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In Memoriam



Dr. William Stewart
1941–2003

ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν κέκρυπται σὺν τῷ Χριστῷ ἐν τῷ θεῷ . . . ὅταν ὁ Χριστὸς φανερωθῇ, ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν, τότε καὶ ὑμεῖς σὺν αὐτῷ φανερωθήσεσθε ἐν δόξῃ.
Colossians 3:3–4

Dr. William (Bill) Wayne Stewart, son of Roy and Gladys Stewart, was born June 8, 1941, in Austin, Texas, where he died on December 4, 2003. Bill graduated from the University of Texas, Texas Tech University, and the University of Southern California.

Bill had a lifetime interest in education, serving as a director at the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. He was especially interested in Christian education, serving on the Board of Brentwood Christian School and as an adjunct faculty member of Austin Graduate School of Theology.

Bill is survived by his wife Becky, his son Landon and daughter-in-law, Lana, two grandsons, Christian and Casey, and his sister, Jan Colley. Bill's first wife, Daphren, died in 1986.

From 1973 Bill was a member of Brentwood Oaks Church of Christ where he taught classes and for several years faithfully composed prayers for the order of worship. He was a man of deep personal faith who was sensitive to all those around him. He viewed all life as God's gift and sought to live in a manner showing gratitude for those who have gone before and concern for those who follow.

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Living as Sacrifices

Walking in Accordance with the Spirit in Romans 12–15

Jeffrey Peterson

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The word *spirituality* is as common in use today as it is vague in definition. A search for “spirituality” on Amazon.com returns tens of thousands of titles; besides books on traditional Jewish and Christian spiritual practices, there is Deepak Chopra on *Golf for Enlightenment*, Simon Buxton’s revelatory *Shamanic Way of the Bee*, and (for the impatient reader, who wants inner peace and wants it now) Dr. Bob Bottfried’s *Shortcut to Spirituality*. Run a Google search, and among the 7 million hits is Leonard Nimoy’s recent collection of photographic nudes, allegedly celebrating the *Shekinah* but admitting of a less high-minded interpretation. Christians may welcome the dissent from reductive materialism that the word often registers, but we cannot be enthusiastic about all the company that it keeps.

To judge from current usage, spirituality involves individual experiences that lift us out of ordinary consciousness and result in an overpowering sense of peace and well-being. In the quest for such altered states of consciousness, the mystical sense of union with the cosmos is more important than the teachings of any of the historic religions. The key to

becoming truly spiritual, it is suggested in various quarters, is for each of us to follow our bliss.¹

James Herrick's informative recent study notes several points in which the "new spirituality" represents the abandonment of traditional Christian faith.² First, the new spirituality holds that history (and therefore also the events of biblical history) are spiritually unimportant. Second, it vests final authority in human reason, informed by science, elevated by mystical experience, and developed through spiritual evolution. Third, it regards nature as living, and indeed divine. Fourth, it holds that hidden knowledge possessed by spiritual authorities is the key to enlightenment. Finally, it regards mystical experience as the only universal in religion and the basis for religious harmony.

Clearly this new spirituality represents a challenge to orthodox Christian faith—the more so as aspects of it are sometimes embraced by well-meaning Christians. This is more common in the mainline Protestant churches (i.e., Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopal, Lutheran) than in Churches of Christ, but we should not suppose that we can entirely escape the effects of such a powerful spiritual movement.

One place to turn as we seek to assess and respond to new pagan spiritualities is Paul's letter to the Romans. Romans is especially valuable because it offers a comprehensive exposition of the gospel that he preached among Gentiles. The gospel concerning Jesus Christ the Son of God is first summarized in the opening lines of the letter (1:3–4), and then "God's just verdict of acquittal" is stated as the letter's theme in its thesis statement

¹ The phrase was popularized by Joseph Campbell, whose work resembles Carl Jung's in its aversion to Christianity. On Campbell, see James Herrick, *The Making of the New Spirituality: The Eclipse of the Western Religious Tradition* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 240–243; on Jung, see pp. 191–194.

² Herrick, *The Making of the New Spirituality*, 33–35. I have condensed Herrick's seven points of contrast into five.

(1:16–17).³ The climax of the letter is found neither in the account of the great change in human fortunes God has wrought through Christ (chaps. 3–8) nor in the bittersweet meditation on Israel’s prospects in the future that God is calling into being (chaps. 9–11), but rather in the appeal to live lives transformed by the gospel (chaps. 12–15). Here is the outcome of Christian proclamation.

That the letter should be read in this way is apparent from a crucial passage in 8:4. Paul states that the purpose of Christ’s death was “that the statute of the *Torah* (*nomou*) might be fulfilled (*plerothe*[i]) among us, who walk not in accordance with the flesh but in accordance with the Spirit.” The purpose of Christ’s saving death was that a community might come into being empowered by God’s Spirit to fulfill the prescription of the divine Lawgiver. It is thus no surprise if Paul concludes the letter by giving attention to the character of the community, as he does beginning at 12:1. The connection between 8:4 and this section is made even clearer in 13:8–10; there Paul identifies love of neighbor as the “fulfillment of the *Torah*” (*pleroma . . . nomou*), picking up the language of 8:4.⁴

³ The translation “God’s just verdict of acquittal” for *dikaiosyne theou* (1:17; cf. 3:21–26; 10:3) is supported by the restatement of Paul’s thesis that as a result of the sacrifice of Christ, God is now “just and the justifier” (*dikaion kai dikaiounta*) of the person marked by Jesus’ faith (3:26). As Austin Farrer notes, the image of God as judge (most vividly presented in 2:2–16) is fundamental to Paul’s teaching on justification, (*Interpretation and Belief* [London: SPCK, 1976], 95–96). The complex significance of *dikaiosyne theou* is not apparent on first encountering the phrase in 1:17 but emerges only as the reader follows Paul’s exposition through the letter, in which attention is given alike to God’s role as judge (1:18 [cf. 2:5]; 1:32; 2:2–16), to the justice of his verdict (3:3–6; 9:14), and to his ultimate justification (i.e., acquittal) of accused humanity (2:13; 3:22–30; 4:2, 5, 25; 5:1, 9, 16–19; 6:16; 8:30, 31, 33–34). For a suggestive discussion, see Markus Barth and Verne E. Fletcher, *Acquittal By Resurrection* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), esp. 85–96. Translations of texts from Romans are my own responsibility.

⁴ Joseph Fitzmyer, *Spiritual Exercises Based on Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 197.

The Spirit of God is not a prominent topic in this exhortation. The word translated “Spirit” (*pneuma*), so frequent in chap. 8, occurs only twice between 12:1 and 15:12, and one of these uses may well refer to the individual Christian’s spirit (12:11). Still, it is clear that in 12:1–15:13 Paul describes the life of those who “walk in accordance with the Spirit.” Rather than focusing directly on the presence and activity of the Spirit in our lives, Paul speaks of the actions we must take if we would “walk in accordance with the Spirit.” It is only in passing as he addresses the most delicate issue in the section, the question of how Christians with different convictions may coexist in mutual love and fellowship, that Paul notes that the result of the conduct he calls for will be “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17).⁵

We thus have in Romans 12–15 a rough and ready guide to Paul’s “spirituality,” and we may note some differences with modern spiritualities (e.g., Deepak Chopra’s). Extraordinary religious experiences were common occurrences in Paul’s own churches (1 Cor 14:26–31; Gal 3:5; 1 Thess 5:19–20), and his mention of the cry “Abba! Father!” (Rom 8:15–16; cf. Gal 4:6) and the Spirit’s intercession “by means of inexpressible sighs” (Rom 8:26) suggests that he knew such experiences were known in the Roman community as well.⁶ Moreover, Paul was no stranger to intense and

⁵ In this respect the exhortation in Romans stands in contrast to that in Galatians chaps. 5–6, where Paul refers to the Spirit (*pneuma*) ten times. This stress on the Spirit reflects the situation of the recipients of Galatians, who must be reminded in their enthusiasm for the Torah that they have already received the gift of God’s Spirit, and therefore been granted entry into the eschatological community in their initial response to Paul’s gospel (Gal 3:1–5); for clarification of the underlying issues, see Paula Fredriksen, “Judaism, the Circumcision of Gentiles, and Apocalyptic Hope: Another Look at Galatians 1 and 2,” *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 42 (1991): 532–564.

⁶ It is debated how much information Paul had about the life of the Roman churches, and how much of this information is reflected in the letter. Chapter 14 provides the clearest indication that Paul writes with the Roman situation specifically in mind, although detailed reconstructions of Romans as addressing

extraordinary spiritual experience himself. It was by such an experience that he was drawn into the Christian community in his vision of the risen Christ (Gal 1:15–16; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:8). He appeals ironically to a subsequent ascent to God's heavenly throne room in "the third heaven," an experience so remarkable that he cannot say definitely whether it was a bodily or only a spiritual ascent (2 Cor 12:2–3). He boasts to the Corinthians that his experiences with the gift of tongues surpass those of that church notable for tongues-speaking (1 Cor 14:18), but in the context of that very boast we find the principle that Paul develops in his ecclesial spirituality in Romans: in the Spirit-led life of the church, what is of importance is the strengthening of the community's faith and the deepening of its spiritual insight. Thus, as regards life in the church, better five words of intelligible instruction than 10,000 in the ecstasy of tongues (1 Cor 14:19).

Similarly, in Romans 12–15, the work of the Spirit is seen in the mutual fellowship and support Christians offer to one another rather than in individual displays of spiritual virtuosity.⁷ The conduct of the community that lives out the will of God revealed in the Torah comes in for extensive

Jewish-Gentile conflict within the Roman churches go beyond the evidence. Questions of food and days treated in the chapter need only reflect a faction in Rome that was enthusiastic about observing provisions of the Jewish law, and the ethnic origin of such converts may have been Gentile as well as Jewish; on this, see John M. G. Barclay, "Do We Undermine the Law?" A Study of Romans 14.1–15.6," in *Paul and the Mosaic Law* (ed. James D. G. Dunn; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 287–308, esp. 289–294. James C. Walters suggests a rationale for Paul's obliqueness in referring to disputes related to *kashrut* and Sabbath: that such questions of Torah observance are at issue is clear from the use of *katharos* and *koinos* (14:14, 20), but Paul's language permits him to diplomatically address the issue without singling any particular group out for attack (*Ethnic Issues in Paul's Letter to the Romans: Changing Self-Definitions in Earliest Roman Christianity* [Valley Forge: Trinity, 1993], 86–88).

⁷ As Thomas H. Tobin suggests, the image of the church as the body of Christ is a significant indication that for Paul a saving relationship with God "is not simply between Christ and the individual but between Christ and Christians as a community" (*The Spirituality of Paul* [Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1987], 185).

treatment here not merely because Paul is in the habit of concluding his letters with a section devoted to exhortation.⁸ It is also because the life of the church serves as the final confirmation of the truth of the gospel that Paul has presented in the preceding eleven chapters.⁹ Here as elsewhere in his letters, Paul is above all a missionary theologian who recognizes that persuasive proclamation (such as that in Romans itself) is only a necessary condition for the spread of the gospel, not a sufficient condition; the latter is provided in the form of a fellowship committed to the life the proclamation calls for.

The rubric under which Paul treats our life in accordance with the Spirit is the “living sacrifices” that Christians are to make of our own bodies as the heart of the “rational temple service” (*logike latreia*) that we offer to God (12:1). The image Paul uses reflects ancient philosophical critiques of the efficacy of animal sacrifice; a decade or two before Paul wrote Romans, Philo of Alexandria reflected the same tradition in his interpretation of the Torah, finding in the costly adornment of the altar of incense and the priority apparently given to its service in Exod 30:7 LXX (*to proi proi*; cf. *to proi* in Exod 29:39; Num 28:4) an indication that “what is precious in the sight of God is not the number of victims immolated but the purity of a rational spirit [*pneuma logikon*] in him who makes the sacrifice.”¹⁰ Paul’s use of the

⁸ The common generalization that Paul opens his letters with theology and proceeds to ethics (e.g., Fitzmyer, *Spiritual Exercises*, 189) is valid enough as a description of Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, but it does not apply to the Pauline corpus universally. Thus, the body of 1 Corinthians begins with an appeal for conduct adequate to the Gospel (1 Cor 1:10). Philemon likewise moves directly from thanksgiving (vv. 4–7) to appeal (vv. 8–21) without benefit of the theological section that is said to be Paul’s standard opening, and the body of Philippians begins not with theology but with a report on Paul’s circumstances (Phil 1:12–26), followed immediately by the ethical appeal that the letter then develops (Phil 1:27–28).

⁹ On Paul as missionary theologian, see especially Nils Dahl, “The Missionary Theology in the Epistle to the Romans” (*Studies in Paul: Theology for the Early Christian Mission* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977], 70–94).

¹⁰ Philo *On the Special Laws* 1.277 (translated by F. H. Colson in Loeb Classical Library). The same tradition of critique inspires the well-known statement

image in this context draws out the implications of his earlier teaching on the death of Christ and Christian participation in it. The bloody sacrifice of Christ's life, only implicit in the letters's first summary of the gospel (1:3-4), appeared as the crucial event in the divine drama of salvation in 3:25 and 5:6-10. In 5:19, it is Jesus' obedience, fully realized in his embrace of the cross (cf. Phil 2:8) and contrasted with the disobedience of Adam, that is the means by which humanity is made righteous.¹¹ Salvation for the individual Christian comes through participation in the death of Christ, which begins in baptism (6:3-11) and continues in a life dead to sin and alive to God (6:12-23). Our participation in the glory of Christ's resurrection is contingent on our sharing in his suffering (8:17).

We should not suppose that when Paul speaks in these passages of dying or suffering with Christ or of enduring "the sufferings of the present age" (8:18), he is thinking principally of martyrdom. Paul wrote to the Roman Christians before Nero's fierce persecution of Christians in A.D. 64. At the time Romans was composed, martyrdom was at most a distant prospect; this is underscored by the positive terms in which the letter describes the ruling authorities, which are "a terror not for the good deed, but for the bad" (13:3).¹² The death that Romans calls its readers to is death to the sinful

that "it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should remove sins" (Heb 10:4).

¹¹ Statements that balance the death of Christ with his resurrection (e.g., Rom 4:25) and those that emphasize the resurrection only (e.g., Rom 1:3-4) should not be understood as relegating Jesus' death to a position of secondary importance. In Paul's thinking Jesus' death and resurrection constitute a whole, the two-sided event by which God accomplished our redemption; like the Jewish Passover *haggadah*, Paul's narrative of Christ, our Passover, "begins with the disgrace and ends with the glory" (Mishnah *Pesachim* 10.4). Just as the humiliation of Israel and her crying out to God was the catalyst for God's powerful deliverance, without which the exodus would not have taken place, so the crucifixion as the culmination of Jesus' obedient life is the indispensable condition for God's having vindicated him and exalted him to share his heavenly throne (cf. Romans 8:34).

¹² In contrast, the appeal to follow Jesus on the way of the cross in Mark, written within a few years of Nero's persecution (and traditionally at Rome) likely

passions that once ruled their lives (6:11–12, 17–21), the same passions described in the opening portrait of a gentile world rife with idolatry and vice (1:18–32). Paul appeals to us to die to selfish lives ruled by sinful passions and awaken to new life in Christ.¹³

Concretely, this new life means life in fellowship with others who have likewise shared in Christ's death. The shape of that new life is described most fully in 12:1–15:13. Its basic principle, expressed in the image of spiritual sacrifice in 12:1–2, finds plain statement in 12:3: in the body of Christ there is to be no elevation of self-regard beyond what is needed for the exercise of sober judgment, and the standard for our self-evaluation is to be the measure of an individual Christian's faithfulness made active through the exercise of spiritual gifts for mutual edification (12:4–8). The qualities that characterize the community which walks in accordance with the Spirit are virtues that support communal harmony and peace (12:9–21), rather than the individualistic virtues that were celebrated by first-century Romans (and, with different emphases, by twenty-first century Americans).¹⁴ Our model in this shared life is the one who "did not please himself" but suffered reproach to benefit us (15:3).

Paul would dismiss much of the spirit-talk we hear as encouraging us to live "in accordance with the flesh"—on the basis of the possibilities inherent in our created nature—rather than in accordance with God's Spirit. When we become intoxicated with the thought of limitless spiritual vistas opening to our individual view—visions of rapture bursting on our sight—

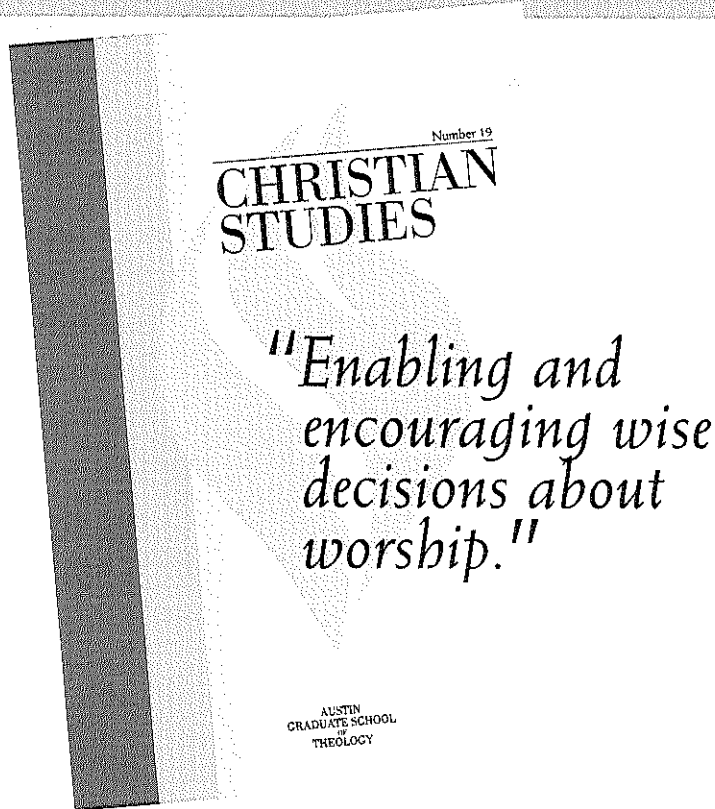
does envision martyrdom as a possible future for the Gospel's readership (cf. Mark 4:17; 8:34–38; 13:9–13).

¹³ See Stanley Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 252–53.

¹⁴ On first-century interest in individual self-mastery, see Stowers, *Rereading of Romans*, 52–82. On Paul's communal "ethic of adaptability" in Romans 14–15, see Clarence E. Glad, *Paul and Philodemus: Adaptability in Epicurean and Early Christian Psychagogy* (NovTSup 81; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 213–235.

he would agree that God has endless vistas of holiness and love in store for us, but he would remind us that the purpose for which God's Spirit moves in individuals is to strengthen his people in our journey to occupy the country that we have been promised.

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"I believe that all of our denominational traditions are in deep crisis about the same issues. . . . I quite agree with the sympathy and tone of the articles in the issue (Christian Studies 19)."

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