

Introduction

GRANT LEMARQUAND AND GEORGE SUMNER*

There is a Latin rhetorical device called *praeteritio*, in which the speaker opens by saying, “This is not an article about that blankety-blank Joe . . .,” in the hope that Joe would, thereafter, never leave the hearers’ minds. Well, this is an edition of the *ATR* with contributions from a number of evangelical Anglican scholars, and it is not about same-sex unions! But the present issue of the *ATR* did grow out of some concerns which are not unrelated to the present state of church life, in which virtually every conversation, liberal or conservative, has in recent years been, implicitly or explicitly, about that topic. In fact the present issue is a reaction to an issue of the *ATR* from a few years back. It was devoted entirely to the subject of homosexuality and same-sex unions, with the preponderance of the contributors from the revisionist wing.¹ This elicited a protest from conservative members of the *ATR* family (including the two guest editors for this issue) that a more traditional voice had not been heard. The *ATR* saw our point and offered us a chance at rebuttal on the same topic, but we declined. On the subject of same-sex practice, the conservative view is well known and well documented.² But there are other concerns which we believe actually to be more central, and these concerns—which have not regularly been rehearsed of late in Anglican conversations—deserve a hearing. So we proposed an issue on salvation, and the *ATR* board welcomed this, which response we appreciate.

The past generation has seen a thinning of discourse with respect to basic claims and assumptions of Christian belief and life. At least in the old days of the churchmanship wars, people knew what to arm wrestle about. The open communion debate makes one worry how

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¹ “Homosexuality, Ethics, and the Church,” *Anglican Theological Review* 90, no. 3 (Summer 2008).

² “Same-Sex Relationships and the Nature of Marriage: A Theological Colloquy,” *Anglican Theological Review* 93, no. 1 (Winter 2011).

seriously the past generation meant all its talk about the importance of formation for the Baptismal Covenant. “Missional” is all the rage, though one wonders in some cases whether witnessing for Christ remains in any sense a fixed point of navigation. On the Anglican front the self-satisfied claims about being the “bridge church” or the *via media* no longer seem plausible. And of course we North Americans are an “outcomes-based,” do-what-works people, which serves us in good stead in many areas—among which theology is not numbered. No sector of the church is fully immune from this description and its consequences.

Some years ago, in 1997, Elisabeth Koenig, professor of ascetical theology, preached a memorable sermon in the chapel of The General Seminary in New York. The gist of the sermon was this: the big dichotomy for our time is between being “accepted” and being “forgiven.” The former almost seems to be the latter, and yet the difference makes all the difference. Being forgiven is deeper, harder, far better. It presumes a grammar of sin and redemption; it entails struggle, failure, and hope. In our culture, psychological movements of acceptance are the distant cousins of forgiveness, but much is lost in the transaction, not least the agency of a sovereign God *pro nobis*.

So it was a deliberate decision on our part to suggest that this issue of the *ATR* be devoted to the doctrine of salvation. We think that this doctrine provides the soil in which conversations we need to have about communion, mission, reconciliation, and indeed the nature of God, can grow.

A few observations about the assumptions and the limitations of what we offer herein are called for. These articles are exercises in retrieval, *ressourcement*. They assume an intact theological tradition which we need, once more, to listen to. We assume the readership of the *ATR* to be cognizant of, and friendly to, such an enterprise. We are also aware that there is more to do. These essays assume, for example, a doctrine of sin. Yet this is an increasingly controverted locus. What do we now believe about it? Even those who find the subject of sin grim and unhelpful think that the world needs to be freed of oppressive structures. And of course without a robust concept of sin the concept of grace corrodes back into mere acceptance. Perhaps this issue points to yet another issue which needs to be addressed.

Theology as hearing anew the great doctrinal affirmations of our faith begins with seeking to understand the logic of those claims from within, with thinking along with the tradition. To this end, we offer in this issue a series of essays, all of which are related in one way or

another to soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. We seek to understand the logic of Christ's atoning work itself (Justyn Terry, George Sumner). But, one might ask, isn't Anglicanism an "incarnational" religion? Such a question drives us back to the doctrine of God, in which we see that God's being and work are inseparable (Christopher Holmes). To mistake this fact is to end up with a Christ who is lost in abstraction (the cosmic Christ?) or lost in the vicissitudes of history itself (the Jesus Seminar?). Likewise, atonement is not some inert good, an impressive monolith apart from the human beings for whom Jesus died. So soteriology leads to a discussion of justification and sanctification, of God's free work, and hence the real effect it has on us through his Spirit (William Witt). Finally, all these discussions are placed against an eschatological background. Salvation implies eschatology, for it must lead to the question of the possibility of eternal loss (Grant LeMarquand). If there is one throne before which all must appear, the question of salvation and the religions has an eschatological dimension as well (Jonathan Wong). We focus on one doctrine, but in so doing appeal to a surrounding web of doctrines, and so, we hope, offer an example of how doctrinal theology works. And, once more, one may ask: is it Anglican? With the deep simplicity and brevity of our senior voice, John Rodgers makes it clear that all that ensues flows from the core affirmations of the Thirty-Nine Articles and Scripture.

We may claim to attend to this nest of theological questions from within, but we cannot deny that we do so with one eye on the environment from which a number of challenges may be heard. Is the doctrine of salvation too narrow in this pluralistic age? Have we, in our deeply historicized and supposedly post-metaphysical age, outgrown such claims? And what about the inherent unfairness of substitution, or the offense of offering up for death one's child? From the inside out, these essays address all of these questions as well.

We do not offer these essays as an exhaustive treatment of the subject. We are aware that the Bible declares that the God who created the universe has not given up on the tangible, physical dimension of the cosmos.³ There is still work to do extending soteriology to the ecological question. Our conviction is that foundational work on the doctrine itself will make us better able to address this task.

³ Our fellow Anglican N. T. Wright's *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008) is a good resource on this topic.

