Editor's Notes

This issue of the *Anglican Theological Review* comprises a set of essays that are not particularly related thematically. Surveying this sort of broad landscape can give us a glimpse of possibilities that both intrigue us and extend our perspective beyond the immediate, constantly pressing matters that preoccupy us. In this way, the essays here represent a kind of spaciousness, "world enough and time" in which one may ponder, explore, elaborate—the balance to both the reactivity and the relentless focus on goals that seem to characterize both church and academy in the United States (at least) these days. I hope you will accept this invitation to ponder and reflect, and will be enlivened by doing so.

Now that the Episcopal Church is thirty years into the regular use of its "new" *Book of Common Prayer*—that is, the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*—it's helpful to look at how that prayer book has affected our worship and life. In our first article, **Louis Weil** looks at what many see as a central focus of the American book: the sacrament of baptism. It is on the basis of baptism that Christians recognize each other across lines of difference and division. Baptism expresses and embodies our fundamental unity. But at the same time, for many Christians baptism seems to have no "lived significance." Weil pleads for "an abundance of the signs" of baptism—not just hearty (and wet) renewal of baptismal vows at appropriate seasons, but more extravagant use of the oil of chrism, of immersion, of the many elements of this rite that help us to know not just that we are part of the body of Christ, but that as members of that body, we are also always "drenched in grace."

In the next article, **Lindsey Disney** and **Larry Poston** take up the extraordinarily complex and fraught question of when human life begins. We are all well used to the arguments about the moral character of abortion; we are becoming more familiar with similar arguments about in vitro fertilization; and we will be hearing more about ethical issues surrounding stem cell research. A central consideration

in all these discussions is a question that is easily overlooked, because not easily answered: What distinguishes "human life" within the larger category of "biological life"? Science cannot settle this question, these authors argue. For centuries, various religions—including Christianity—have talked about "ensoulment" as a critical moment. Revisiting that notion provides some opportunities for looking at fundamental understandings of life and death, and how those understandings are connected with social circumstances and arrangements that are always varied and ever changing over time. Perhaps in doing so, we will learn the habits of living in the midst of a degree of complexity in moral issues.

One way of handling some of that complexity is the idea of the middle axiom, a concept well known to Anglican and ecumenical theologians familiar with the work of William Temple and Ronald Preston. **William J. Danaher** steps back to a slightly earlier time to look anew at the definition and use of middle axioms by J. H. Oldham in his 1937 book *The Church and Its Function in Society*. According to Oldham, using middle axioms in a particular way could help the church engage with social and political life in a way that does not presume either Christendom or a separation between public and private spheres. Middle axioms might help open up a more missional approach to the relation of church and society, now as then. Danaher certainly does not suggest reappropriating Oldham in an uncritical way. Rather, he proposes some revisions that may be useful to a church that is struggling once again to understand what it means to be "missional" in pluralistic contexts.

Mark Richardson also turns to the first decades of the twentieth century to look at Anglican Modernists and liberal Anglo-Catholics on questions of anthropology and soteriology, particularly in relation to evolutionary biology. At stake here is the extent to which evolutionary views of human origins "can be interpreted so as to protect and illuminate the meaning of God's goodness and holiness." With Poston and Disney, Richardson claims that science and religion answer different if closely related questions, especially in relation to basic accounts of the human condition. Richardson argues that we need not give up the crucial theological category of sin even if we give up the idea of a historical fall as its origins. In short, an emergent view of creation and humanity, in which "novel features of the natural world are realized over time," does not lead ineluctably to the notion of the

inevitability of progress toward perfection. We still need to be saved, and to be saved by a God who is both profoundly involved with and profoundly other than us.

Our final essay is the winner of the 2009 Charles Hefling Student Essay Prize. **Beatrice Marovich** looks at the notion of the self developed in Walt Whitman's "new Bible," *Leaves of Grass.* Whitman's *self* is complex, democratic, formed both politically and theologically. This *self* is joyously embodied, messy, not easily managed; it is part of a natural landscape with these same characteristics. Whitman wanted to "vivify what he saw as waning enthusiasm for . . . democratic principles" by creating a "political *poesis*" that drew on certain strands of Protestant Christianity that developed in the United States in the first century after the American Revolution. In doing so, he crafted a *self* with rights but, perhaps, few restraints. This essay leaves us asking, with its author, about the extent of similarity between Whitman's *self* and the body politic of the contemporary United States.

Marovich's final question has resonance with the matters taken up in **Mark Edington**'s essay on identity within the Anglican Communion in this time of covenant drafts and struggles with communion. The various drafts of the Anglican Covenant, including its third, "Ridley Cambridge" version, present visions of communion and interrelationship in which restraint at least balances rights, though some believe it overbalances in the direction of a degree of conformity that is theologically and ecclesiologically questionable. Concerns focus on the fourth section, in which processes are laid out for becoming, being, and staying Anglican. In the current climate, it is not surprising that this section sparks the most discussion—which leads Edington to consider Anglicanism as a movement rather than a somewhat more stable heritage. In movements, identity is constantly contested and, as in the contemporary Episcopal Church, often cast in polarizing if not divisive terms. In the midst of such struggles, Edington wonders, what is happening to humility and self-criticism? What of the space that opens toward awe, reverence, and repentance? Our responses to questions like these indicate that we do still see Christian identity as encompassing more than the political.

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