

Editor's Notes

Over the past several months the realities of harm and suffering grounded in racial, ethnic, and religious conflict have been manifested so blatantly, so broadly, and so frequently as to be unavoidable, reminding especially those in majority cultures that complacency and denial are not the way to resolution of long-standing and deep-rooted divisions. At the same time, the sheer vividness of key events can mask the complexities of history and society that give these events a great deal of their intensity and significance.

During the *ATR*'s Board meeting in September of last year **George Wayne Smith** offered some reflections on his experience as the Bishop of Missouri in the midst of the conflict in Ferguson, Missouri. We encouraged him to develop his reflections into an essay for the *ATR*, and are pleased to open the Practicing Theology section of this issue with his "Blood Cries Out from the Ground: Reflections on Ferguson." In his essay Bishop Smith offers us cultural and historical perspectives into the Ferguson and wider St. Louis communities that the mass media has largely ignored. These insights fuel his observations about his own involvement in events following the shooting of Michael Brown and about the church's responsibility to speak and act in such circumstances.

Craig Hovey continues our Practicing Theology exploration of human suffering in the midst of conflict in his essay "Being and Witnessness: Minding the Gap between Martyrs and Witnesses." Hovey takes as one of his guides the work of Robert Harvey, which explores the "strangeness of this English word *witness* with the odd grammar it implies." His essay connects with Bishop Smith's in its inclusion of black and womanist theologians who have explored this question with more than intellectual interest.

Lauren Winner joins Smith and Hovey in reflecting on another of the painful dimensions of contemporary life in her essay, "*Lectio Divina* and Divorce: Reflections in Twelve Parts about What Divorce Has to Teach the Church." Winner's ruminations on her personal journey and her reflections on the experiences of others who have divorced have something important to say to the church: "To those

who fear accommodation, and to those who fear alienation, this essay wants to ask: What might divorce help the church remember? What true things might divorce help the church see?" Her essay brings Henri Nouwen's image of the "wounded healer" to mind.

It is perhaps wonderfully serendipitous that the major articles in this issue of the *ATR* include **Jessie Gutsell's** essay on "The Gift of Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination of Western Medieval Christianity." This article is the 2014 winner of the Hefling Prize, which encourages seminary students to bring fresh perspectives on theological topics of interest and pressing concern to the church. Gutsell offers us a picture of tears as a means of communicating with the Holy One, who must surely weep for the tragedies that mar our world, whether in Ferguson or Paris, Gaza or Syria, Nigeria or New York. She begins with the haunting question, "Who has lived in this world and not shed a tear?" Weeping may be a language of prayer that can move us, in the face of cruelty and oppression, from passivity to action, from indifference to compassion.

In keeping with the *Anglican Theological Review's* commitment to connecting pastoral practice with thoughtful theological inquiry, and given the inclusion of three Practicing Theology pieces in this issue, we open this volume with **Richard Briggs's** foundational article, "Biblical Hermeneutics and Practical Theology: Method and Truth in Context." Briggs notes that the rise of practical theology as "a theological sub-discipline, with its attention fixed firmly on the daily lives and practice of humans in God's world, affords a new challenge in making sure that scripture's voice continues to be heard." One hears this in Smith's metaphorical use of the biblical image of Cain and Abel, in Hovey's critique of Christian views of sacrificial death, in Winner's reflections on the broken covenant lamented in the prophets. Surely these ancient stories, these ancient tragedies, continue to be enacted in our times. Briggs would have us be mindful of how our contemporary pastoral context reenacts an ancient and ongoing human story.

The retirement of Rowan Williams as Archbishop of Canterbury has not diminished his role as a theologian whose insights continue to intrigue and inspire readers throughout the world. **Dustin Resch** argues in his essay, "Christ and Contemplation: Doctrine and Spirituality in the Theology of Rowan Williams," that Williams represents a movement towards the integration of two areas of Christian endeavour, doctrine and spirituality, that in modern times have often

been considered separate and distinct. “A doctrine,” Resch writes, “is a linguistic construction by which the church aims to identify—not to master—God and the pattern of God’s activity.” As such, Briggs goes on to say, spirituality “serves doctrine by anchoring and testing talk of God in a holy life.”

For Anglicans, holy life is corporate—bodies and groups gathered for life together. Yet ordering community life so that the variety of gifts can indeed be brought together in the one Spirit is always a challenge, and one that requires revisiting on a regular basis. How authority can serve this *koinonia* is a perennial question for Anglicans, particularly pressing over the last decade and more. In her review article, “Questioning Authority,” **Ellen K. Wondra** considers recent discussions of authority that point to its relation to human well-being. Understood this way, those aspects of life together we often find difficult—difference, conflict, unsettledness, the requirements to listen and receive—take on positive value. And the very diversity of the Anglican Communion itself is a resource for living together in a church that is struggling to be a global communion. Of course day-to-day realities may be less than consistently inspiring, as Jay Sidebotham’s cartoon before the article shows.



This will be the last issue that I will edit as Editor in Chief. The demands of pastoral ministry as well as a variety of diocesan and national responsibilities have made it impossible for me to do this work in the manner that you as readers of the *Anglican Theological Review* deserve. I am grateful for the support given to me by the Board and by all the members of the editorial team, especially Jackie Winter, Vicki Black, Roberto Pamatmat, and Jason Fout.

So, my friends, may your journey through the Spring 2015 issue be filled with new perspectives on old questions. May you find here honest cries of lament and rigorous theological reflections that empower you to act in the hope of the good news of God in Christ.

Why no! I never thought other than
That God is that great absence
In our lives, the empty silence
Within, the place where we go

Seeking, not in hope to
Arrive or find. He keeps the interstices
In our knowledge, the darkness
Between stars. His are the echoes
We follow, the footprints he has just
Left. We put our hands in
His side hoping to find
It warm. We look at people
And places as though he had looked
At them, too; but miss the reflection.¹

RICHARD GEOFFREY LEGGETT
Editor in Chief

¹ “Via Negativa” by R. S. Thomas in *Collected Poems 1945–1990* (London: Phoenix Press, 1993), 220.