

Editor's Notes

As I recently reread the essays in this issue, I was struck by how each essay wrestles with using what we have inherited in contexts that are in so many ways not only different but actually new. This process of bringing out from the storehouse what is new and what is old in order to make the gospel hearable and credible is what we mean by tradition. What are we willing and able to receive from our ancestors? What do we want and need to leave aside, at least for the time being? How do we bring across time and place the faith, and the insights, and the doubts, and the commitments of those who have come before? Most often these are not easy questions to grapple with because, regardless of how beloved (or misunderstood or disparaged) some bit of our inheritance may be, it always has to be reconsidered to find out how it may be both meaningful and useful here and now. So we retrieve, recover, reinterpret, reconstruct, and sometimes deconstruct and even discard. In each case, this involves changing the meaning and import of what we have received, and generally we hope we do so in a way that maintains respect for our ancestors and, where possible, clear continuity. And, yes, sometimes “new occasions make new duties; time makes ancient good uncouth” (James Russell Lowell)—even so, appreciation for the fidelity of those who have gone before ought to be something we can muster.

None of this is new, certainly. Anglicans prize ourselves on noting that scripture, tradition, and reason, all three interwoven, guide us as we try to be faithful in the thoughts, words, and deeds called for in our own times and places. Most of us are well practiced in working with scriptural tradition, that is, not just the text *per se* but also how it has been interpreted over time, including by those who preach from the lectionary year after year. We may be less familiar with the myriad ways in which tradition has been handed on. In the articles in this issue we can see how some writers go about working with familiar and unfamiliar beliefs, texts, and practices in order to bring them alive for us here and now. And this may help us with the equally complicated and necessary task of figuring out what we ourselves want to pass along to those we hope will follow us.

This year's winner of the Charles Hefling Student Essay Prize, **Jeffrey Metcalfe**, engages in retrieving and reconstructing Augustine's theological virtues, with particular attention to the virtue of hope. For Augustine, says Metcalfe, hope in a fairly certain future could provide happiness in the present. But now, "the validity of hope can no longer be taken for granted in a world whose future remains in question. If hope is to have a future, it must be able to withstand the risk of not having one." Metcalfe considers the critique of hope offered by political theologian Vincent Lloyd, including Lloyd's treatment of the view of hope suggested in the work of the late philosopher Gillian Rose on melancholia and joy. Metcalfe discusses how Rose's postmodern "deconstruction of deconstructionist hope" makes space for hope in an eternal present where no future is guaranteed, but where many possibilities remain.

In her essay, **Alison Lutz** examines two different views on the role of the church in economic life that were presented at the Church Congress of the Episcopal Church in 1924. One position is based in natural law: economic arrangements, including market systems, are ordained by God, so the church has little or no reason or authority to speak on such arrangements, though it does of course have a duty to alleviate suffering. The other position is that economic arrangements are created by human beings and therefore can be changed by human beings. The church, then, can legitimately advocate for economic systems consistent with Christian principles. Lutz examines in detail the conference papers presenting these positions, uncovering how each appeals to particular and familiar strands of tradition to bolster its own claims. This careful reading assesses the theological adequacy of each position, and also shows how particular theological understandings of creation do and do not conduce to engaging the possibilities for change. As Lutz concludes, viewing existing systems as natural, given by God, or otherwise obdurate makes change seem impossible. Yet the church has significant theological, spiritual, and pastoral resources for forming moral imagination that takes a different view of such systems. "The life, death, and resurrection of Christ shows that the powers of death and destruction—no matter how totalizing they may seem at any given moment—do not have the last word."

Thomas E. Breidenthal's essay on the diaconate in the Book of Acts exercises moral imagination in exploring how the contemporary diaconate might serve "as a structural remedy for the church's

addiction to privilege.” Breidenthal notes two sets of tension involving the diaconate today, one having to do with the ministry of the laity, and the other with the ministry of priests and bishops. In both cases, resolving these tensions in particular ways can succumb to the desire for privilege in the church, either through suspect notions of servanthood or through ecclesial one-upmanship of various sorts. In Acts 5–7, Luke offers another possibility: the institution of the diaconate is a response to the church’s recognition of its failure to live up to its own aspirations and of its desire to be held accountable in the future. In other words, here the church is engaged in adaptive change in recognition that reliance on the Holy Spirit involves disciplined, sustained work addressing inevitable human failing. Because of its reordering with the establishment of the diaconate, “The church will never again assume that it can simply embark onto smooth waters with the Spirit in its sails. It will have to content itself with an overland journey through the Sinai wilderness that lies between the *koinonia* we aspire to and the privilege to which we still cling.”

As with Metcalfe’s essay, **Julie Clawson’s** contribution considers the difficulties with notions of hope, in this case beginning from the seminal work of Jürgen Moltmann now some forty years ago. Moltmann reinvigorated eschatology by proposing that hope is both transcendent and immanent: that for which we hope is even now breaking in, contrary to all appearances. Clawson notes that consistently living in this paradox, enacting what is hoped for before it comes fully into existence, is extraordinarily challenging, requiring constant resistance to pressure from within and without to resolve the tension in favor of either the “already” or the “not yet.” In Paul Ricoeur’s work on a hermeneutic of imagination Clawson finds an account of how people of faith regularly use the narratives of scripture and tradition to respond to these pressures. Encountering scripture and tradition is always an act of interpretation in that it entails bringing them into the present, into one’s own world. Making the past present changes the world of the interpreter so that “interpreting the event of the advent of Christ—that of the future and the past which therefore informs the present—means performing through acts of hope in the present the anticipated reconciling hope of the future.” As Moltmann puts it, “When the future comes to meet us this way, there is reason for us similarly to go out to meet it.”

In the first of two Practicing Theology pieces, **Tim Vivian** describes how the tribulations and exclusions of life in a highly conflictual

and, eventually, divided diocese have been transformed by deliberate focus on those marginalized and dispossessed through the conflict. For Vivian and those with whom he ministers, empathy and compassion in such situations mirrors Jesus' own life and ministry. Care and concern for people's and the church's actual woundedness may mean a more indeterminate approach to tradition and teaching than some may find comfortable. But it may also place us in a different, more expansive relationship with the mystery of God.

Marshall A. Jolly reflects on the concrete realities of coal mining in Appalachia, with its stark positive and negative aspects. "At once, coal puts food on the table, but poisons those who work the mines in order to purchase the food"—one of many daily paradoxes and constantly impending crises that affect those whose lives are wrapped up with the mines. In order to come to an appropriate response to the moral questions raised directly in this context, Jolly has found it crucial to pay close attention to the "cultural identity, memory, and narrative" of the people of Appalachia. Generally, debates about mining turn on economic utilitarianism: "mining means jobs." The concerns here are real, and they cannot be put aside. But, Jolly thinks, the grounding of Appalachian identity in love for and attentiveness to the land and nature provides a basis for hope that at one and the same time faces squarely the necessities of survival *and* "the imaginative possibility that hope may exist in places other than tangible and profane benefits."

Finally, in her essay on poetry and theology, **Judy Little** looks at five poets who place faith in conversation with some of the more challenging contemporary themes of intellectual life and public discourse, such as modern physics, evolution, and ecological crisis. Each of these phenomena is often taken as challenging the very possibility of faith, if not actually destroying it. Poetry, with its rich use of multiple metaphors, rhetorical strategy, and surplus of meaning, recasts these challenges not as some bounded, clear juxtaposition of the affective against the reasonable, but as the stuff of our daily lives that causes us to ponder and to wonder. Now, for example, we experience time very differently than did those living before the eighteenth century or so: now its proportions are "monstrous" rather than manageable (or nearly so). Yet the phenomena of deep time provide the shape and context of generations of relationships not only among humans but between time and what both proceeds and possibly succeeds human interventions. Little

suggests that “the unexpected stretches of imagination” in the poems she discusses “may very well derive from the necessity of stretching, reaching, travelling” in response to the constant reinvention and, yes, retrieval and reconstruction that characterizes the contemporary world.

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