in on stories of how small gatherings of Christians are working for the common good in their communities.

As Christians on both sides of the Atlantic, we're now live in communities increasingly shaped by mistrust, anger, confusion, anxiety and fear. Neighbors feel increasingly at risk in communities that, until recently, were the bedrock of security. Whether it's the election of Donald Trump, with its attendant shock to all elites who considered themselves wise in reading and guiding social movements, or the hugely off-balancing Brexit vote, or the radical divisions that have re-emerged on the streets of America with movements such as *Black Lives Matter*, or the fear of the other in the form of migrants and refugees, or the growing chasm between the 1% and the rest that was such a central concern of the Occupy movements, or the eviscerating of a middle class that has been the basis for the social and political cohesion of Western democracies and so and so on, we find ourselves implicated in a massive unraveling in which the established structures of state, economics and their educated elites have lost their capacity to lead. Mistrust of elites and institutions across the West is palpable.

The *JMP* wants to go beyond a concern for these tensions. More critically it wants to address the question of what is happening underneath all of this in terms of the question of a missional engagement with this West. As an editorial board we know we can't step into these issues with premature analysis or quick determinations about the nature of a gospel engagement. How do we discern helpful ways of attending to this unraveling? We are aware of the temptation that invites us to take these movements of reaction, tension and anxiety and analyze them within the social, theological and cultural frameworks in which we've been formed in order to frame comprehensive explanations for what is happening. What we don't want to do is apply our own internalized models to explain what is happening (for example: "Brexit" or the Trump election is just part of such and such a social movement that can be explained by these models of social change or this theory of how people react when they feel under duress) because at the end of this road we are taking hugely important movements and fitting them inside our own current understanding of the world. In so doing we perpetuate a kind of colonization that has characterized too much of dominant Western responses to cultural change. We are good at this

analysis but we're sure it won't help us hear the Spirit. We wonder – what if the disruptions of political, social and economic unraveling can't be fitted into the current scheme of things? What if applying our own rationalized forms of explanation misdirects us from hearing the Spirit?

The Journal is trying to test out these instincts. It is doing this by starting from the grounded stories of Christians in specific locales who are attempting to grapple with some of the issues named above. How do we engage these stories with Biblical-theological conversations that resist the colonizing defaults within us to press everything into existing categories of social change? How might we become open to hearing the Spirit in new ways? How might these stories invite us to listen differently in order to be questioned by them?

This volume is framed around a number of grounded interviews with Christian communities/leaders engaged with some of these issues in their communities. We will share these stories with you but NOT try to provide in-depth analysis. We won't pretend we have some authoritative place from which to speak. We will record ways specific communities of God's people are seeking to engage the common good in the light of these issues and then invite engagement on how we might be hearing the Spirit.