

Editor's Notes

The articles and book reviews in this issue of the *ATR* cover a wide range of topics. One thread running through the major articles is the challenges and gifts of cross-cultural difference and conflict. The issue opens with **Ross Kane's** postcolonial examination of the ongoing controversies about human sexuality and ecclesial communion. Anglicans around the North Atlantic, and perhaps particularly in the United States, have often placed support for same-sex relationships within a framework of justice. Kane begins with two observations. First, any adequate framework of justice must attend to the current realities and ongoing legacies of racism and colonialism, present if at times overlooked in debates about sexuality. Second, the very understanding of justice used in such debates is itself shaped by these realities and legacies. That is, it is not just the claims made in the debate (on any side), but the underlying presuppositions and assumptions giving the claims their form that must be examined with a postcolonial lens. The "scientific" equation of sexual behavior with fundamental identity may prevail in North Atlantic cultures, but elsewhere in the world this equation is not necessarily made. Fundamental misunderstandings about what, exactly, is being debated occur again and again.

Kane observes that the modes of discussion are likewise contested: Western preferences for a seemingly dispassionate, explanatory response to objections in parts of the global South cross cultural lines as dismissive and condescending. All of this is inflected by differences of power, influence, and resources, complicating the attempts to discern mutually accessible and reciprocal terms of engagement. Kane frames all this as moral tragedy; that is, as an outgrowth of inherent human limitation that affects our ability to respond well—generously, fully—to what is going on around us. Helpfully, Kane gives some examples of elements of the current discussion that show a growing capacity in the dominant liberal discourse for listening to and receiving the experiences and insights of multiple others. These elements foster hope for a climate more conducive to reconciliation, but without the pretense that any sort of moral or ecclesial perfection is to be had in this world.

It is appropriate, then, to turn next to basic questions about what we mean when we use such terms as *good*, *right*, or *virtuous*. **Ronald Damholt** discusses ways in which preferences in the translation of scripture both support and spring from the Western predilection for individuality and its accompanying tendency to divide “inner” and “outer” lives. *Dikaiosyne* is often rendered as “righteousness,” now largely understood as pertaining to the individual’s relationship with God, a primarily “internal” matter that cannot be definitively inferred from “external” behaviors. Thus, one might still be internally righteous, as public figures have been known to claim while persistently engaged in evidently unjust external acts. As Damholt points out, a better contemporary rendering of the Greek is “justice”—a term that refers to what is fundamentally corporate and relational and is also observable. In tracing the history of English translations of this important biblical concept, Damholt reminds us that translation is always interpretation, and interpretation is as much a matter of cultural context as it is of word choice.

By now, most North Atlantic Christians are at least acquainted with the challenge of how Christians ought to view and engage with other religious traditions. As **David R. Mason** reminds us at the outset of his article, this is not just a question of the relation of other religions to salvation. It is also a matter of “coming to terms with the relation of any religion to the ultimate reality that is taken to be the ground and end of all existence.” In the irreducibly plural religious landscape that is now present even in small North American communities, how can Christians resist the impulse either to claim exclusive access to salvation or to reduce all religions’ claims to an entirely relativistic sameness? In Karl Barth as well as Paul Tillich, Mason finds helpful fundamental concepts that, used well, may help Christians maintain our claims for the indispensability of Jesus Christ while also recognizing the saving grace of God in other faiths. Barth’s insistence that God’s grace can be received only by faith—that is, his insistence on revelation—already relativizes any religion, including Christianity, making all subject to the judgment of God, and at the same time disqualifying any religion as a reliable judge of its own faith as well as the faith of others. This means that Christians need not rely only on their own tradition to see the manifestation of the righteousness of God, while at the same time trusting that what is manifest in Jesus Christ is in fact this righteousness. Mason finds a similar move made possible in Tillich’s concept of the New Being. Jesus as the Christ is the manifestation of this New Being, and that manifestation, in Barth’s

words, discloses as well “the truth that God is found everywhere and that, both before and after Jesus, men have been discovered by Him.” Then the challenge is to discover what is revelatory in others’ beliefs, and to address what is not of God in our own.

Kortright Davis took the celebration of the Martin Luther King, Jr., holiday in 2014 to reflect on Black prophetic moments before, during, and after the “King Event.” Fifty years after the March on Selma and fifty-two years after the March on Washington, the effects of white superiority on the lives of people of color, and particularly perhaps on Black men, are everywhere in the news, and rightly so. Attention to very public tragic incidents ought to lead to greater focus on the systemic realities that are manifest in them. Davis argues that what is needed to bring about this focus is “moral, cultural, and social outrage”—an aspect of the prophetic tradition that is often overshadowed in our thinking by the elements of repentance and conversion, justice, and compassion. To illuminate the role outrage can play in spurring conversion to justice, Davis recounts a number of specific moments in our history where particularly “compelling and consuming causes” came to the fore to challenge unjust systems, practices, and structures. These spur moral outrage, and they also remind us that moral outrage is itself a thirst and a hope.

In his essay on J. M. Coetzee’s acclaimed novel *Elizabeth Costello*, **William Danaher** also addresses moral dispositions that respond to our contemporary context. In this case, they have to do with the significance of embodiment and how it is connected to love, violence, and sacrifice. Coetzee urges that human embodiment must be considered in light of other bodies with which human bodies interact, particularly the bodies of animals. Danaher opens up the way in which apparently philosophical and rational arguments are in fact testimony to a particular experience of connection and sheer vulnerability, a type of experience that presses through cognition to knowledge of a broader reality. This connects to another major theme: atonement and redemption, and the nature of sacrifice. Danaher points out that sacrifice here is a matter of willing surrender and works of charity, rather than the Girardian understanding of sacrifice as scapegoating. Even with this shift of emphasis, embodied sacrifice is still a challenge to understanding and inferring meaning from sacrificial events. Coetzee intentionally does not attempt to resolve any of this.

The issue continues with a short essay on a foundational motif in social (or relational) models of the Trinity: friendship in and with God. **F. Gerald Downing** brings to the fore the long history of discussions

of friendship as an appropriate metaphor for relationships in community. Friendship does not look for uniformity, but rather for consistent amity and common purpose. Friendships are, at least aspirationally, less prone to the unreliability that stems from competing interests (as in families and large social structures). In both Paul and John, friendship means being of one mind, with other Christians (Paul) and with God (John), a point subsequently made by the Cappadocians and others. Downing urges the recovery of this notion of being of one mind and argues for its reconstruction in adjusting to contemporary views of personhood that are less elitist, rationalist, and male-gendered than the ancient models. As theologians, pastors, and others continue to look for analogies from human life that help illuminate our life with God and with each other, this motif has particular promise.

In practice, friendship entails learning from each other. Even establishing the desire for friendship between “mainline” and “mega-” or post-denominational churches continues to be a challenge, especially on the ground. And it is a multifaceted challenge. In his *Practicing Theology* essay, **Jay Sidebotham** describes one path that takes on this challenge in a way that, by design, will enrich everyone involved, directly and indirectly. A number of years ago, Willow Creek Church (in the northwest suburbs of Chicago) decided two things: they needed to know more about what keeps people coming to church (not just what gets them there); and they wanted to pursue this question in ways that would benefit all churches. They sponsored a huge, cross-denominational study (headed by an Episcopalian) and then published their major findings in the *Reveal* series. Other local churches have made use of this series in stimulating their own life and mission; Sidebotham’s previous congregation and diocese were among them. Now, Forward Movement has taken up the topic more broadly in its *RevealWorks* project. Sidebotham gives an engaging account of what is involved in working with this material, and what has been learned about the Episcopal Church in the process. For example: If, as studies indicate, there is a continuum of spiritual practices in U.S. Christianity, where on the continuum do Episcopal churches tend to land? How can that data give us some direction in fostering the vitality of our congregations? What are “best practices” that resonate with Episcopal culture or ethos? And what are practices that open up congregations to insights that come from other churches, including those that we most want to resist? As Christianity responds to contemporary

culture, these questions must be engaged. It is promising that Anglicans do not think we can answer the questions all on our own.

The interface between faith and culture is very much the topic of **S. T. Campagna-Pinto's** book review article, "Barack Obama and the Habit of Hope." The books Campagna engages look critically and appreciatively at Obama's attempt to engage both religious and secular citizens through the theme of hope. In doing so, Obama has opted to take a centrist position in many areas, a position where he has compromised on both faith and politics. Reinhold Niebuhr (whom Obama explicitly cites as an influence) argues that such compromises are inevitable. The Christian realist must always recognize that all politics and all politicians inevitably fall short of spiritual ideals and aspirations: it's the way of the world, where love and justice are not synonymous. For Obama, as for Niebuhr, this means that political processes and disputes can go some distance toward justice, and should do so recognizing the inherent fallibility of both processes and results. All the books Campagna reviews find Obama fascinating, in that he provides a case study of how these struggles can unfold for good and ill, and lessons for how we ourselves might engage in them more wisely and more realistically. In the U.S., we have been in the lead-up to the 2016 election for some time. Campagna's essay and the books he reviews may help us think more faithfully as the political process heats up.

I end by noting that it is summer and so, as has become our custom, we offer an expanded poetry section, keeping in mind that poetry offers and requires a very different interaction between self, others, world, and God—an interaction that may be easier to engage when some of the pressures of work and weather have relaxed, for the moment. Or, perhaps this extra offering of poetry may help some find more space for different modes of being in the world with God. I hope all of you have many reparative and re-creative occasions over these months, whatever they may involve.

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