Introduction

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Two of the essays in this issue—my essay on “The Anglican Exemplary Tradition” and Jeffrey Greenman’s “Anglican Evangelicals on Personal and Social Ethics”—are the first two essays from a new research project on Christian ethics and the Anglican tradition. This project has undertaken what I would call the archeology of a tradition for the sake of identifying the sources for the constructive work of theology and ethics for the next generation. A number of contemporary North American Anglican ethicists come together here to present historical-constructive essays narrating a tradition of ethics within Anglicanism. These essays engage three things: the particular questions or problems the tradition seeks to address; the development of thought as addressing new challenges, changing assumptions, or new conditions; and what this means for the present as resource and as challenge. We hope here to offer some insights on topics and approaches that may be ripe for development.

Traditions are a matter of what is the literal meaning of the word “tradition”: what is “handed over” from one generation to the next. What is “handed over” is shaped by the needs of a community and what is considered important, given those who assume authority in bearing a tradition. This bearing of a tradition by those with authority has moved from storytellers to scribes and teachers to scholars and critics, each imbedded in specific social networks and institutions with their own distinctive interests and purposes. Christian ethics is thus shaped by church and academy, by religious practices and theories of ethics. These are related as a matter of concept and experience, signifier and signified, form and matter.

Theories of Christian ethics seek to define “what is Christian ethics” and thus interpret the “ethics” of a tradition and so define what texts are significant and what they mean. In turn, the texts of a

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Tradition point to questions and claims which refresh, critique, and reformulate the questions and understanding of “what is Christian ethics.” Given this mutually interpretive relationship between theories and the texts of a historical tradition, the understanding and development of an Anglican Christian ethic begins with an archeology of texts and the questions they pose for Christian ethics. For Anglicanism, this is a distinctive task, for the boundaries of the tradition are broad, given the character of the English reformation. The reading of a tradition or strand of a tradition is itself, of course, an act of interpretation. The intent, therefore, is that these probes will provide the basis for exploring shared convictions, reasons for differences, and outstanding questions for a contemporary Christian ethic.

Additional essay on ethics in Anglicanism are planned for the Fall 2012 issue of the ATR. Responses to this project are expected to be included. Essays on Practicing Theology are intended to offer some sense of how this work in the archeology of a tradition is reflected in current congregations. Review articles also have been solicited, one in this issue and another in the fall issue in order to provide a window into some current work in Christian ethics by contemporary Anglicans. Again, the hope of this project is to focus and nurture constructive work in Christian ethics as grounded in an historical tradition, in this case Anglicanism. In this sense, this effort itself is a project in traditioning, of handing over the work of Christian ethics for the sake of the life of Christian faith and the mission of the church.