

Editor's Notes

Both subscribers and occasional readers of the *ATR* alike will probably have noticed over the years that a number of issues of this journal are thematic, seeking to approach a single topic from a variety of perspectives and methods of study. Other issues—like this one—are wide-ranging in focus, with no deliberate overarching theme or topic. Each article stands on its own. I would venture to say, though, that among these articles, addresses, Practicing Theology essays, book reviews, and poems there is a common attentiveness to the relation of theory and practice, to how our theological efforts are formed by and help to form the practices of ordinary church life. Of course, such attentiveness is a key part of the mission of the *ATR*, and a challenging one. As has been noted often, theological studies require a certain distance from actual situations, a distance that allows focus and thematization of what is in fact largely unfocused, responsive if not reactive, and endlessly changing. At the same time, theology and practice are inextricably connected, though the temptation to pull them apart is often compelling on both sides. From a variety of angles, each of the essays in this issue takes on the task of bridging this gap.

In the opening article, **Clive Beed** and **Cara Beed** examine the claim by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and others that Jesus encouraged (if not outright founded) a movement with egalitarian governance. Noting that egalitarianism does not look for complete equality in every area, the authors suggest that what is at stake here is the reduction of a limited range of inequalities within social organizations, including hierarchies of status and power. “Whether Jesus sought members of his movement with different social standing and economic condition to play a comparable role with each other in helping determine policy for the movement” is a more accurate way of putting the question. The Beeds give a canonical reading of key sayings and actions of the Matthean and Lukan Jesus, arguing that the “great reversal” statements imply a dismantling of hierarchically ordered governance or decision-making practices. Also involved is a recasting of the patriarchal “natural family,” despite its prominence in Jesus’ time as a template for social organization. The article concludes that

egalitarian governance within the Jesus movement is consistent with Jesus' own words and actions as recorded in the Gospels, even though the subsequent church has faltered in continuing this model.

Anglican theologian Daniel W. Hardy died in 2007, curtailing his outstanding contributions to theological studies and theological students around the world. Some readers may be familiar with his writings on theology, biblical reasoning, ecclesiology, and the church; others may remember his work as a teacher and as Director of the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton. The *ATR* is happy to publish three addresses from a day of appreciation and elaboration of his work, held at Roehampton University in June 2014. The first of these, by **Julie Gittoes**, unfolds and expands Hardy's notion of the "gifting of responsibility" by God the Spirit, through which "we participate in divine light without having to possess it." In Hardy's view, this gift irradiates and changes us even as it challenges us—the church—to move from the forgiveness given in "the eucharistic encounter" into the world in order to work with God "to make it possible for the light of God to embrace and transform human life in all its dimensions." The world is the arena of God's activity, and the church's task is one of accompaniment, of "gently edging forward the things that are being prompted" by God's generous loving activity. A key focus in Hardy's last work, *Wording a Radiance*, is pilgrimage—our journey through the eucharist and scripture to the world, the world's journey toward God and its own fulfillment.

Jason A. Fout's address begins with the importance of sociopoiesis in Hardy's work, the ongoing activity of God in the world "within creation to create sociality" and flourishing. Through this activity, the world is attracted to God, in and through whom its being is fulfilled (not obliterated). To render this vision more concrete, Fout looks at the contemporary socio-political context of American churches, living as they do in a society where self-referentiality and self-sorting into homogeneous groups seem always to increase and to inhibit sociopoiesis. Four pervasive elements of the American built environment reinforce and encourage self-absorption: focus on the private rather than the public; the dispersion of communities by easy reliance on cars; the accompanying focus on new development in suburbs and other low population-density areas; and a loss of orientation or sense of the importance of place. Fout suggests that the recovery of a sense of the historic Anglican parish—a social rather than ecclesial designation—may help remedy some aspects of contemporary self-absorption

and dispersal, in that the parish indicates a particular and proximate area which is a local church's mission field. To put it another way, parish involvement in local communities not only witnesses to but helps to enact the divine sociopoiesis.

In his address **Stephen Srikantha** explores how Hardy related sociopoiesis to the practice of eucharistic worship, seeing the eucharist as "the defining measure of the church"—in the lives of its individual members as well as in particular local churches and the church and creation as a whole. In calling the eucharist a "measure," Hardy sought to establish common ground between theology and various sciences that look to the social relations that form and support visible communities. The practice of the eucharist places the "primal event" of Christianity into the context of these communities, making it possible to generate "probabilistic claims about the world"—the purpose of Coleridge's notion of abduction as Hardy appropriated it. Srikantha uses the semiotic understanding of signs as both intersubjective and suprasubjective to draw out the way the eucharist forms a fundamental ethic that "brings about a particular form of being related toward the 'other'" and that reorders our own thought and relationships, as well as the church's relationship with its God and God's created world.

The Fall 2015 issue continues with three Practicing Theology essays. In the first, **Cathy George** reflects on the effect of various innovative partnerships in building up an economically challenged church and community. Both the community of Dorchester, Massachusetts, and St. Mary's on the Hill Episcopal Church faced fundamental challenges to survival, and while the Diocese of Massachusetts was committed to serving both the community and the church, the needed resources seemed out of reach. By forming coalitions of mutual interest, the church through its members and various community organizations through theirs were able to support and further a variety of projects, each of which contributed to the life and hopes of the community. The church benefited as well, opening itself to new members, realizing a greater importance to the community, and nurturing its own sense of mission and hope. George sees these various partnerships as building bridges, one of the implications of Christian belief in God's transforming and reconciling work in the world.

Like other Christians, Episcopalians and Anglicans claim that the Bible is the primary source of our faith, knowledge, life, and reflection. Yet in today's highly secularized societies, many Christians know little more about the Bible than what they hear in church on Sundays.

Scripture reading in the form of *lectio divina* (among others) is not a daily practice in most congregations, or even perhaps for most clergy. **Marek Zabriskie** has been deeply concerned about how widespread biblical illiteracy limits the church in its faithfulness in daily life and in mission. In his essay, he discusses the reasons for The Bible Challenge and its effectiveness in increasing not only biblical literacy but also depth and breadth of faith in individuals and congregations. The Bible Challenge is designed so that individuals and groups can actually manage to read through the Bible in a reasonable amount of time. In many places, the effect of this practice has been lasting church revitalization of various sorts. Zabriskie recognizes that there are many spiritual and ecclesial practices that build up the body of the faithful, but he maintains that reading the Bible regularly and allowing ourselves to be challenged and re-formed by it is the most important.

Episcopal lawyer, lay theologian, and activist William Stringfellow found a great deal of his strength and inspiration precisely in regular reading and reflection on scripture. **James Walters** reviews key moments, persons, and writings in Stringfellow's life to highlight lessons contemporary Christians might learn from him about church leadership. Stringfellow was skeptical about what the church could learn from the world, especially about leadership, given that institutions form leaders more than individual leaders form institutions. Some of the effects of this reality could be mitigated, Stringfellow thought, by recognizing that in the church leadership is in fact shared by all. Laity have the vocation and the gifts for being the face of the church in the world; they need to be encouraged and formed to do so. Much of this can occur as the church focuses on pastoral care—understood here not just as alleviating people's distress but as countering the "principalities and powers" whose dominion causes it. "The priority of pastoral care boils down to the simple truth that in order for the church to be the redeemed principality it must exist for the service of others." In our efforts to configure leadership in the contemporary church—efforts that often make use of leadership theory from "the world"—Stringfellow's wariness and criticism are needed to sustain the healthy tension associated with being in but not of the world.

Precott D. S. Parsons's review of recent studies of German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer highlights the importance of context—both Bonhoeffer's own, and the multiple contexts from which spring the works Parsons reviews. Though no historiographer,

Bonhoeffer was nonetheless attentive to the contexts of the various sources he retrieved, and to their reappropriation in his own situation. Parsons notes both the ways the works he reviews continue in this vein, and where they fall short. He finds in Bonhoeffer's works certain tensions (as between freedom and obedience) and breadth as to make that work helpful in constructive theological projects in contemporary contexts. "The diversity of form, audience, context, and content leads Bonhoeffer's work to be a theological conversation within itself, a conversation that is open at the edges and thus available for different points of entry by any number of different interpreters." The books reviewed here illustrate his point well, and enable him to assess certain other interpretations that may be now emerging.

Finally, I want to draw your attention to the very rich section of book reviews included in this issue. I am grateful to the *ATR's* fine Book Review Editors for inviting discussion of so many books covering such a wide range of fields and genres. Their work encourages each of us both to read more in our particular areas of interest, and also to cross disciplinary lines and explore connections we may not have seen before.



This is my last issue as Interim Editor, and I must say I have enjoyed this time immensely and am happy to continue with the *ATR* as Editor Emerita. The gift given to journal editors is the possibility of reading widely, entertaining new approaches and ideas, and discerning what might encourage those in both church and academy in their own vocations. **Tony Baker**, our incoming Editor in Chief, is well aware of this gift as well as the challenges it brings. I am very much looking forward to his leadership in continuing the *ATR's* challenge and mission to its varied readers, and to the church.

ELLEN K. WONDRA
Editor in Chief

