Editor’s Notes

This is a very rich issue of the Anglican Theological Review, and I am delighted that we have been able to bring so many interesting elements and authors together in a single issue. There are two major essays on Anglican moral theology and ethics; further discussion of the question of opening the communion table to the unbaptized; reflections on the environment, including by the Episcopal Church’s House of Bishops; and an essay on Rowan Williams’s theology and spirituality, the winner of the 2011 Charles Hefling Student Essay Contest.

All this is a manifestation of the health and of the depth and breadth of contemporary Anglican theology, broadly understood. All the theological fields have undergone significant change over the past few decades. There is now much greater recognition that all theological work is contextual, situated in particular times and places, bringing certain interests to the fore and leaving others in the background, articulating the lived experience of some groups without claiming universality. The interdisciplinarity of theological work is also more pronounced, with the human sciences and the arts as significant conversation partners, along with philosophy and the physical sciences. The separation of faith and reason in many ways has been reconciled. Some may say, “But this is what Anglican theological studies have been doing all along!” Indeed. Add to this new epistemologies—post-liberal, postmodern, postcolonial—new voices, new topics, and we have a situation where revivified ideas and methods, creative ferment, and constructive imagination may thrive even amidst controversy and contestation.

We begin the issue with the first fruits of an intriguing project in Anglican moral theology and ethics. Issue co-editor Timothy Sedgwick finds real value in taking stock of the subject area and what it says about the interweaving of thought and practice as we contribute to the ongoing development of the Anglican tradition. In terming the project an “archeology,” Sedgwick invokes Michel Foucault’s notion that beneath our particular consciousness operates a system of conceptual possibilities that shape and frame human thought. In the essays by Jeffrey Greenman and Timothy Sedgwick and the review article by
Benjamin King, Robert MacSwain, and Jason Fout, some major elements of these conceptual possibilities are brought to light precisely as contributions to traditions we might think of as “typically Anglican,” not only in the past but in the present and the future. Sedgwick’s introduction further frames this project and points to its next element: three essays on the tradition of moral theology, on postcolonial Anglican thought, and on social thought. With these will be Practicing Theology essays that reflect on the importance of these various strands in the lives of contemporary congregations. These essays, along with responses, will appear in the Fall 2012 issue of the Anglican Theological Review. I am most grateful to Timothy Sedgwick for pursuing this project, and to the many people who are part of it.

The next section of this issue is comprised of three presentations made at a special forum on the open table (or open communion) at St. Patrick’s Episcopal Church in Dublin, Ohio, on October 29, 2011. This program is part of the work of the Faith in Life Commission of the Diocese of Southern Ohio, intended to foster theological and ethical reflection among Episcopalians and their ecumenical and interfaith partners. Explicitly inviting the unbaptized to receive communion in the Episcopal Church continues to be a growing practice. And it is a controversial one, theologically, ecclesially, pastorally, and ecumenically.¹ The St. Patrick’s forum brought together three people who have pondered deeply the implications of what they often encounter and at times encourage in the practices of the church’s corporate worship of God. As current chair of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music as well as a seminary professor, Ruth Meyers is engaged with the issue at many junctures, including concerns about the official position of the Episcopal Church as such. A long-time advocate of the open table, Donald Schell is co-founder of St. Gregory of Nyssa Church in San Francisco, a parish where innovative approaches to liturgy and mission go hand in hand. Thomas Breidenthal, Bishop of Southern Ohio, serves a diocese where the practice of open communion is widespread, while he himself has strong reservations about it. In our email correspondence about the presentations, the moderator of the forum, the Rev. Dr. R. William Carroll, provided a helpful context for the papers presented that day and now included in this issue:

¹ For previous essays on the topic in the ATR, see the Conversations section of our website: http://www.anglicantheologicalreview.org/read/conversations/.
Although both Meyers and Breidenthal bring critical perspectives (in some respects sharply so) to these questions, each is wrestling with this emerging practice as a matter of ongoing discernment for the Church, making an earnest effort to see what might motivate those who offer such an invitation and how it coheres or fails to cohere with other Christian beliefs and practices. In their exchange, all three panelists modeled the kind of charitable engagement with one another and a shared commitment to the faith and mission of the Church, which above all is what Faith in Life was seeking to promote. We hope that this kind of conversation helps to open up new perspectives on what is at stake, for good or ill, in the practice of an explicit invitation to the unbaptized to receive Holy Communion.

The ATR is happy to extend the audience of these particular contributions to this important discussion in the life of the church. And we are grateful to William Carroll and the three presenters for allowing us to publish this work.

Next we have an essay by Luke Fodor on the “occasional theology and constant spirituality” of Archbishop Rowan Williams. In his essay, Fodor maintains that Williams’s theology springs from a mystagogical impulse born of his own spirituality. Williams’s theology invites his audiences to participate in the mysteries of the Christian faith while exploring these mysteries in scholarly discourse. In this way, Williams brings two disciplines together, spirituality and deliberate thought. Fodor examines Williams’s spiritual writings, such as The Wound of Knowledge, along with his critical theological writings, such as On Theology and Wrestling with Angels. He perceives a direction in Williams’s mystagogy, from embodiment to judgment to purgation, that invites and encourages us, heart and mind, “to purge ourselves of our own self-interests, to embrace our own vulnerable creatureliness, and to open ourselves to the judgment of the gospel. At the Spirit’s behest, this continual movement finds us occupying the place where Christ resides.”

Following a similar line, Douglas Burton-Christie asks, “What would it mean for Christians to take seriously the idea that we are called to practice paradise, to inhabit the world as if ‘everything is in fact paradise’?” The Christian contemplative tradition maintains that paradise is “knowable, graspable, and inhabitable” in the lives we live and know. In our age, our experience of paradise is threatened by our growing awareness of environmental degradation and the possibility
of related not-entirely-natural disasters. In studying some letters from Thomas Merton to D. T. Suzuki, Burton-Christie highlights Merton’s affirmation that insofar as we are “in Christ” by God’s grace, we are already living “in paradise.” This opens to the notion of living “free from care,” that is, living in a way that does not reduce everyone and everything to utility and purpose. For Merton, the “purposeless life” was a necessary foundation for social criticism and resistance, especially resistance to “false paradises.” The practice of living as if everything is in fact paradise may help us to see and appreciate the inherent value of all that is, and thereby spur us to participate in the “healing and renewal of the world” in which we live.

In their “Pastoral Teaching on the Environment” (September 2011), the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church plays the theology of grace essential to life in Christ off against the self-indulgence, greed, and heedlessness that have brought the world we inhabit to the brink of environmental disaster. The bishops call for all Episcopalians (and others as well) to face the urgency of environmental crisis, to pray for environmental justice and sustainable development, to reform our lives in accord with these prayers, and to seek political, social, and economic justice that will help restore “right relations both among humankind and between humankind and the rest of creation.” This is a matter of the human spirit and the Holy Spirit, and of how we enact both in our lives and in our thought.

If we have your email address, you have now received two issues of the ATR’s electronic newsletter, edited by Vicki Black. (If you haven’t received it, please send your email address to Jackie Winter, atr@seabury.edu.) The ATR Board has been considering how best to use social media and electronic publishing in ways that strengthen our mission and expand our audience. With the newsletter, we can now expand our conversation, bring you updates, and highlight various aspects of the overall work of the journal. We hope you enjoy the newsletter. And, as always, we welcome your comments and suggestions.

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