From the Editor

If nothing else, the COVID-19 Pandemic seems to have been a productive time for many academics! Perhaps it was the chance to stay at home and work on their ideas, or perhaps it was just a realization that life is fleeting and so these thoughts and ideas need to be captured. Whatever the reason, this issue of The Asbury Journal is overflowing with creative ideas from many different directions. The first two papers, by Bonilla-Giovanetti and Bennett and Varghese, are products of the 2020 Advanced Research Program Colloquium held at Asbury Theological Seminary. Bonilla-Giovanetti examines the importance of understanding the supernatural worldview of the people of the biblical text in order to better understand scripture. This is especially valuable when interacting with people from similar cultural frames of reference in Global Christian communities. Bennett and Varghese explore the idea of autoethnography, or learning to understand our own cultural frameworks so we might better mitigate our own biases in our interactions with other cultural groups. This is a useful lesson for anyone involved in missions or cross-cultural ministry.

The next set of papers come from the work of seminary presidents. Matt Ayers, president of Wesley Biblical Seminary, goes deeper into understanding the idea of being “drunk in the Spirit” in scripture, especially in relation to the Eucharist and the unity of the Body of Christ. Külli Töniste, president of Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary in Estonia, delves into the subject of how John Wesley understood and interpreted the Book of Revelation. Timothy Tennent, president of Asbury Theological Seminary, joins this group by adding a key critique on how evangelicals should rethink the classic paradigm of exclusivism/inclusivism/pluralism when thinking about God’s interactions with people of other religions. This is republished from Dr. Tennent’s book Invitation to World Missions, but stands on its own as an important corrective for modern evangelicals in our modern globalized world.

The subject of religion and science emerge in the next two papers. Michael Bennett explores the use of cognitive anthropology as it can be applied to understanding trauma within the field of mental health.
Understanding how different cultures reflect on and understand worldview concepts differently can play a crucial role in understanding the best ways to treat people who might think very differently in terms of their cultural constructs. Logan Patriquin looks to the ideas of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology to provide a different take of a Wesleyan view of the theology of original sin. In both cases, secular science may provide avenues for Christians to better understand and refine their theology and ministry practice.

The final papers are essentially historical in nature. Samuel Rogal focuses on the ways that Abraham Lincoln interacted with Methodists, even while not officially claiming any religious affiliation during his life. Philip Hardt looks at how Methodists interacted with the difficult issue of infant mortality in the 19th century, especially through the lens of Dr. David Reese and his ideas to help solve this growing social problem in New York. Thomas Hampton explores Anglican missions to the deaf, through their work in schools in India and Ceylon. Finally, in both English and Spanish versions of their article, Robert Danielson and Kelly Godoy de Danielson examine the interaction between traditional mission history and the oral history of the missionized through a case study of the Baptist College mission work of the American Baptists in Santa Ana, El Salvador. The From the Archives essay concludes with a look back to the diary of Phebe Ward and her first-hand account of travelling to and interacting with the Mukti Revival of 1905 in India as a Free Methodist missionary.

These are historic times in our world as well with the Global Pandemic, and it is not just the scholars of the Church who are reflecting on and responding to the times. I have been a bit surprised by how quickly evangelical Christians have decided to support individual freedom over the love of neighbor as presented in scripture. As a reminder, Jesus said in John 15:13 “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” Does this sound like an appeal to individual freedom? Paul’s discussion on the Church as the Body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 points out how we all work together with different gifts for the good of the whole, and this is a prelude to his marvelous chapter on love. Earlier in the same book, in chapter eight, Paul laid out an argument that food offered to idols had no power, because of the authority of God through Christ. Does Paul use this as an opportunity to tell us to live in individual freedom? No. In fact he notes, “Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak” (1 Corinthians 8:9). Paul gives
an additional warning of how we use personal freedom when he writes, “‘Everything is permissible’- but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible’- but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others” (1 Corinthians 10:23-24). So, why is the evangelical church so willing to sacrifice itself on the cross of individual freedom in the cause of vaccines and mask wearing? I wish I understood their theological point, but all I hear is their political opinions, even among those who should have a better grasp of Christian theology. Jesus Christ modelled God’s view of love when he sacrificed himself for the sins of others, while he himself was sinless. Is it such a stretch to see that taking a vaccine or wearing a mask is a small price of individual freedom to pay for the love of our neighbors? The best of our Christian theology means nothing if we are not able to live it out in the world around us.