

## Editors' Notes

Sometimes, it happens that the manuscripts slated for publication in a given issue of the *Anglican Theological Review* serendipitously (or maybe providentially) cluster around an idea or group of ideas to form an unplanned thematic issue of the journal. The issue you are holding happens to represent just such an occurrence.

In this case, the articles on offer each explore the character, utility, and concrete effects of theological imagination. They do so from a number of vantage points and perspectives. Each of them illustrates in some way how theology is constructed and practically embodied at various stages in the processes and contexts in which imagination plays a signal role in Christian discipleship.

What is theological imagination? One could reasonably define it as the total universe of authoritative sources, basic doctrinal commitments, core practices, and interpretive and constructive methods—all of this on both the implicit and explicit, examined and unexamined levels—that, situated within a given historical and cultural context, constitutes the framework for an individual's or group's theologizing, conceptually and practically. This imagination, in other words, is an imagination shaped simultaneously by: (1) the weight accorded to scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, respectively, as sources for one's theologizing; (2) the central theological principles that root and orient all the others; (3) the religious and spiritual practices that both flow from and further refine those principles; (4) the processes and procedures by which the theological sources are engaged and interpreted; (5) the methods selected for constructing and communicating theological ideas and practices; and (6) the specificities of time and place that inevitably influence theological ideas and actions, and to which those ideas and actions are meant to speak in some way. The manner in which each of these variables are calibrated and then interact systemically with each other, as a whole, forms a distinctive or characteristic theological imagination. All theology is born out of the resources provided by a person's or community's theological imagination, whether or not they recognize that such an imagination is in

operation. The articles published in this issue of the *ATR* give readers the opportunity to observe more closely how this works.

In his “Who Is Jesus Now? Maxims and Surprises,” **David F. Ford**, retired Regius Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge, offers a rare glimpse directly into the theological imagination of a world-renowned theologian. In this article, an edited version of the two McDonald Lectures he delivered at Emory University’s Candler School of Theology in April of 2018, Ford demonstrates how his own theological imagination allows him to answer the question Jesus poses to us all: “Who do you say that I am?” In this essay, we observe a master theologian engaging scripture, theological tradition, the creative arts, ecumenical work, and disability theology to develop a means of recognizing Jesus among us, in our time(s) and in our place(s). His project is explicitly conditioned by the Christology of the Prologue to John’s Gospel, as well as the vast sweep of Christian theologizing over the course of the past hundred years, a subject on which Ford is an expert. He offers seven maxims drawn from and supported by these sources that, in Ford’s view, provide important keys to Jesus’ identity and to how Christians might imagine the shape of their discipleship in light of who Jesus is and where he is to be found today.

**Ndidi Justice Gbule**, a theological historian and senior lecturer in the Department of Religious and Cultural Studies at the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria, approaches the theme of theological imagination from a much different direction. Gbule makes a case in his article, “The Translation Principle in Christian History: A Discourse of the Cross-Cultural Diffusion of Anglicanism in Ikwerre Land, 1895–2009,” that there is what he calls a “translation principle” at work in the process of the spread of world Anglicanism. This has allowed the theological imagination that animated specific missions to Nigeria to plant the seeds for and bring to flower a form of Anglicanism that is one with the core vision of Anglican Christianity but inflected in a manner specific to the sensibilities and practices of the Ikwerre people. Here, we can see how a particular theological imagination produced a specific understanding and practice of mission, and how a different, yet related, theological imagination was brought into being with the establishment of Christianity in this one specific West African locale.

Ford and Gbule, therefore, both demonstrate the concrete effects that theological imagination has in real-world contexts. How one imagines theologically gives rise to how one acts as a Christian in one’s world. Conversely, how one practices discipleship also influences the

(hopefully) ever-evolving and dynamic shape of one's theological imagination. This is a cyclical process, one in which each new iteration shifts—generally subtly but sometimes radically—the theological framework out of which a person or a group operates.

The articles that compose the roundtable on the first volume of Katherine Sonderegger's *Systematic Theology*, in contrast to Ford's and Gbule's essays, emphasize mostly the conceptual aspect of this interchange. That is as it should be, given that Sonderegger's own project in this first volume of her theological system, on the doctrine of God, is focused specifically on rehabilitating ways of conceiving of God that have, for various reasons, been eclipsed by other conceptions. In Sonderegger's view, this is to our detriment. Why? Though she does not put it in these terms, it is because it unduly attenuates our theological imaginations. As a result, our frameworks for thinking and acting theologically are less robust than they should be. This is a central thrust in Sonderegger's book, and one that bears directly on the theme of theological imagination. Moreover, this deep dive into the systematic theological perspective of Sonderegger, who occupies the William Meade Chair in Systematic Theology at Virginia Theological Seminary, allows *ATR* readers another opportunity to examine the shape of an eminent theologian's own theological imagination and to consider well the case she makes for ensuring that our own imagination—individually and collectively—is as fully and healthfully formed as possible. The roundtable itself draws this out still further, though, as stated before, often more implicitly than explicitly.

**Scott MacDougall** kicks off the symposium with an extended review of Sonderegger's book. He names the metaphysical commitments Sonderegger brings to the task of formulating appropriate "God-talk," commitments rooted in what Sonderegger refers to, quite traditionally, as the divine perfections: the unity, omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, and love that God does not "have" or "exhibit" but that God, in Sonderegger's estimation, *is*. MacDougall defines the key terms and concepts that structure the shape of Sonderegger's theological imagination. He also raises questions precisely on that score, questions having to do with her use of sexed language for God, her critical affinity for Platonism, and the lack of explicit treatment in her book of how Sonderegger herself thinks that the theological imagination she displays might be realized in the lived life of faith.

Noted biblical scholar **R. W. L. Moberly** continues the conversation with an essay focused specifically on Sonderegger's use of the biblical text. He calls her employment of the Bible "scriptural

impressionism,” and outlines concerns about her use of scripture that, in a sense, reflect variances in their own theological imaginations. Moberly applauds the weight that Sonderegger affords to scripture in making her proposals. He worries, however, that Sonderegger’s significant theological insight might come at the cost of too little attention paid to forms of biblical scholarship that would actually assist her in her project. He suggests what some of those might be and demonstrates the difference that engaging them might make in her work. In reading Moberly engaging Sonderegger, one attains a vantage point to see plainly how differences in theological imagination might entail adopting different methodological starting points that can lead to different conclusions, even while pursuing the same ultimate goals.

The same is true of **Jana Marguerite Bennett**’s essay, “Telling the Old Story in Gendered Keys: The Theological Revivals of Katherine Sonderegger, Kathryn Tanner, and Sarah Coakley.” Bennett, professor of religious studies at the University of Dayton, examines Sonderegger’s theological viewpoint by comparing it with that of two other prominent Anglican theologians who are also women presenting comprehensive theological perspectives. Putting the work of Sonderegger, Tanner, and Coakley into a three-way conversation elucidates the similarities and differences among them that mark their respective theological imaginations. Bennett demonstrates with clarity and precision how differently they each define systematic theology and the systematic endeavor, take up the task of characterizing God in a manner that does not pull God into the order of creation on the one hand, nor posit a fundamentally absent God on the other, how they construe the transcendent God to be immanently present, and how they designate prayer—variously conceived and practiced—as the appropriate response to this divine presence. Bennett succeeds in showing how the three theologians share these four general sets of concerns and make similar overall moves in their work, as well as highlighting how they do so quite differently, precisely on account of the differences in their theological imaginations, conceptually and practically.

**Katherine Sonderegger** herself closes the symposium on her book by responding to the three authors who engaged with it. In addressing directly the points raised by each, her response demonstrates that theological conversations are as much exchanges about differences in overarching theological imaginations as they are about content or even method, both of which are components of such imaginations.

These are conversations about varying theological visions, visions that spring from and feed back into diverse expressions of what it might mean to be Christian. As a whole, the roundtable on Sonderegger's provocative and profound work illustrates the complexity of theological imagination and how differences in the six factors that determine its shape coincide with differences in the resulting theologies, even in cases where theologians' goals might be quite similar. Even subtle differences have perceptible concrete effects.

The Practicing Theology article by **Lyndon Shakespeare, Joel C. Daniels**, and **Robyn King**, "Inhabiting a Theological Imagination: Three Portraits from Parish Ministry," takes up the question of theological imagination directly. The authors do so in the context of ecclesiology. They consider, each in their own contexts as priests and theologians, how the theological imagination of churches are key to their flourishing. They explore the characteristics of a theological imagination able to give vitality and life to congregations, and exemplify how this dynamic works by offering three specific case studies as examples. In their essay, they provide a working definition of theological imagination consonant with the one provided here, and they conclude with an expression of "hope that inhabiting a theological imagination, less a technique than a spiritual rule of life, will assist the church . . . with nurturing a relationship with the truth that sets us free."

Unlike Shakespeare's, Daniels's, and King's essay, but like all the others collected here, the two major review articles reflect the issue's unintentional theme in an indirect way. The effects of theological imagination—both formational and deformational—are signally on display in both of them. The first is a review article by **Jesse Zink** of six recent books (one of them actually a recent reissue) that examine the ways and extents to which human beings in capitalist contexts are tempted to idolize, sacralize, or even functionally deify financial markets. Of all the pieces in this issue, it is perhaps this one that demonstrates most clearly how unexamined theological imaginations running in the background of our societies have immense power to warp us as individuals, groups, entire nations, and perhaps, given the reach of our economic systems, even as a global species. Zink reviews works by Harvey Cox, Scott Gustafson, David Marquand, Michael Sandel, William Stringfellow, and Justin Welby. He shows that in marketized consumer economies in a neoliberal age, market ideology is essentially a theological imagination. Like all theological imaginations, it comes

complete with authoritative sources, central operating principles and commitments that orient the others, disciplines and practices, processes and procedures for evaluating the core principles, methods for developing and disseminating emerging concepts, and a sensitivity to context. The monumental difference between them and those featured in the other articles, of course, is that the imagination animating this ideology revolves around the creation of wealth, especially for individuals or an elite, rather than the orientation of the person to a life lived in a Godward direction, with the neighbor as a central focal point in doing so. Occasionally, a Christian veneer provides religious cover for such a theological imagination. Analysis of the form assumed by the variables composing such an imagination swiftly reveals, however, that the God of the Bible and of Christian tradition and devotion is not its lodestar, and that being oriented to that God is inhibited when under the influence of an imagination characterized by an alternative logic and by competing values, regimes of truth, and philosophical and moral commitments.

The second, at the opposite end of the spectrum, perhaps, is **Maria Gwyn McDowell's** Review in Depth of the trilogy *Ethics as Theology*, written by the noted Anglican moral and political theologian, Oliver O'Donovan. McDowell takes the reader through the landscape of O'Donovan's theological imagination as it issues in a moral theology rooted firmly in his scriptural hermeneutic and that is meant to be an embodied response in "faith, love, and hope" (in that order) to God's self-disclosure, the divine identity as recorded and communicated in the Bible. This is how the Christian responds authentically to the historical moment in which they are located. Ultimately, McDowell writes, O'Donovan's trilogy reads "as a superbly informed meditation on human agency, ethical reflection, and scripture."

As you read your way through these essays, we hope you will note the attention the authors have paid to the form and function of theological imagination, and to the crucial role it plays in the Christian vocation. We hope you will enjoy this informal and unintended thematic issue of the journal, and that it might be useful in forming your own theological imagination.

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