

## Editor's Notes

“Church scholars.” What images does that phrase conjure? Learned women and men in book-lined studies, sitting in armchairs and reading? Or bent over cluttered desks marking student papers? Teachers in seminary classrooms making erudite comments to wide-eyed, eager young students? Someone in a white coat presiding over “classrooms and labs, loud boiling test tubes”? Perhaps an archaeologist on a dig in the Sinai Desert; or a researcher in a monastery library, leaving stacks of books to pray the Daily Office? How about a group of people in a windowless hotel conference room, carefully working out every word, every phrase of a document going to the next General Convention?

This last image may seem improbable, but in fact a great deal of the church's work is done by scholars who are members of the church's standing commissions, committees, agencies, and boards. In the wake of the Episcopal Church's most recent General Convention and the Anglican Church of Canada's most recent General Synod, and as the preparation for the 2008 Lambeth Conference begins, it's worth pausing a moment to acknowledge this too often unheralded work.

In the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada, it is these commissions, committees, agencies, and boards that devise new rites for worship, negotiate ecumenical agreements, write and evaluate ordination exams, and consider and develop the church's theology of mission or its ethics for end-of-life issues. And the scholars who serve on these groups put in hours, days, or weeks each year researching, writing, presenting, and commenting. The contributions of the Episcopal Church's scholars are spread throughout the “Blue Book”; the resolutions sent to Convention committees, the House of Bishops, and the House of Clerical and Lay Deputies; and the reports filed by title in the proceedings of General Convention.

What is noteworthy here is not that scholars are asked to use their expertise for the sake of the church—that is certainly as it should be. Rather, the work scholars do in these settings is often very different from their “own work”—those ongoing projects of research, writing, and teaching that many of us think of as “real scholarship.”

Often, church scholars are asked—and consent—to setting aside their personal interests or points of view in order to lend their knowledge and skill to some work that the church needs to have done. For example, a biblical theologian may write a question for the General Ordination Examination that can reveal the extent of students' abilities to follow a theme through both testaments of the Bible and then teach it in an adult education setting in a small parish. Or a church historian may write a succinct account of the local adaptation of the episcopate in two different churches now trying to overcome historic divisions. A theologian may be asked to give theological support for a practice of the church that the theologian him- or herself finds problematic. A liturgiologist may be asked to assess a eucharistic rite intended for use in very specific circumstances. The outcomes of such efforts may be filed away somewhere rather than published, or they may appear as the work of the group as a whole. Such presentations may not be what scholars create as part of their ongoing constructive work. But they are what the church needs.

My sense is that most church members have little or no awareness of this part of the work of church scholars, or its importance to the church's ongoing life. Academic institutions—and, indeed, other scholars—do not easily see the value of a scholar's writing a paper on someone else's topic. Church scholars themselves may chafe at what *ATR* Board member Bill Petersen calls "the vocation to anonymity." But "vocation" is surely the right word.

The *ATR* regularly publishes the work of church scholars as part of our mission of contributing to the thoughtful consideration and careful discussion of matters facing the church and its members. Sometimes these are conference papers, sometimes assessments of and responses to important documents or events. Recently we've published some of the papers prepared for the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops. In this issue, we are printing two responses to some of those papers as a way to broaden the conversation, the debate, on something that affects us all. Such learned conversation is part of the Spirit's work in the church, I am convinced. Without it, the church succumbs to the temptations of reactivity, of yet more reiterations of entrenched positions (and often more strident ones at that), of appeals to what we may remember of long-past "golden days," and of recourse to anecdotes whose import is evident perhaps only to the speaker. Sound scholarship, critical and self-critical reflection, and careful dis-

cussion are indispensable as we wrestle with the many issues, events, and controversies that are so much of our calling of faithfulness to the gospel. Thank God for the work of church scholars.



This issue features a number of articles on liturgy, brought together because they address not so much a common topic as a common question. Liturgy is surely a primary area where the faith of Christians is strengthened and formed, shaping both how we speak of our faith and how we give witness to it in our manner of life. That prayer, belief, and witness are integrally related is widely recognized. But *how* these interrelationships work is less clear—a perennial question.

For decades the rites of Christian initiation have been a case in point. **Ruth Meyers** and **James Turrell** respond to the 2005 report of the Theology Committee of the Episcopal Church's House of Bishops, "Forming Christians: Reflections on Baptism, Confirmation, and Christian Formation." Both authors consider the baptismal theology of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer to be a development of singular importance for the Episcopal Church. *Lex orandi, lex credendi*: In seeing baptism as full and complete initiation into the Body of Christ, the 1979 Prayer Book underscores the fact that all persons are called to ministry, not just the ordained (or confirmed). On this basis, the expression of the church's vocation is its mission in and to the world. The formation and care of church members is, then, a necessary part of equipping the church for mission; but it is not the sole purpose of the church's existence. Over a period of thirty years and more, the emphasis on baptism as full initiation and equipping for ministry has effected a broadened and deepened participation in every area of the church's life and mission.

At the same time, the Rite of Confirmation is still in the Prayer Book and figures largely in bishops' visitation schedules and their preaching. Confirmation happens. It is still a requirement for ordination and for holding some church offices. But if baptism is full initiation, what is the point of confirmation?

In our first article, **Ruth A. Meyers** insists that confirmation does not complete initiation: baptism has already made the baptized full members of the Body of Christ. Confirmation may be, for some, a mature affirmation of faith. But it is unrepeatable, while the life of faith

may easily include many signal moments of deeper or rediscovered faith. Confirmation often involves those whose faith has yet to reach the point of maturity. The passage it ritualizes has, all too often, been a movement away from the church, while it is less evident how we might mark a later return. Meyers concludes that contemporary baptismal theology identifies confirmation as a pastoral matter, a “rite that includes mature public affirmation of faith and laying on of hands by a bishop, conveying God’s blessing and the strengthening gift of the Spirit.” The rigors of the Christian life and the realities of ongoing formation suggest that reaffirmation of commitment to the Christian faith is needed, and perhaps more than once. Were the rite generally known as confirmation to be understood in this light, it would serve as a renewal of baptismal commitment rather than a rite of passage to a manner of life upon which the baptized are already embarked.

In his article, **James Turrell** examines how parts of the Theology Committee’s report may undermine this same baptismal theology. Turrell notes that the office of bishop includes great responsibility for teaching and formation, both in word and in deed. Yet a survey of bishops’ practices of confirmation and reception seems to indicate at least some confusion about how baptism and confirmation are connected, along with a widely disparate “take” on the purposes of reception. What do bishops’ practices teach? Turrell also takes issue with Kathryn Tanner’s paper on confirmation (published in the Winter 2006 issue of the *ATR*) that argues that confirmation is “a distinctive rite of strengthening and nurture,” an intensification that marks a shift in the life of the believer into greater accountability for manifesting the fruits of baptism. Turrell argues that the baptized life of faith is manifest from baptism on (and even before), and an unrepeatable rite of strengthening occludes this reality. At the same time, confirmation overshadows the renewal of life that is one of the effects of regular participation in the Eucharist. Better, Turrell proposes, to eliminate the initiatory aspects of confirmation altogether. This would eliminate confusion and highlight key elements of both baptism and Eucharist.

**Susan Marie Smith** takes another angle on the relation of liturgy and the life of faith, advocating “ritualizations” specific to particular contexts and events as a way to give expression to God’s presence in and for a community gathered around immediate and local concerns. Such ritualizations, properly performed, stand in creative tension with the universal elements of liturgy through which people recognize each other as worshiping the same God despite differences

of space and time. Smith maintains that the practice of indigenizing liturgy meets the legitimate pastoral needs of local communities in a way that standardized worship may not. At the same time, it may be difficult to ascertain the aptness of localized liturgies and rituals. Smith offers four standards that evaluate the usefulness of a particular ritualization in a particular pastoral situation, while also assessing its “fit” with the characteristic beliefs, practices, and commitments of Christian faith. Smith also sees local ritualizations as a means to develop the “ritual competence” of all members of the church as we continue to take up the rich diversity of God’s creation and providence into worship of the one Creator.

In a discussion of the relation between practice and theology, **Lizette Larson-Miller** takes note of the phenomenon in North America and Great Britain of “anointing by proxy” for healing, those occasions where persons present themselves for ritual healing not for themselves, but for others who are not present. Larson-Miller sees in this practice a blurring of a distinction between prayer and sacrament, the latter being an encounter, a concrete human action in response to a particular, embodied, and temporal relationship mediated by God. Sacraments include prayer, but not all prayer is sacramental. A sacramental rite presumes a number of elements, including a community physically and temporally gathered—that is, a body made up of bodies as well as memories, beliefs, and desires. Sacramental healing is, properly, always connected with the Eucharist, itself a primary sacrament of healing and reconciliation. And it involves ritual touch along with prayer, thereby attending to the particular elements of affliction, not the least of which is social isolation, overcome to some extent by the presence of embodied others. On Larson-Miller’s view, sacrament and prayer complement each other in important, necessary ways while also having their own specific characters. Anointing would seem to require the presence of the one on whose behalf prayer is offered in a way that intercessory prayer does not.

**Owen Thomas** offers a helpful analysis of how some larger cultural understandings of spirituality reflect an ongoing tendency to romanticization in Anglo-American culture. Romantic movements emphasize the individual, the fantastic, the exotic, the transgressive; and they serve as a much-needed corrective to an overreliance on the social order, the rational, the routinized, and the regulated. However, Romantic movements also spawn various forms of disregard for others and for the realities of material existence. Thomas notes these destruc-

tive characteristics as they are manifest in consumerism, political neoconservatism, and certain elements of postmodernism. He also expresses caution concerning the romanticized elements of contemporary spirituality and theology, where many readily claim to be “spiritual but not religious,” and where some scholars are suspicious of analysis and rigor while favoring the vague, chaotic, and eclectic. There is no doubt that the current Romantic movement and its associated spirituality provide a salient critique of contemporary culture’s excessive emphasis on the material and the scientific. At the same time, the romantic emphasis on the interior, the private, and the affective must be balanced with an equally deep commitment to the corporate, the public, and the reasoned. All of them are necessary to the exercise of sound judgment in the face of multiple practices and dispositions, not all of which are conducive to holiness and justice.

In addition to the customary array of careful reviews of recent books, this issue includes an article reviewing the work of philosophical theologian William P. Alston. Reviewer **Robert MacSwain** traces Alston’s long work of wedding faith and intellect in a manner that has had immense influence on both philosophy and theology. Alston, founder and first president of the Society of Christian Philosophers, maintains that sound scholarship need not be skeptical of the intelligibility of Christian experience and practice. Rather, hard though they may be to assess, Christian beliefs make actual truth claims that refer to more than particular conceptual schemes or worldviews. Concomitantly, Christian philosophy can legitimately make use of a variety of sources of religious knowledge—a claim that MacSwain notes has a distinctively Anglican flavor. Indeed, Alston is one of a number of prominent current philosophical theologians who are Anglicans. MacSwain considers this no accident. He concludes, “If we Episcopalians pride ourselves on our commitment to ‘reason,’ it might behoove us actually to listen to those [like William P. Alston] who have made reason their life’s study.”

This issue of the *ATR* concludes with an offering of “Gleanings” from **Catherine Wallace**. In this essay, Wallace considers some of the performative aspects of language: the relationship of word and gesture; of prophetic, academic, humanist, and aesthetic language-forms; of poetry and the processes of the mind; and of happiness and truth. Along the way, she offers wisdom and possibility for responding to both church and society in a time when “spinmeistering” and too-easy toleration overshadow truth-telling, careful thought, and true integrity.

Unfortunately for *ATR* readers, this will be Kate's last "Gleanings," as she turns her attention more fully to her own writing projects. As this issue's essay demonstrates, Kate's singular ability to bring together wide-ranging material into coherent relationship has made her "Gleanings" consistently stimulating, interesting, and enjoyable. And her writing is itself such a pleasure to read. Kate, thank you. Your creativity and imagination has been a gift to every reader of the *ATR*. And we all look forward to reading much more from the riches you have to offer.

ELLEN K. WONDRA  
*Editor in Chief*

