Christian Studies

A Publication of the Faculty of Austin Graduate School of Theology

Volume 20 / 2004

Austin Graduate School of Theology
CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 20 2004 ©

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.

Christian Studies

Volume 20 Fall 2004

Austin Graduate School of Theology
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Foreword

It is frequently observed that modernity, with its highly mechanized and overly managed societies, leaves many with a sense of loss—a deep-seated unrest, an emptiness and longing. It is also evident that an endless array of entertainment options is unable to bring any lasting calm to the restless hearts of moderns. In fact, the near hysterical search for diversions is viewed by some as a major cultural crisis of modern civilization.

Current widespread interests in "spirituality" pose opportunities and problems for Christians. Over eighteen hundred years ago, Tertullian warned of the "itching curiosity" of Christians leading them into false spiritualities. Today, in an era of doctrinal minimalism, we are reminded that there are many "spiritualities" and many versions of Christian spirituality. Nevertheless, we also need to respect concern among modern Christians, even if awakened by the shallowness of our mechanistic culture, to have a deeper understanding of their faith and to be "more spiritual." The essays in this issue of *Christian Studies* are presented both to edify our hearts and to increase our discernment.

This issue of *Christian Studies* is dedicated to the memory of a dear friend and colleague, one of God's devoted servants, Bill Stewart, whose life is hidden with Christ in God. Special thanks are owed to guest contributors Craig Bowman and Jim Roberts.

Michael R. Weed, Editor

Christian Studies (ISSN–4125) is a publication of the faculty of Austin Graduate School of Theology (formerly the Institute for Christian Studies). *Christian Studies* is funded by gifts from readers and friends of the graduate school. Subscription is free upon request. Back issues are available for $3.00 each, plus postage. Correspondence should be addressed to Michael R. Weed, Editor, *Christian Studies*, Austin Graduate School of Theology, 1909 University Avenue, Austin, Texas 78705. *Christian Studies* is indexed in *Religion Index One*. FAX: (512) 476–3919. Web Site: www.austingrad.edu. E-Mail: christianstudiespress @austingrad.edu.

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The Lord's Prayer
The Touchstone of Christian Spirituality

Allan J. McNicol

> Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord?
> Where is the soul refreshing view of Jesus and his word?
>
> William Cowper

These haunting words of William Cowper resonate within the hearts of most believers. Perhaps it is a cliché, but a recurrent model for describing the Christian life is that of a journey; and on every journey there come dry spots where we wither and sense we are about to die.

In desperation we search for some way to enable our return to the right path. Some re-examine their prayer lives or resolve to be more disciplined in reading and studying scripture. Others may explore the works of Teresa of Avila or Søren Kierkegaard, while still others may take in a *Road to Emmaus* seminar or a local Taizé service.

The perception that we are running on empty is not confined to believers. Contemporary society with its endless banalities also conforms to the dictum attributed to Chesterton that those who will not believe in the God of the Bible will believe in anything or everything. Community bulletin boards throughout the country overflow with announcements of classes and seminars ranging in everything from Joseph Campbell to Zen. Catering to

narcissistic urges embedded in the culture, many presume to fashion for themselves do-it-yourself religions.[1]

It is common to place all of this under the banner of spirituality.[2] Frequently one hears the comment, "I do not accept many of the dogmas of the church but I seek to be deeply spiritual." Consider the journey of Elaine Pagels, the well-known historian of religion at Princeton. In her latest book, Pagels speaks movingly of her rapprochement with a version of organized Christianity after the tragic death of her young son.[3]

Yet reconciliation comes on her own terms. Time and time again she speaks about what she can and *cannot* love in Christianity. What she cannot love is its insistence on acceptance of the belief structure crystallized in the ancient creeds. For her, Christianity is about unconditional acceptance and approval of others in an inclusive community which considers matters of the spirit as simple mystery, things *beyond belief.* Her strongest models for *faith and spirituality* are the Gnostic Christian groups of the early Christian centuries. She considers that they were on a journey of self-discovery. According to Pagels, they recognized that "the capacity to discover truth is within you," and that the "image of God" is hidden within each of us, secretly linking all "humankind" with the *One.*[4] Spirituality is making the right connections.

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[1] "Do-it-Yourself Religion," *Wall Street Journal,* Friday, June 11, 2004, W1, 5.

[2] A good working definition of spirituality is supplied by Gordon S. Wakefield in his article on "Spirituality" in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (ed. Gordon S. Wakefield; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 361. Wakefield says, "This is a word which has come into vogue to describe those attitudes, beliefs, practices which animate people's lives and help them to reach out towards super-sensible realities."

[3] Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Random House, 2003), 1-7.

[4] Pagels, *Beyond Belief,* 54-55.

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In other words, the way to the transcendent, what is truly beyond, passes through the development of spiritual sensitivity. We are left with an understanding of Christianity as a voyage of discovery of the inner self. This may take place in community or just as well in awe-inspiring places like the mountains of Colorado. But, the bottom line is that spiritual wholeness can be found in the search for the "inner light," discovering our true self. Anything that can facilitate this enterprise is fair game. Spirituality is the process of each person arranging his or her building blocks of self-discovery. Pagels challenges Christians to get over their emphasis on the structures of right belief and join with those who pursue the inward journey. If mainstream churches cannot make this accommodation to the *zeitgeist* they will have nothing to say to the multitudes who have embarked on these journeys.

A Proposal

Pagels claims that any major faith system (Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, or Christianity), with their resources of stories and community, can accommodate the seeker of the spiritual. The issue of finding wholeness in other faith systems, or for that matter outside of them, is not one that we wish to engage in this essay. Some forms of historical Christianity have placed great emphasis on self-discipline, mystic union with the divine, and beatific visions.[5] But although Christianity has housed these diverse versions of spirituality, in the main it has not claimed that they are genuine expressions of the faith apart from maintaining basic Christian beliefs. Indeed, genuine Christian spirituality appears to strike an essential balance between an

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[5] One thinks of a work such as Athanasius' *The Life of Saint Antony,* where, according to Athanasius, Antony viewed Christ as having such perfect self-control that he was free from any inner weakness. Antony, by living a life of solitude sought to find God in a similar way. He became the progenitor of cenobitic monasticism in the West. See *St. Athanasius: The Life of Saint Antony,* (trans. Robert T. Meyer; Ancient Christian Writers 10; New York: Newman). Of course, he has been followed by many major Christian figures both in the West and in the East.

inclination to search for spiritual union with God in such areas as prayer and participation in the Lord's meal and a contingent pursuit of appropriate moral conduct in our daily lives structured on basic biblical beliefs (1 Cor 11:17–33).

In this essay I suggest that being part of a contrast society of care for each other and a community of encouragement of the formation of spirituality (the church) is entirely compatible with holding fundamental beliefs about God and his revelation in the history of Israel and Jesus Christ. Indeed, I suggest that genuine Christian spirituality occurs when basic Christian belief structures provide the resources to make the necessary connections between doctrine and our inward hunger for spiritual food in ordinary daily life. Procedurally, I wish to demonstrate this thesis by discussing the centrality of the model prayer of Jesus (the Lord's Prayer) for both early Christianity and Christian spiritual formation today. My goal will be to show that Christian spirituality that emerges out of the biblical tradition has a very different shape and appeal than that which is nourished in contemporary versions of spirituality based on vastly different resources.

The Model Prayer of Jesus

The model prayer of Jesus (often called the "Our Father" or Lord's Prayer) is found in three ancient sources: Matt 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4; and *Didache* 8:2–3.[6] Luke places it in the context of a request of a disciple, "Lord teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1); hence

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[6] *The Didache* dates from about A.D. 100 and seems to be the product of a late first-century Christian-Jewish community in greater Syria. The wording of the *Didache*'s version is very close to that of Matthew. The most striking feature of this version is that it provides the earliest textual evidence for part of the doxological ending to the prayer, "For yours is the power and glory for ever." According to Kenneth W. Stevenson, Cyprian was the first to give a treatise on this prayer labeled unambiguously *De dominica oratione* (*On the Lord's Prayer*). See Kenneth W. Stevenson, *The Lord's Prayer: A Text in Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 32. Since the Patristic Era this has been a common designation for the prayer.

the inference that this prayer represents Jesus' model instructions that the believer ought to follow when engaging in prayer. Both Matthew and the Didache represent Jesus' teaching on prayer as a contrast to what the "hypocrites" do (Matt 6:5; Did. 8:1). In both cases the context indicates the hypocrites are Jewish synagogue leaders. Since the *Qaddish* (prayer for holiness) recited in ancient synagogues had structural similarities to Jesus' prayer, scholars have concluded that the model prayer is his direct instruction for how people in his community should pray not only in private (Matt 6:6) but also in communal gatherings.[7] With this in mind we now move to discuss the prayer in some detail.

Our Father in the Heavens

Although we have duly noted the Lukan emphasis on the prayer as a model for others to pray we should not ignore that the prayer also is a central expression of Jesus' own spiritual relationship to God. In the Lukan version it opens with the expression, "Father" (Luke 11:2). In the everyday Aramaic language of Jesus' world this may mean that he would address God as *abba* (father). Among the people of God there is a long history of recognition that God is "Father" (Exod 4:22–23; Isa 63:16; Hos 11:1, Ps 89:27; 1 Chron 29:10). But without arguing that Jesus' use of *abba* constituted his sense of a unique personal relationship between himself and God, the fact is that *abba* was a term of endearment, most often used within families![8]

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[7] There is no clear distinction between prayers said in the synagogue and in private in the Judaism of the first century. In daily prayer a regimen of fairly standard prayers were said by pious Jews several times during the day either paralleling the temple sacrifices when it was standing or at morning and evening. This is the background for the instruction given to the Christian Jewish believers in *Didache* 8:3 to pray the model prayer three times daily. Stevenson, *The Lord's Prayer*, 26, 238, provides us with information about the medieval *Qaddish* prayers which have many structural similarities to the model prayer of Jesus.

[8] Oscar Cullmann, *Prayer in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 41.

This indicates that Jesus viewed a child's endearing relationship to his father as an analogy to our relationship with God. Just as important, his use of *abba* reminds us that both he and the Twelve had left their earthly families and begun a mission characterized by total dependence upon God as father (Matt 23:8–9).[9] The early Church understood this as unusually important. It carried the Aramaic expression *abba* into its own prayers even in the Greek speaking communities (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15; cf. Mark 14:36).

Jesus' own deep sense of spirituality can be taken for granted. But what is equally important is to understand Jesus' use of *abba* in the wider context of his ministry. At the core of Jesus' message is the conviction that with his mission God was doing something fundamentally new. The kingdom of heaven was near (Matt 4:17; Mark 1:15). God was in the process of regathering his people in order to dwell as king in fullness with them. In light of this coming time of the unhindered presence of God (often represented by Jesus as a banquet), his call for repentance was a trifling prerequisite for one to undertake in order to enjoy the unprecedented blessings waiting at the door. And, astonishingly, the New Testament teaches us that what Jesus said proved to be true. He did regather his people in the church and fulfill the promise to come fully and dwell with them (2 Cor 6:2; Luke 10:23–24). In biblical thinking on spirituality the tragedy is that, despite all the talk to the contrary, we hesitate to accept the promises of God that came with Jesus. Instead of keeping our eyes fixed on him we are distracted continually by a multitude of other concerns. This is the reason for the contemporary ineptitude and lack of power in the church. It all begins with our failure to apprehend

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[9] In teaching the disciples, Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimensions of Christian Faith* (trans. John P. Galvin; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 48, says that Jesus' use of *abba* meant "They no longer had their earthly father, who could plan and prepare for the future with the wisdom of experience, but instead had God himself."

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the value of Jesus' almost childlike trust that the God of Israel had fulfilled his promises to his people—if we would repent and open our eyes to see. This is the fundamental act of precognition we ought to presume if we are to hear the words of Jesus exhorting us to pray, "Our Father in the heavens."

Sanctify your name
let your kingdom come[10]
let your will come to pass
as in heaven also on earth (Matt 6:9b–10)

It is noticeable that the main body of the Matthean version of the prayer falls into two easily delineated divisions. These are the three second person you-petitions of Matt 6:9b–10 (as noted above), and then moving to the third person, the three we-petitions ("give us," "forgive us," "lead us not") of 6:11–12. Since a slight variation of the Matthean version (with one major exception noted below) is the version almost universally used by believers, we will focus our comments on this wording.[11]

The first two divisions of the prayer, "Sanctify your name," and "Let your kingdom come," are considered to have close connections with the ancient *Qaddish* prayer in Judaism. The Latin equivalent to this ancient

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[10] I am indebted to John P. Galvin, the translator of Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, 15, for the wording of these first two lines.

[11] A word needs to be said about the context of Matt 6:9-13. It comes as part of the context of 6:7-15 on prayer and forgiveness—the latter being a special Matthean theme (Matt 5:21-26; 18:21-35). This, in turn, has been placed into an even wider context of teaching on three fundamental expressions of piety; almsgiving (6:2-4); prayer (6:5-6); and fasting (6:16-18). As noted by Birger Gerhardsson, "The Matthean Version of the Lord's Prayer [Matt 6:9b-13]: Some Observations," in *The New Testament Age: Essays in Honor of Bo Reicke* (ed. William C. Weinrich; vol. 1; Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984), 209, the central teaching on the three expressions of piety is that these good things should not be performed ostentatiously. Matthew (6:9-13) places an additional word on prayer into this framework. Besides wishing to make his characteristic connection between prayer and forgiveness (6:12 and 14-15), Matthew suggests that the model prayer should be differentiated not only from the hypocrites (scribes and Pharisees), but also, by virtue of its economy, from the Gentiles (6:7).

prayer (Aramaic) is *sanctus* and thus the general idea of this prayer is that it functions as a petition that the quality and holy realm of existence present with God may come about on earth.[12] A rendering of the opening lines of the *Qaddish* provides us helpful background enabling us to understand the needed context of the prayer of our Lord.

> (May) His great name be magnified and hallowed in the world which he has created according to his will.
> May he let his reign rule in your life and in your days and in the life of the whole house of Israel, in haste and in the near future.[13]

It is possible that Jesus was taught an early version of this prayer and recited it many times in his youth. Besides the interesting references to "hallowing the divine name," the major function of the prayer was to keep in mind that a day was coming when God's rule would be absolute in the whole house of Israel.

This is also Jesus' focus. No doubt he was deeply familiar with the words of the prophets—especially Ezek 36:20–24. The difficult relationships of Israel with the Roman administration would easily bring to mind Ezekiel's message that the lowly state of God's people in exile (subjected to the Romans: the contemporary Babylonians) constituted a profanation of God's name. How could Yahweh be acknowledged as universal sovereign and creator when his people were slaves to nations who worshipped other gods? Ezekiel speaks about a time when the holiness of God's name will be vindicated. It will be a time when all nations will stand in awe at the wonder of the gathering of his people together again in purity and holiness in their own land (Ezek 36:22–24). Jesus had already called the twelve as the nucleus of the redeemed people of the new age. Now he teaches them that they are

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[12] Bruce Chilton, *Jesus' Prayer and Jesus' Eucharist: His Personal Practice of Spirituality* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1997), 33.

[13] As quoted in Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary* (trans. W. C. Linss; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 379.

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daily to beseech God with a prayer that this word of Ezekiel will come to pass and that divine holiness may again rest among his people.[14]

Not only is the prayer an appeal for God to reconstitute his people, "sanctify your name" and thus establish definitively the arrival of the kingdom, "your kingdom come,"[15] but also the believer is to petition that "God's will be done."

A remembrance of an incident in church in my teenage years is a vivid reminder of the significance of this latter phrase. Our minister was a formal person and no one could ever remember him moving from behind the pulpit while speaking. But on a particular Sunday suddenly, to our

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[14] The three "you-petitions" all have verbs in the Greek aorist imperative passive; literally, "let your name be sanctified." Linguists generally agree that although this third person structure in the passive suggests that God is the subject, fulfillment is contingent upon both divine and human action. Cf. Gerhardsson, "The Matthean Version of the Lord's Prayer," 213.

[15] Clearly, when Matthew was written, a generation after the resurrection of Christ, Pentecost, with its regathering of the people of God empowered by the Holy Spirit, had taken place. The gospel writers were aware of this reality. The use of the aorist suggests a definite time for the arrival of the kingdom. But the late first-century author of *Didache* 8:2–3, urging Christians to pray "three times daily" did not err. Although the kingdom emerges in Jesus' ministry and God's people were regathered on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus, the coming of the kingdom is also a dynamic process still dependent upon our work and prayers. This was widely acknowledged in the ancient church where the saying of this prayer was ubiquitous. Cf. Karlfried Froehlich, "The Lord's Prayer in Patristic Literature," in *The Lord's Prayer: Perspectives for Reclaiming Christian Prayer* (ed. Daniel L. Migliore; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 71–87 for references. In an understandable attempt to counteract the influence of dispensational premillennialism within Churches of Christ, some twentieth-century teachers and ministers, unconsciously following the precedent of some earlier Anabaptists, discouraged the saying of the Lord's Prayer on the ground that the kingdom had already come with the establishment of the church. This represented a failure to understand the dynamic nature of the kingdom and certainly would have been news to the vast majority of believers in the ancient church. Even today we still wait for its complete fulfillment. Part of the rationale for this essay is not only to help us appreciate the Lord's Prayer as the touchstone of Christian spirituality but to be a small contribution toward its rehabilitation in both private devotionals and assemblies of the Churches of Christ.

astonishment, he came down from the pulpit and stood directly in front of the pews. He had a basic query: "I have been wrestling in my life for months with this question, What is the will of God?"

Clearly he was framing the question in a personal way. "What is God's will for my life?" That was forty years ago. Contemporary religious best-sellers claim that God has a personal plan for the life of every person. And if we can make the effort we can discover it! But is this true? Those who live within the parameters of the biblical story should be aware that the focus of the revelation of God's will is not on allowing us to discover our individual destinies but the fulfillment of God's plan to bring salvation as the completion of the long history of the calling of *his people* (Acts 10:21–27; 22:14). The first two you-petitions call for the fulfillment of the divine purpose understood to be the regathering of his people in full blessedness. It is the same with the third.

This is why the Gethsemane event was so momentous for Jesus. When Jesus prays, "My Father . . . your will be done," he is in full realization that what is at stake is not discovering God's will for his life, or even his own survival, but that God's entire plan of salvation for Israel depended on his faithfulness unto death (Matt 26:42).

This is not to say that God is unconcerned about us as individuals. The very chapter in which the Lord's Prayer occurs shows us otherwise (Matt 6:25–33). But when we pray to know the will of God what is critical is that we ask for insight into the role and place we are to play in God's overall plan for his people.[16] Inasmuch as it is our task to find God's will, it

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[16] A full discussion with many more scriptures can be found in John T. Squires, *The Plan of God in Luke-Acts* (SNTSMS 76; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). As an example as to what lengths people will go in personalizing the will of God consider this prayer found in a piece of Catholic devotional literature. "How comforting it is, O blessed Father, that you have long since made my calendar down to the last detail for the coming year. So I resign

is not so much a matter of self-discovery but of remaining true to the commitment that despite all that appears to the contrary, God is in the process of bringing his promises to fulfillment.[17]

This leads to a brief comment about God's will being done as in heaven *also on earth.* In our judgment this constitutes a summary refrain for all three initial petitions. God's name, kingship, and will, in heaven are absolute. In Jesus he has begun to reclaim the creation for himself. Yet we continue to pray for the full realization of his plan of salvation *on earth* as in heaven.

Give us our bread today which is due on the day to come

In light of the three you-petitions directly beseeching God to establish his reign on earth, the movement of the prayer shifts to the we-petitions, where intercession for concrete needs of believers is encouraged.[18] In brief, Jesus is saying, as we await the ultimate regathering of God's people for salvation, that we still have immediate needs which warrant our attention. The first of these is bread.

As metonymy, bread is an appropriate image for the messianic age.[19] Throughout Matthew's gospel in the feeding episodes of the five and four thousand, and at the Last Supper, Jesus anticipates the blessings of having bread in the messianic kingdom (Matt 14:13–21; 15:32–39; 26:26–29).

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myself completely to your benevolent foresight and have but one concern: to recognize and fulfill your fatherly will." Noted by Gerhard Lohfink, "Der präexistente Heilsplan: Sinn und Hintergrund der dritten Vaterunserbitte," in *Neues Testament und Ethik: Festschrift für Rudolf Schnackenburg* (Freiberg: Herder, 1989), 111.

[17] As noted in Cullmann, *Prayer in the New Testament,* 48-49.

[18] Notice now that the balancing imperatives of the second section, "give," "forgive," and "lead [us]" are active rather than the passive imperatives in the first section.

[19] Bread is the first word of the first we-petition in the Greek text. This is different from the last two we-petitions of the prayer, where the verbal imperatives come first. This may indicate that Matthew wishes to give special attention to bread.

Commentators have often argued over whether the reference to bread "today" is spiritual or material. Probably the primary allusion in Jesus' prayer is to material bread; but it is not one dimensional. There is some ambiguity. Indeed, the terminology "day to come" or "coming day" has an unclear linguistic history. We understand it to refer to the time of the coming new age; but this is a translation of a rare Greek adjective the precise meaning of which is difficult to pin down; and given this linguistic ambiguity, one cannot be dogmatic about the interpretation.[20] However, we believe we can safely assert that as long as bread is understood as a metaphor for the coming messianic banquet, one cannot go far wrong understanding it to be a petition to supply our present needs, both spiritual and material, in light of this new reality. As is well known, Luke has the phrase "day by day" (cf. Luke 9:23) for the Matthean "daily." This is in keeping with Luke's linguistic preferences and his emphasis on the need for persistent faithfulness in discipleship.[21]

In some faith traditions the Lord's Prayer with its petition for bread is recited in association with observance of the Lord's Supper. By and large those in the Reformed and Restoration traditions have avoided this usage because of earlier ecclesiastical misunderstanding of the nature of the Eucharistic bread. Yet the spiritual food of the Lord's Supper is an anticipation, par excellence, of the bread of the new age. Thus, in my view, it is appropriate to say the Lord's Prayer at the Table. But it should not be confined just to the Table. Until the arrival of the messianic banquet we are dependent for all of our needs, both spiritual and material, on a gracious heavenly Father.

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[20] Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 382.

[21] As noted by William Farmer, *The Gospel of Jesus: The Pastoral Relevance of the Synoptic Problem* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 45–46, the expression "day by day" is a linguistic characteristic of Luke (cf. Luke 9:23; 16:19; 19:47; Acts 2:46, 47; 16:5).

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And forgive us our debts
even as we have forgiven our debtors

In general usage this is the one place where recitals of the model Prayer follow the Lukan rather than Matthean usage. Luke's version differs from Matthew in two significant ways. First, Luke has sins (often translated "trespasses") instead of debts in the first part of the petition; second, Luke softens Matthew's suggestive impression that God's forgiveness must be preceded by our forgiveness of others. Matthew's version infers that our forgiveness of others is a one time action of the past (Greek aorist) preceding God's forgiveness of us. Luke places our act of forgiveness in the present and intimates that God is forgiving us in a continual process of our forgiving others.[22] By and large, Christian communities have found the latter rendering more palatable.

These technical points aside, what is critical to note is that this is the *only* place in the model prayer where direct action is required on *our* part. And, as already noted, in Matthew's version of the prayer there immediately follows a commentary on forgiveness (Matt 6:14–15). The point is inescapable. Matthew places forgiveness at the very center of Christian community. For Matthew, Christians were brothers and sisters bound together as a contrast-society in a hostile environment as they awaited the full emergence of God's new world. As the beachhead of the new age, the emergence of lack of love

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[22] A complicating factor in Luke (11:4) is that the Lukan petition is for God to forgive our *sins* while we are to forgive those *indebted to us*. The Greek words in the parallel construction are different in Luke while Matthew has the stem of the same Greek word for *debtor* in both places in the parallel construction. Luke does something similar in Luke 13:2, 4 where "sinners" and "debtors" are used as similes. Thus this seems to be simply a linguistic preference of Luke rather than Luke saying that wrongs against God are of a more severe kind ("sins") than our offenses against each other ("debts"), as some have concluded.

and an unforgiving spirit in their community was a practical denial of everything they stood for. As it was then so it is today.[23]

And do not bring us into the test
But free us from the hold of the evil one.[24]

The standard English translation, "Lead us not into temptation," is unfortunate because it inevitably directs believers to think that we are being asked to be spared from our trivial day-by-day temptations. The book of James may be reacting against this misperception when it acknowledges that it is the lot of all believers to suffer regular enticements and trials (James 1:2, 12) although one should never conclude that God is responsible for our failings (James 1:13). That is a given. But Jesus has something different in mind. We would do well to return to the wider context of the prayer, which centers on the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation through the regathering of the true people of God. Jesus is aware that Satan is interested in preventing this event. The test to which Jesus refers is the series of barriers which Satan places in the way of the coming of the kingdom. In the apocalyptic world of Jesus this referred to the time of woes before the full emergence of the kingdom of God.

Ironically, Jesus himself is the first to face the test. According to Luke, in the last days of Jesus' life Satan entered Judas (Luke 22:3). Judas

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[23] We have already noted other intertextual echoes of this theme in Matt 18:21–35. Raymond E. Brown ("The Pater Noster as an Eschatological Prayer," in *New Testament Essays* [New York: Paulist, 1965], 248) notes another instance with respect to Matt 25:34. "The fifth petition is the acting out of the Last Judgment as described in Mt 25:34 . . . Notice all the connections to the PN [Pater Noster] in this verse: the title (Father); petition 2 (the kingdom); petition 3 (the divine will: prepared from the foundation of the world); and the present petition (a favorable judgment based on dealings with our brothers)."

[24] Some would make these two lines separate couplets and thus bring the number of petitionary elements to seven: a favorite number for Matthew. As already noted we believe that the principle of organization is the balance of three "you-petitions" and three "we-petitions."

plots with the temple authorities to arrest him (Matt 26:47). Immediately beforehand Jesus is with the disciples in Gethsemane. He begs them "to watch and pray lest you have to enter into the test."[25] And what a test it was. Although the textual tradition is dubious, Jesus is represented as being in such agony that "his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground" (Luke 22:44). And this was before his arrest and crucifixion! We are pressed to the edge of mystery when we consider that God's answer to *Jesus' prayer* was No![26] But Jesus also knew that these events concerning his coming test (the "cup of suffering") would not be Satan's final assault.[27] Other great tests were on the way (Matt 24:22). Perhaps an appropriate paraphrase of these words would be "Lord, spare us from the level of testing that could lead to our apostasy and forfeiture of our share in the kingdom."[28]

Given this close connection with the momentous events of salvation history, a believer may well ask whether it is appropriate for him or her to say this prayer today. The answer is a resounding yes! Scripture teaches that until the end of the age evil will be present in the world. There are a multitude of situations wherein we may slide down the slope into apostasy and thus hinder the sanctification of God's name. Serious reflection on the life of Christ leads one to note that it was characterized by a curious mixture of great triumphs of joy and moments of almost unbearable pain. In these ways the incarnation can be viewed as a model for the life of most believers.

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[25] The same Greek word *peirasmon* "test" in Matt 26:41 // Mark 14:38 // Luke 22:46 (cf. Luke 22:40) is the one in Matt 6:13, usually translated "temptation," but which we have chosen to translate as "test."

[26] N. T. Wright, *The Lord and His Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), in a popular reflection, captures this point well.

[27] We have preferred to render the Greek word *poneros* as masculine "the evil one" rather than neuter "evil." This is the case in Matthew 13:19 (cf. 13:38), although in Matthew 5:39 it probably ought to be rendered as "evil." This accounts for the differences in translation. Luke (11:4) omits.

[28] Cf. Gerhardsson, "The Matthean Version of the Lord's Prayer," 216.

Perhaps when we pray for release from the test we are simply echoing Paul when he dares to claim that we will not be tempted beyond our strength (1 Cor 10:12–13).

Doxology

It is customary in biblical Judaism to end prayer with a statement of praise to God. The traditional ending, "For yours is the kingdom, power, and glory forever, amen," has some ancient manuscript support; but in the opinion of the textual critics, not enough to warrant inclusion in the text of Matthew.[29] Clearly, in its earliest recital some doxological conclusion must have been given to the prayer; it is difficult to hear Jesus saying, "Deliver us from the evil one, Amen." In Jewish prayer a doxology was often based on 1 Chronicles 29:11. A version of this doxology was already placed at the end of certain prayers in the *Didache*, including the Lord's Prayer (*Didache* 8:2; 9:3; 10:5). Kingdom, power, and glory are characteristic Matthean words. In Matt 24:30 we are taught to await the coming of the Son in power and glory. Since our analysis has shown that the focal point of this prayer is to await the fulfillment of God's plan to regather his people, we believe this doxology is an appropriate concluding word to the model prayer, even though it is dubious to base it on the actual text of Matthew.

Conclusion

At the outset of this essay we drew attention to a widespread perception that contemporary Western culture is shallow and devoid of spiritual power. Many would extend this analysis to mainstream church life. A massive industry of "alternative spiritual resources" has rushed in to fill the vacuum.

An answer to the modern spiritual malaise may be found in a proper understanding of the Lord's Prayer. We suggest that this vision is the perfect

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[29] Luke omits it. Part of the problem of the textual tradition is that it occurs in a number of variegated forms.

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remedy to counteract the deleterious effects of the tidal wave of self-absorption and narcissism of the age. Jesus invites us to visualize a community where the people of God have regathered and God's name is sanctified through "the blind receiving their sight . . . and the poor having good news preached to them" (Matt 11:5 // Luke 7:22). In short, we need to believe that salvation has come. We are at the beachhead of what will ultimately be. Therefore we ought to conduct our lives within this framework.

Even though five of the six petitions of the model prayer are pleas for God to complete his work of salvation, Jesus believed that a spiritual life thoroughly energized by prayer was the designated vehicle to provide the synergy between human and divine action.[30] What is striking is how simple are the stated human actions that are constitutive in bringing in the kingdom. In the model prayer it is forgiveness. For John it is love. And for Paul it is faith, hope, and love. Even in Revelation, where by the end of the first century some churches were becoming spiritually negligent, the risen Jesus calls for them not to raise their spiritual temperature through retreats or self-help courses but by doing the works of love (Rev 2:4; 3:15–16).

Thus the Christian faith teaches that there is an ineluctable connection between correct belief and appropriate action. The great ascetics and mystics in the Christian tradition withdrew from society into the inner world partly because they believed the church had lost its way from its genuine ideals and habits. I suggest that a way to deepen spirituality is to return to the ideals and habits of the ancient church. At its center we will find the regular recital of the Lord's Prayer, at home and in our assemblies, to be indispensable.

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[30] Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 389, says "Prayer does not become superfluous by acting, but the acting remains constantly dependent on prayer."

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True Religion and Undefiled
Spirituality in Micah and James

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R. Mark Shipp

People have always been interested in spirituality. It is an irony that in American secular society, interest in things spiritual continues unabated. In recent cover articles in a local newspaper, "spirituality" is highlighted in a variety of ways:

> The road to a fulfilling life could only be found if the listeners realized that all their interactions with others were about power.
>
> The spiritual journey is an arduous and necessarily protracted meandering that takes a soul from a life governed by fear to that new serenity birthed only by trust in the mystery we call God.
>
> The Society of Contemplative Spirituality is advertising seminars in inner tranquility.

What these statements have in common is that they define spirituality as internal life, a quality of inner peace and tranquility, or a mysterious connection with the divine life which enable us to transcend human weakness. Even many Christians in our society will define spirituality as something strange, numinous, and exotic, not really rooted in the here and now.

There have been other ways of approaching spirituality throughout the ages. A common way of understanding how humans can approach the divine in antiquity, the Middle Ages, and even down to the present, has been

by means of religious ritual. Those who adopt this approach assume that by performing the right acts of worship or sacrifice or by saying the right words, the realm of God or the gods can be brought close and we can have fellowship with and a participation in the divine.

A popular way of understanding spirituality in the past two centuries has been that of acts of kindness and benevolence towards our neighbors. The "social gospel" approach, popular at the beginning of the twentieth century, emphasized the healing and compassionate ministry of Jesus and the speeches of the Old Testament prophets against those who turned a blind eye to the unfortunate. Charles Sheldon, in his book *In His Steps*, said this:

> What I feel puzzled about is, what is meant by following Jesus. What do you mean when you sing "I'll go with Him, with Him, all the way?" Do you mean that you are suffering and denying yourselves and trying to save lost, suffering humanity just as I understand Jesus did? What do you mean by it? I see the ragged edge of things a good deal. I understand there are more than five hundred men in this city in my case. Most of them have families. My wife died four months ago. I'm glad she is out of trouble. My little girl is staying with a printer's family until I find a job. Somehow I get puzzled when I see so many Christians living in luxury and singing "Jesus, I my cross have taken, all to leave and follow Thee," and remember how my wife died in a tenement in New York City, gasping for air and asking God to take the little girl too. Of course I don't expect you people can prevent every one from dying of starvation, lack of proper nourishment and tenement air, but what does following Jesus mean?[1]

Sheldon's book has been in print for over 100 years, helped popularize the social gospel movement, and was the original "WWJD" ("What Would Jesus Do?," Sheldon's sub-title).

Walter Rauschenbusch was the primary theologian of the movement. A recent writer has said this about Rauschenbusch:

> He believed that Christian principles must be translated into actions that promote compassion, justice, and social change. He took seriously the equality of love embodied in Jesus' admonition that we love our neighbors as ourselves. . . . He began to believe that Christianity must address the physical as well

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[1] Charles M. Sheldon, *In His Steps: "What Would Jesus Do?"* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1896), 9.

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> as the spiritual needs of humankind. He developed an understanding of discipleship that made the spirit of Christianity the core of social renewal.[2]

To Rauschenbusch, as well as other social gospel leaders, sin and spirituality are primarily defined as social sin and social righteousness and it was understood to be a necessary and logical development within Christianity.[3]

These are but three of the ways that spirituality has been defined over the centuries: religious ritual, social action, and inner illumination. The question of spirituality is a crucial one; how we define it has everything to do with our lives as Christians, for "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Scripture orients us to what true spirituality is.

Micah and Spirituality

The people of Judah in the eighth century B.C. had their own definition of spirituality, having to do with their understanding of the importance of ritual and worship. Micah, and earlier in the eighth century, Amos, had much to say about the fervor with which the people of Judah performed their acts of public worship. The problem was that they saw no connection between their acts of worship and their behavior. Micah describes the spiritual leaders of Judah in this way:

> Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong. Its heads give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for hire, its prophets divine for money; yet they lean upon the LORD and say, "Is not the LORD in the midst of us? No evil shall come upon us." (Mic 3:9–11)

In chapter 6, Micah describes the care with which the Judeans conduct their worship in words and rituals reminiscent of the book of Leviticus. The

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[2] www.deepmedia.org/rauschenbusch/rauschenbusch.html.

[3] "The Social Gospel is a permanent addition to our spiritual outlook and . . . its arrival constitutes a stage in the development of the Christian religion" (Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1945], 2).

people offer the calves of the whole burnt offering, or holocaust offering, the oil of the grain or thanksgiving offering, and the ram of the guilt offering.[4] Micah resorts to a little hyperbole: even if the Judeans offered thousands of rams and ten thousands of, not measures of oil, but rivers of oil, the Lord would not be pleased with their worship.

Micah 6:7 reflects the point of the book: the sacrifice the Lord requires is that of justice, loyalty, and humble living before God. Justice, the Hebrew word *mishpat*, is literally proper judgment. It has to do with being fair and impartial in legal judgments, and by extension, interpersonal relationships. Kindness is the Hebrew word *hesed*, which literally means loyalty, keeping covenants and promises. It is a word used in almost every passage in the Old Testament which talks about covenants. The last phrase means literally "showing a humble walk with your God." "Walk" is the way Deuteronomy refers to behavior and way of life characterized by keeping God's commandments. Deuteronomy 5:33 says, "You shall walk in all the way which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you."[5]

All of this has a great deal to do with spirituality. If spirituality may be defined in terms of what God requires in order to be close to his people, then there are two distinct requirements: acts of compassionate kindness and fidelity, directed to others, and a faithful and obedient walk of life, directed towards God.

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[4] Note, however, that James L. Mays (*Micah* [Old Testament Library; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976], 139–140) suggests that only the *'olah*, or whole burnt offering, is intended here.

[5] Note Hans W. Wolff's discussion of these words and their interconnectedness in *Micah: A Commentary* (Continental Commentary; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990), 180–181.

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What do compassion to others and a humble walk with God have to do with New Testament spirituality? James 1:27 is one of the earliest commentaries on Micah 6:8. It reads,

> Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

James defines pure and undefiled religion in much the same way as Micah did. Pure religion, in other words pure spirituality, is comprised of two elements: acts of compassionate kindness and a faithful and obedient walk with God.

What Does the Lord Still Require?

We live in a society which defines spirituality in many different ways. Some define spirituality as inspiring worship, as the Judeans of Micah's day did. Some define it as inner illumination and faith, as James makes allusion to those of his day who had an inadequate understanding of that faith. Some define it as social action and acts of compassion, like Walter Rauschenbusch and Charles Sheldon.

But scripture does not limit itself to these categories for our understanding of what the spiritual life is. It is to love God and love our neighbor. It is the life of faith and worship, but faith exhibited in acts of loyalty and compassion.

We live in a confusing and complex world where we are asked to believe that spirituality is an inner feeling, an outward action, or exciting worship. While authentic spirituality may include elements of all of these, the heart of true and undefiled religion is still to do justice, love loyalty and compassion, and live a life of faithful obedience.

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More Than Routine Words
A Reflection on Psalm 100

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Craig Bowman

A Psalm of Thanksgiving

Raise a glad cry to Yahweh all the earth!
Worship Yahweh with joy!
Come into His presence with shouts of joy!

Know that Yahweh is God;
He made us and we are His,
His people and the flock he tends.

Enter His gates with thanksgiving,
Come into His courts with praise.
Give thanks to Him,
Bless His name.

For Yahweh is good;
His loving loyalty endures forever;
His faithfulness is for all generations.

Since 9/11 I have had to deal more frequently with the failure of American popular theologies to deal adequately with human tragedy. The popularity of *The Prayer of Jabez* and *The Purpose Driven Life*, where theology has become pre-occupation with self disguised as real spirituality, leaves people panicked in the face of adversity and asking, "Why isn't God behaving the way I want him to?" It has forced me to rethink several things theologically, such as the nature of God's blessing and God's redemptive work in the face of global terrorism and war. When asked to speak about what God is doing in the world, I tend to offer answers that focus on the mystery of God's

presence with us through the suffering of Christ. Hopefully what is said today will drive you into the center of the psalms in search of an understanding of God that challenges our comfortable American life-as-usual and transcends all the political hype of this election year.

Psalm 100 calls for a joyous response to God's character and activity, but it comes in a context which is hardly joyful. Similar to Paul's admonition in Philippians to be "full of joy," the surrounding context for this hymn is the astounding truth that this God is willing to suffer completely for human sin and that this is characteristic of the king of the universe. Yahweh reigns but look carefully at what he must do and how he does it.

> The appeal and the trust of those praying, in fact, depend essentially on the presupposition that God is *personally* touched by injustice, and is even called into question by it—that God must bring about justice "for the sake of God's own name." . . . Precisely because [this] God is a *living* God, those who pray seek to call their God forth from aloofness and move this God to take sides!

Only in the broader context of psalms 93–100 can the joyful response be understood fully.

Contrary to popular theology, our worship of God was never meant to lift us completely out of the mire of the world's problems and conflicts. The worship of God happens in the midst of all the chaos and pain. It is out of the depths that we cry to God and he responds. Incarnational theology did not originate with Jesus and John's declaration of it. Yahweh is frequently described in the Old Testament as One coming and One who is about to come; He is the One who is always ready to enter into the midst of the human condition in order to redeem us. Thus, Psalm 100 has a larger context that provides a breadth and depth to its joyful invitation to worship. What is that context? And how does it heighten our awareness and appreciation for what God is doing in our midst today?

Psalm 100 is "A Psalm of Thanksgiving." This is the only time in the Psalter that the word thanksgiving (Hebrew *todah*) appears in a heading.

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In this case it refers more to an attitude of worship than to the sacrifice that was made. In verse 4 it is linked to the word praise. The whole psalm speaks of a shamelessly joyful response to life, which praises God for all that He has done and for all that He is. Contextually, Psalm 100 is the crescendo of praise that began building in Psalm 93, which declares that Yahweh reigns as King. Recognition of Yahweh's kingship, its complexity, completeness, and the security it affords, over the course of these eight psalms climaxes in a festal shout of praise: Yahweh is the ideal king over all people, therefore come into His presence with thanksgiving, praise, and joy. Structurally this short psalm is simple: two neatly balanced sections: (a) verses 1–2 sound the call to joyful worship, with verse 3 stating the reasons; (b) verse 4 reiterates the call to worship, with verse 5 stating the foundational motive. Yahweh is King, Creator, and Sustainer, whose goodness is marked by His *hesed* (loving loyalty) and trustworthiness, now and forever.

Psalm 100 is at the heart of Book Four of the Psalter (Psalms 90–106). This section functions as the editorial center of the psalms setting forth an answer to the woeful questions of the second part of Psalm 89, a very strong lament, which closes Book Three:

> How long, O Yahweh? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire? . . . Lord, where is your loving loyalty of old, which by your faithfulness you did promise to David?

The answers given in the psalm that follow are, essentially: Yahweh is king; Yahweh has been our refuge in the past, long before the monarchy existed, and will be our refuge now in exile since the monarchy is gone; blessed are those who trust in Yahweh! Over and over Yahweh is extolled as the *true* transcendent king; He is also Israel's rock and refuge, "the mighty one on high," forever. Psalm 100 exalts Yahweh, who alone is God and King. It is clear from the larger context that Yahweh brooks no rivals and that Israel is to celebrate His incomparability.

The most striking aspect of Psalm 100 is the subtle significance of its *political* imperatives in the context of faithful religious worship. Yahweh is King; Him alone shall you serve/worship. The invitation is a summons to activity whose nature and intention is the formation of a loyal congregation as the kingdom of God. We call it worship because its focus is God; but its rhetoric, movements, and response are truly political. This is a call to worship that demands that we recognize the real center of life, that we surrender our greed and self-centeredness to Yahweh who is all powerful. The royal ideology of Israel's day may not be compelling for us. But with global awareness, nations actualizing power, problematic power structures, and political struggles, we certainly know these as relevant issues. By reciting this Psalm and realizing its commands we assemble before Yahweh who is still King, Creator, and Judge; who is still our rock and refuge; who is still the great King above all gods. He is the One who invites us to sing, to praise, to fear, to rejoice, to proclaim, to lament, and to tremble before Him, the Mighty King, the lover of justice, Yahweh Our God. When we accept this invitation, we acknowledge and confess all that He is. We also accept Yahweh's definition of our identity; who He is determines who we are.

The question is whether this invitation, announced in boldness and seriousness, is heard by us. We know the words, but do we believe them when tragedy and crisis choke our faith? Are they more powerful than the God we confess to be Lord and King? Is this psalm, for us, more than routine words? Do we really "Know that Yahweh alone is God!?"

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

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[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.

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(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]

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[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

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[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

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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

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[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

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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

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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—

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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.

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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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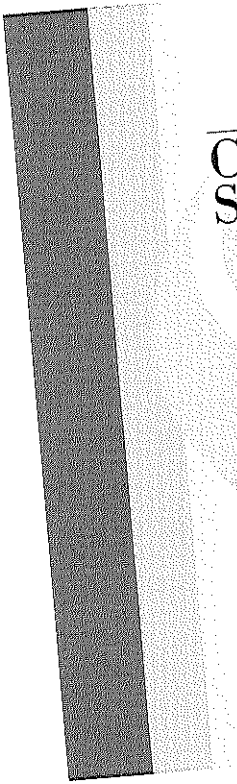

"I believe that all of our denominational traditions are in deep crisis about the same issues. . . . I quite agree with the sympathy and tone of the articles in the issue (Christian Studies 19)."

Walter Brueggemann
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Seminaries, "Spirituality," and "Spiritual Formation"
A Quick Fix for the Disciplined Life of Faith?[*]

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J. J. M. Roberts

In the twenty-five years I taught at Princeton Seminary one of the recurring complaints of the student body was that the seminary did too little to promote "spiritual formation." Nor was this complaint unique to Princeton. If one may judge from ATS recommendations, it is a complaint common to many, if not most, seminaries. In recent years this complaint has grown in such volume that seminaries all over the country are attempting in one way or another to fix the problem. I assume something similar is happening in Church of Christ schools, since the desire for "spirituality" and "spiritual formation" seems to be a cultural-wide phenomenon, but since I have not taught in any of our schools for many years, I will restrict my comments to the schools I know, which are mainly Presbyterian. The fact that I criticize a phenomenon I know first hand in Presbyterian schools should not be misconstrued as a self-congratulatory criticism of others, however. My

[*]This paper was originally a speech presented on November 25, 2002, at the Restoration Quarterly Breakfast in Toronto, Canada, during the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature.

criticism is directed at a cultural phenomenon that I think is affecting theological education in almost all Christian communities, including our own. In fact, if I may judge from what I see going on in the worship services of our communion, we probably have a far greater problem than the Presbyterians. Most Presbyterian ministers still know what a Presbyterian order of worship looks like. I am not so sure the same can be said for the ministers graduating from our colleges and seminaries. In addition to the general cultural drift toward a homogenized and undifferentiated Evangelicalism, many of our graduates appear to be encouraging that drift, whether out of ignorance, or even more troubling, out of a surprisingly blatant hostility toward the central concerns of our own theological tradition.

Nonetheless, many of the fixes to the need for "spirituality" and "spiritual formation" that I have seen in Presbyterian and other Reformed circles have been incoherent, and in some cases even flaky. In my opinion, the recent and very popular promotion of walking the labyrinth as an ancient and profound Christian spiritual exercise qualifies as flaky. It is neither a very ancient Christian practice, nor was it ever very important, even at Chartres, until the recent fad. At Princeton, some faculty and administrators encouraged Seminary students to deepen their spirituality by attending spiritual retreats run by a Benedictine monastery. Together with a number of my Presbyterian colleagues on the faculty, I regarded that advice as at least bordering on the incoherent. Can a "spirituality" nurtured in and designed for the cloister really sustain a Presbyterian minister in an active pastoral ministry? That raises the issue of whether the devotional practices being encouraged by these fixes really strengthen the theological identity of the participant or actually serves to undercut it. One might mention here the new interest of Presbyterians in programs to train spiritual advisors. The model for such spiritual specialists is that of the Roman Catholic priest as father confessor in a one-on-one private confessional, and that seems to me

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to undercut the emphasis in the Reformed tradition on the priesthood of all believers and the role of the whole community in issues of confession and church discipline.

One should note that in the Catholic tradition the confessor is an institutionalized part of an ecclesial structure; he speaks with the authority of the church, not as an isolated individual. But that is not so clear in the Protestant adaptation of this model. A couple of years ago the Austin American Statesman published a letter sent in response to a personal problem aired in the new Dear Abby column. The letter writer, who offered a simple solution to a messy and complicated problem, claimed to speak for God, since he was a "trained spiritual advisor." There was no ecclesial or communal structure authorizing this "spiritual advisor's" advice; it was simply the word of an individual, self-proclaimed expert. Interestingly enough, he urged the troubled person to do precisely what she wanted to do, though that very desire was causing her intense shame and guilt.

Moreover, the need to fix this "spirituality" problem has opened the door for a peculiar sort of empire building. Certain of the faculty at one seminary have developed a program in spirituality that they are trying to franchise out to other seminaries, and they are willing to use strong-arm tactics to expand their empire. When the faculty at another seminary declined to accept the program as a part of their curriculum, its promoters went to important church leaders and complained that the faculty at the uncooperative seminary were opposed to "spirituality," and under the resulting church pressure on that seminary's administration and the promise of outside funding, the beleaguered faculty reluctantly agreed to accept and participate in the program, though the faculty still refused to make the program mandatory for all students. When participating students complete the program, they are issued a certificate of spirituality at graduation, but since students are not

required to take the program, it means that only a minority of the seminary's graduates can be certified as spiritual.

Many of the seminary's faculty participate in this program they did not want simply to prevent it from being totally in the hands of outsiders, and an incident that happened to one of them illustrates what seems to me to be the underlying problem in all these fixes. This faculty member was asked to be the final speaker on the last day of a five-day conference on "spirituality" in the program. The faculty member agreed and began this final presentation by asking the participants, who had already spent four intensive days in this workshop, what they understood by "spirituality." Not one of them could give a coherent answer. The problem is that "spirituality" is one of those amorphous words that can mean anything in general and nothing in particular. This point was unintentionally highlighted a couple of years ago in an article in *The Christian Century* entitled, "Spirituality said to spur social activism" (Oct. 23–Nov 5, 2002, p. 15). The article defined religion as an "institutionalized set of beliefs and practices." Spirituality, on the other hand, it defined as "an individual and selective expression." In short, spirituality can be any smorgasbord of beliefs and practices that an individual selectively chooses to tailor a subjectively meaningful practice and worldview.

Given the difficulty of any meaningful definition of "spirituality," it is worth noting that it is not a biblical word. While Scripture speaks often of life in, by, or according to the Spirit, it never uses the abstract noun "spirituality," and it is very reticent in using the adjectival form "spiritual" in reference to people. Paul uses the term *pneumatikos* three times in 1 Corinthians (2:14; 3:1; 14:37) to refer to "spiritual" members of the Christian community at Corinth, but one wonders to what extent this may be tongue in cheek irony. He also uses it once in Gal 6:1, where such irony is less evident. But nowhere else is it used of individuals. 1 Pet 2:5 speaks of the community as a "spiritual house," but otherwise the term is used of

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things—spiritual gifts, spiritual food, spiritual drink, spiritual rock, spiritual blessings, body, songs, understanding, and sacrifice. One should note that "formation" is not one of those spiritual things. The phrase "spiritual formation" is never used in Scripture, though Paul speaks of being again in labor with his converts in Galatia until Christ be formed in them (Gal 4:19), and several New Testament passages speak of disciples growing up into mature Christians who can deal with grown-up doctrine. One of the slogans of our tradition has been "to call scriptural things by scriptural names," and I think there is some theological wisdom in this slogan. A subtle shift in language can disguise a far more profound shift in the understanding of the reality to which that language originally pointed, and this is particularly true when the new language is vague, amorphous, and indefinable.

Part of the problem in the students' demand for "spiritual formation" is precisely that they don't know what it is they want. It is to some extent an incoherent longing for something that is missing from their lives, though they are not really sure what it is. To the extent that this longing is a legitimate desire, I think it is a desire not just to know God, but to have their Christian identity and character so firmly shaped by that knowing that they will be able to remain faithful in their lives and ministries when God seems absent. Of course, I am cynical enough that I think some students just like to complain, or they are angry that seminary is harder and not as much fun as Young Life. Some of the complaining strikes me as no more than the desire for a quick fix. Just as students would like a foolproof method of seven easy steps for flawless exegesis, or an effortless system to learn Hebrew in just four weeks in their sleep, so many students would like the seminary to give them a totally integrated, profoundly spiritual, un-conflicted Christian identity in a painless and entertaining three years. Life doesn't work that way.

One may even question how big a role a seminary can play in a prospective pastor's Christian formation. In contrast to the rampant

individualism in our culture's quest for spirituality, the formation of Christian identity and character is by definition a communal activity. We are not our own, we were bought with a price, and our redemption puts us in the body of Christ, the church. It is in that community of the redeemed where we should learn what it means to be a Christian. It is the local church in its life together, in its Bible reading, preaching, teaching, singing, and praying, in its concern for the sick and the poor, and in its encouragement of family and private devotions, that is the primary shaper of Christian identity.

However much a seminary or Christian College may want to offer students a supportive Christian community, those communities cannot take the place of a local church, because seminaries and colleges are schools, not churches. Unfortunately, part of what is driving the push for spiritual formation in the seminaries is the lack of any meaningful church background for many of today's ministerial candidates. The number of students at Princeton who came out of para-church organizations such as Young Life, and who had never participated in any meaningful way in the life of a local church was appalling. What little theological identity they had was a very superficial Evangelicalism, largely ignorant of both Scripture and the actual dynamics of congregational life. But even many of those who grow up in local churches come to seminary theologically and biblically illiterate. They cannot inhabit a worldview shaped by the biblical narrative, because they don't know the narrative, and they have little understanding of the particularity of their own tradition's theology.

There is a certain sense in which seminaries are now required to do a great deal of remedial work, to make up for what the students did not learn in church. Students need to have a basic knowledge of the biblical text and a basic understanding of Christian theology before they are ready for genuine critical reflection on Scripture, Theology, Church History, or Practical Theology. Ideally, theological education should provide a student who already

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has a strong Christian and theological identity a chance to reflect on and critique it in the light of other voices from the past and present, to put that identity under the scrutiny of the broader Christian world and to confront it with the serious objections of those who stand outside the Christian faith. This largely intellectual process is intended to facilitate a lifelong critical engagement with the sources of the Christian faith and its critics that will continually forge, reforge, and hopefully both strengthen and make less brittle the individual's Christian identity.

One should note here that my earlier characterization of certain practices of piety as flaky or incoherent was not intended to justify a very narrow or restrictive study of the Christian faith and its disciplines of piety. I think it is very important that all ministerial students, whatever their theological tradition, gain an understanding of the theology and practice of other Christian communities. One should study the piety of the desert fathers, the discipline of the different monastic orders, and so on. Moreover, the theological understanding of those other Christian practices may provide an important critique and correction for the theology and practice of piety in my own Christian community. My overriding point, however, is that the practice of piety promoted in a particular Christian community should reflect and strengthen the theological identity of that community and of the individual as a member of that community, that it should arise out of the community's theology. The danger today is that we simply pick and choose practices at our whim as individuals, or that as communities we adopt a practice, however foreign it is to the theology of our own tradition, because it seems neat or because it draws a crowd at some other Christian group with whom we are competing. In my opinion such faddish or market-driven choices have no theological integrity, and thus can be fairly characterized as incoherent.

Of course, more goes on in a seminary or Christian college than just academics. There is chapel, which ideally models appropriate Christian

worship, and there are all sorts of small groups, and personal interactions between students and faculty that play a role in shaping the way one thinks about and acts out the Christian faith, but at best the seminary or college community is very specialized and unrepresentative of the church at large; it is still no substitute for the local church.

Confession and Intercession
Two Spiritual Disciplines

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Michael R. Weed

> In his love for his creatures, God gave them the possibility of prayer, that great gift which allows us to share in his love.
>
> Oscar Cullmann

Anyone visiting bookstores over the past several years will have noticed that the section titled "Spirituality" has steadily grown. Looking closely at the publications offered in such sections, one finds books ranging from Buddhist to Wiccan "spiritualities"—even "food spiritualities." By anyone's judgment, it is clear that many modern Americans are interested in spirituality. Whether, as some suggest, this interest merely expresses curiosity born of boredom, or, as others contend, it discloses a growing sickness of heart brought by a world grown too rational and mechanical[1]—a world without transcendence and mystery—it is safe to say that there is a wide range of "spiritualities" being marketed to satisfy growing demands.

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[1] See Romano Guardini, *The End of the Modern World* (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 1998, orig. 1950), 58.

We also see many modern Christians interested in being more spiritual. While this interest no doubt reflects that some of the same cultural forces are at work among Christians as in the wider population, it may also indicate neglected areas in our churches. Clearly, it does pose both a problem and an opportunity. On the one hand, there is every likelihood that in the present climate a sincere but uncritical quest for "spirituality" or "spiritual growth" may lead Christians into spiritualities that are damaging to Christian faith. On the other hand, not only does the desire for "spiritual growth"—however understood—offer opportunities for teaching, but also perhaps it is well that we live in an age that is more attentive to diet and exercise disciplines than any previous generation. Conceivably modern Christians may grasp that living the Christian life requires no less time and energy than physical health routines, professional responsibilities, and family obligations. Undoubtedly, present interest in spirituality provides both challenges and opportunities for the church.

In the following, I want to commend two basic and simple Christian "spiritual disciplines," both dimensions of prayer. By "basic," I mean that they are not part of a generic spirituality, but are fundamentally rooted in and reflective of Christian faith. By "simple," I mean uncomplicated, easy to understand and practice. In commending these disciplines, I want to look at 1 John. And I think it is significant that, like today, 1 John addresses a situation in which the church is struggling with a false spirituality.

First John: Christian Spirituality as Perfection in God's Love

First John is written near the end of the first century to a church struggling to survive a painful division caused by a gnostic-type spirituality.[2]

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[2]Robert Kysar cautions against viewing the separatists as "pure docetists" or "antinomians," but suggests that they were predecessors of later gnostic Christianity. Robert Kysar, "John, Epistles of," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (vol. 3; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 905.

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Some who were questioning the incarnation (and crucifixion) as compromising Christ's divinity (4:2; 5:6–8), had withdrawn from the church (2:19) and were attracting favorable attention from outsiders (4:5).[3] Those who had left were claiming "to be in the light" (2:9), to "know Christ" (2:4), and to be "without sin" (1:18). Possibly, given the several times 1 John uses the term "perfection," the separatists may have viewed themselves to have achieved "spiritual perfection."

Encouraging the church not to be deceived by exponents of this false spirituality (2:26; 3:7), 1 John charges that the separatists are in the grip of the Antichrist (2:22; 4:3). They do not practice love of the brethren (2:9–11), are without moral restraint (3:4–10), and are guilty of mortal sin (5:16). Further, perhaps in opposition to separatist views dismissing the importance of actions done "in the flesh," 1 John asserts that "sinlessness," or perfection, is received through God's forgiveness secured through the death of Christ (in the body) and the confession of one's sins:

> If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar . . . (1:8–10)

Further, true spiritual "perfection" is perfection in God's own nature as disclosed in Christ. First John exhorts:

> In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, . . . that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. . . . if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. (4:9–12)

Clearly, love for one another is one of the most fundamental ways in which Christians demonstrate that they are born of God, have entered into his love,

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[3] "It may be that we should imagine a parent body with a number of smaller gatherings of Christians (perhaps house churches)," Kysar, "John, Epistles of," 905.

and visibly manifest his love in their lives (see 4:7, 16). And it is in this context that 1 John leads us to an understanding of prayer.

Here it is important to remind ourselves that in distinction from heathen prayer, biblical prayer does not address gods or a god who exists within the cosmos.[4] Biblical prayer addresses the Creator and Sustainer of all things who, through Christ, has disclosed the redemptive purposes which lie behind the entirety of the universe. Thus, in the first instance, biblical prayer shifts the attentions of the self-centered self to the reality of God to whom, as Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer, the one praying owes his very existence and to whose purposes as disclosed in Christ he commits and orders his life. Further, prayer is itself understood as God's gift to us: a gift which enables us to share in God's love.[5]

Confession: "Daily Baptism" (Augustine)

Implicit in the very act of Christian prayer is the recognition that without this possibility, human life can only be lived in the service of finite and even destructive goals and desires. For it is in praying that we not only acknowledge and exercise our relationship with the Father; we also evidence and extend the Father's love to others whom the Father has created.

As prayer, confession recognizes our dependence on God as the Creator and Sustainer of all things. We remember that he creates out of no necessity and that none of us, and nothing around us, exists of necessity, nor has any "right" to exist. Our very existence is itself a gift—grace—and proclaims the generosity and goodness of the Creator and Sustainer of all things. In this very acknowledgment we are painfully aware that we each tend to pursue our lives as if we were our own creators.

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[4] Cf. Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason* (South Bend: Notre Dame Press: 1982).

[5] Oscar Cullmann, *Prayer in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 132f.

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To address God through Christ acknowledges that it is Christ who has restored the creation's torn relationship with its Creator. We acknowledge that we constantly depend upon the grace of the cross to make our way in the world without doing harm—much less to accomplish any lasting good.

Thus, prior to the explicit confession of sins, prayer itself recognizes our immersion in the immediate world and our preoccupation with its countless distractions—a world which 1 John reminds us "passes away" (2:15–17). The very act of prayer repositions our lives before God and recovers the true context in which our lives are shaped and pursued.

Prayers of confession are understood to involve repentance for specific sins and for aspects of our lives—thoughts and actions—not in keeping with God's purposes manifested in and through Christ. Nonetheless, confession may play an even more profound role in the Christian life than is commonly realized. The discipline of regularly examining one's conscience frequently leads to the recognition of character flaws, blemishes, and other unflattering characteristics of our innermost selves. On occasion, our self-examination penetrates behind particular sins we confess to the discovery of heretofore-unrecognized attitudes and desires hidden as much from ourselves as from others.

A classic example is found in Augustine's *Confessions* (ca. 398 A.D.). Looking back at his life, Augustine remembered that as a sixteen-year-old, he and friends had stolen pears. He asks, "What was it in that theft of mine that caused me such delight?" And he reflects:

> Those pears were truly pleasant to the sight, but it was not for them that my miserable soul lusted, for I had an abundance of better pears. I stole those simply that I might steal, for, having stolen them, I threw them away. My sole gratification in them was my own sin, which I was pleased to

> enjoy; for, if any one of these pears entered my mouth, the only good flavor it had was my sin in eating it.[6]

Continuing, Augustine contemplates the "shadowy beauty which attends the deceptions of vice."

Such are the insights offered through confession's inventory of the heart's depths. In this fashion confession of sin offers crucial insight—however embarrassing or painful—into our capacities not only for being deceived but also for dishonesty with ourselves. Confession may even uncover subtle strategies of self-deception masking themselves behind forms of piety. At some point, we find ourselves entering a "hall of mirrors" and are forced to admit the limits of fully understanding our innermost selves. Here, we can only turn away from ourselves to the Father, acknowledging that we receive our lives from him who sees and understands all, confessing we are in many ways a mystery to ourselves, and entrusting our lives to him who receives those who approach with "broken and contrite hearts."

Further, it is not only the case that confession and pardon lead beyond our sins and enable us to go forward into a future unburdened by the guilt of our sinful pasts. As important as this is, it still may leave us overwhelmed with by a sense of guilt and by burdensome memories of embarrassing, regrettable, or shameful deeds and undeniable harm done to others. Addressing the "weight of the forgiven past," Jacques Ellul suggests that through confession of our sins we do not merely receive release from our past, as if it had never existed. Rather, Ellul observes:

> If I am freed and delivered from my past, this is not because it has disappeared. Quite the reverse! Nothing has disappeared. The past is not a finished past. It is a regathered past. God has regathered it. He grasps it, assumes it, takes charge of it, and recapitulates it in Christ. My past, fortunately, is no longer my own. But it has not been obliterated. It has come into the hands of God where the totality of my life is accumulating bit by bit and being built up in

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[6] Augustine, *Augustine: Confessions and Enchiridion* (trans. Albert C. Outler; Library of Christian Classics 7; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955), 56.

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> the truth. Thus the past lives, not in the hell of my unconsciousness, but in the holiness of God.[7]

Ellul's observations call to mind Joseph's words to his brothers, "You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good . . ." (Gen. 50:20). Ellul suggests that God is able to "regather" our confessed pasts, including those intentions and actions we meant for evil, and in the mystery of his own ways to incorporate them into the advance of his redemptive purposes. This appears to be the sense of a Portuguese proverb: "God writes straight, but with crooked lines."[8] Our honest prayers of confession enable God to transform the "crooked lines" our lives and gather them into his history of reconciliation and transcendent purposes.

Intercession: "Loving our neighbor on our knees"[9]

A second discipline which is also enjoined in 1 John is that of intercessory prayer. First John 5:14–15 reads:

> And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him.

Then, following immediately upon "if we ask anything" and "whatever we ask," 1 John directs his readers' attention not to petitions regarding themselves; rather, he directs them to others: "If you see your brother or sister . . . ask, and God will give him life . . ."[10] Notice that intercession here does not wait upon an invitation; it does not depend upon requests nor upon a full awareness of the circumstances of the neighbor. In 1 John 3:22 we read, " . . . we receive whatever we ask because we obey his commandments . . . ." Verse

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[7] Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 140.

[8] Cullmann, *Prayer in the New Testament*, 134.

[9] Louis Cassels, *Christian Primer* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 58f.

[10] Whether the qualification regarding prayer for "mortal sins" designates the "separatists" whom 1 John associates with the Antichrist or the sin of unbelief (John 16:9) is uncertain. Presumably the readers of 1 John understood the reference.

23 then states, "And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he commanded us." As appropriate as requests for prayers and informed prayers are, 1 John suggests that the underlying initiative for intercessory prayer arises from within the heart of the Christian—a heart being shaped and perfected in God's love (cf. 2:5).

Regarding intercessory prayer, Oscar Cullmann states:

> If we pray for our fellow human beings, we come close to entering into God's loving will particularly clearly. For God equally loves those for whom we pray, and does so far more than we are capable of. God's will is that by our intercession (made possible to us through him) our love shall unite with his, and thus we shall contribute to the bulwark of love with which God surrounds our fellow men and women.[11]

A fundamental sign of God's love in the believer's life is love for one's neighbors: " . . . if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us" (4:12).

John's "if you see your brother" attributes to believers an intentional awareness or alertness to the needs and interests of others. This is a fundamental manifestation of God's own nature being realized in and among those being drawn into and perfected in fellowship "with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

Significantly, 1 John suggests that the community of believers, whose fellowship participates in and reflects that of the Father and the Son (1:3), is now entrusted with the responsibility and privilege of making intercession on behalf of one another. In Jewish piety, intercession was offered by Moses, by certain prophets, and (in late Judaism) by martyrs. First John suggests that all believers are united with God and are entrusted with the ministry of

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[11] Oscar Cullmann, *Prayer in the New Testament*, 133.

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intercession as an expression of the life of God in which the church participates and which it represents to the world.[12]

The Interdependence of Confession and Intercession

We have suggested that prayers of confession and prayers of intercession are much more closely related than is commonly recognized. The soul-searching self-examination evoked by prayers of confession brings to consciousness an awareness of the depth and complexity of human perversity. In addition, it may awaken a consciousness of the extent of the damage done by our selfish and rebellious thoughts and actions.

Garrison Keillor vividly—perhaps too vividly—captures the dawning realization of this fact in one of his Lake Woebegone stories. On the verge of having an affair with a colleague, Jim stands in front of his home, struggling with his conscience as he reflectively surveys his neighborhood:

> All these houses and all these families—my infidelity would somehow shake them. It will pollute the drinking water. It will make noxious gases come out of the ventilators in the elementary school. . . . If I go to Chicago with this woman who is not my wife, somehow the school patrol will forget to guard the intersection and someone's child will be injured. A sixth grade teacher will think, "What the hell," and eliminate South America from geography. . . . Somehow my adultery will cause the man in the grocery store to say, "To hell with the Health Department. This sausage was good yesterday—it certainly can't be any worse today."[13]

We never sin alone; there are no private sins. Even our most secret sins have far-reaching social consequences. Any sin injures the lives of others and has repercussions extending across generations.

As confessional prayer brings us to an awareness of the interconnectedness of our lives with the lives of countless others, we are also made aware of the damage to others—past, present, and future—wrought

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[12] Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Johannine Epistles: Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Crossroad, 1992; German original 1975), 248f.

[13] I am indebted to an article by Jim Forest for this reference. See his "Rest for Our Souls," *Touchstone* 16 (October, 2003): 29.

by both our carelessly indifferent and our calculatedly willful actions. We are moved not only to confess our own sins but also to make intercession to the Father on behalf of others whom we have injured.

As confession leads to intercession, intercession may turn or return us to confession. Being entrusted with the privilege and responsibility of making intercessory prayers on behalf of others may lead us to confess sins in our own lives. Not infrequently, out of concern for those for whom we would intercede, we find ourselves concerned that no obstacles in our own lives limit our petitions for the Father's care for those on behalf of whom we intercede. Not surprisingly, confession of our own sins often enters our intercessory prayers as a prelude to approaching the Father on behalf of others.

Conclusion

We have reviewed two basic and simple Christian disciplines, confession and intercession. A word of clarification is now in order. While these disciplines are basic and fundamental, they also presume and are reflective of an almost incomprehensibly profound reality. In Christ, God is now taking us into his own life.

First John indicates that our fellowship with one another is reflective of our fellowship with the Father (1:3, 7). More specifically—and more importantly—through the incarnation, the Father is incorporating us into his own life, exemplified in the self-expending love seen in the cross (3:16; 4:10).[14] Succinctly, Christian spiritual growth is perfection in God's love (2:4; 4:12, 17).

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[14] The underlying conceptual framework of this Trinitarian theology is more fully reflected in the Fourth Gospel. See, for example, 17:20-23 " . . . that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us . . . I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one . . ."

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It is in this underlying reality that Christian prayer is grounded and by which it is guided. Our prayers of confession sustain us in the life which is God's love, a life which we can never deserve and can only receive from the Creator and Sustainer of all things, the Father of Jesus Christ. Intercession entails our taking before the Father the needs and concerns of others who are, like ourselves, created, sustained, and redeemed in Christ.

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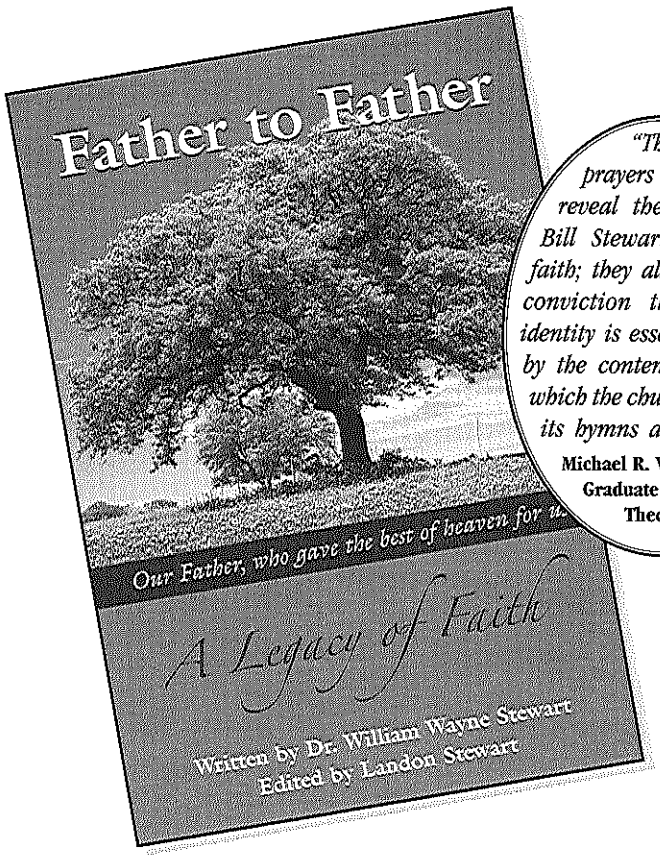
There are times in life when prayer is needed, but the words just won't come. We know it's appropriate to cast all our cares on Him—as well as our thanksgiving and praise—but we struggle to find the words. To that end, the prayers in *Father to Father* are offered as models of thoughtful, comtemplative prayers to assist us in our own prayer life.

– from the Foreword by Landon Stewart



"These prayers not only reveal the depth of Bill Stewart's personal faith; they also convey his conviction that Christian identity is essentially shaped by the content of the faith which the church affirms in its hymns and prayers."

Michael R. Weed, Austin Graduate School of Theology

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Remembering a Friend

A Tribute to Dr. Bill Stewart

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David Worley

Our colleague and dear friend, Dr. Bill Stewart, fell asleep in Christ on December 4, 2003. Bill's day job until his retirement had been skillfully administering financial aid for students in Texas. For many years, however, Bill had graciously taught English courses at our school when called upon and, more recently, was beginning to help us in our accreditation office. Bill always responded with kindness and encouraging words relative to our work.

Bill thought long and hard about Christian education, and not only at the college level. Bill understood the history and philosophy of higher education through his own doctoral studies and he was able to clarify issues facing us all with much insight. Bill served on the board of Brentwood Christian School (and as its chairman), carefully crafting policies and directions for its present and future. Bill was generous with his time and resources as Brentwood Christian School expanded its high school programs.

A quiet and studious man, Bill loved the church extending his graces to her in teaching and writing. His Bible teaching was always the result of thoughtful reading and rereading of the text. His prayers, printed weekly in

the order of worship, gave the Brentwood Oaks Church of Christ fresh ways to pray. These prayers have been edited and published by his son Landon, that another generation may benefit from his father's own discipleship.*

Bill left no stone unturned, not only in his own careful study of the scripture (and English literature) but also, literally, in his own loving observations of the physical world. Hikes through the mountains of the Southwest stirred his imagination and refreshed his spirit. His life was richly blessed through the common interests he shared with his wife, an educator as well, Becky Stewart.

Bill was so proud of his son, his wife, and grandchildren. We learned so much by watching Bill's love and care for his first wife Daphren through her own long battle with cancer. We also benefited from Bill's presence in church assemblies even as he experienced the ravages of cancer.

Dear Bill, we remember your faithfulness to the church, to your family, to your friends, and to the schools you loved. We remember your deliberateness and thoughtfulness in all you did. What you composed, in poetry or prose, was refined and intentional. We all learned from you, more than you know or perhaps accept. We thank you for the words you gave us to express our thoughts and feelings to the Father, words far beyond our own, gifts of the Holy Spirit. Like the Lamentations, you have given us ways to express and understand our grief and pain. You were a man of sorrows in many ways but "faith, hope and love abide."

The Father's love protected you, until you fell asleep in His son. Grace and Peace.

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* *Father to Father: A Legacy of Faith*, 218 pages, is available through the Austin Graduate School of Theology Bookstore, or by writing StrawHat Publications, 9875 South Florence Place, Highlands Ranch, CO 80126 at $16.95 per copy (plus shipping).

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A Confessional Community: *The Seedbed of Spiritual Formation?*

A Review Essay
Reviewed by Allan McNicol

D. G. Hart. *Recovering Mother Kirk: The Case for Liturgy in the Reformed Tradition.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003. Pp. 261.

In his book *After Virtue,* now almost twenty-five years old, Alasdair MacIntyre gives a frightening scenario. He asks us to imagine a series of environmental disasters that beset civilization. A reactionary party emerges blaming the scientists. The party wipes out laboratories, purges the libraries and closes the schools. Sometime later order is restored but the discipline of science, nearly forgotten, is in chaos. People have not only lost key information and data but find themselves unable to make the social and intellectual connections that gave meaning to scientific study in the first place.

MacIntyre's scenario was designed to illustrate problems that arose in the study of morality in philosophical circles of the past several centuries. Attempts to ground morality on the basis of universal reason collapsed. This is the analog to the environmental disasters. Now, in our post-modern world, people have lost the intellectual connections that once informed this discipline. As in the story of Humpty Dumpty, thoughtful people struggle to put the pieces back together.

Thesis of the Book

In this arresting book, D. G. Hart takes on an equally daunting issue. His basic narrative relates the journey of the Reformed tradition (Presbyterians, Christian Reformed Church, etc.). One can look down a well-traveled road. Commencing with Calvin, Reformed worship was characterized for centuries by appropriation of ancient church liturgy based on a common core of theologically-grounded confessions. But in recent decades something has happened. One can go into many Reformed churches and expect almost anything. Like MacIntyre's example, Hart is clear that Reformed worship has lost its way. Conscientious Reformed worship leaders are having a difficult time putting fragmented pieces of doctrine and liturgy together into any coherent model. Meanwhile, numbers at worship continue to diminish. Indeed, the integrity of the entire Reformed tradition is in question.

Of course, it will be difficult to put the pieces back together again. Massive social forces have caused the erosion. It did not help that many Presbyterians drifted into liberal Protestantism where strict adherence to doctrine did not matter. On the other hand, conservatives capitulated wholesale to the Protestant ethos in America: namely, a form of pietism which lately has mutated into Evangelicalism. The latter has come to full flower with only grudging acknowledgment of the importance of corporate worship for spiritual formation.

It is out of this context that Hart makes a basic argument. The Reformed tradition's historic concern to nourish spiritual formation can only be recovered by linking Reformed confessions with corporate worship. At its center is the keeping of the sacraments and church discipline administered by an organized ministry. Undergirded by this framework the believer's spirit is nourished by developing close interconnections between family life and the serious observance of traditional liturgical practices. Hart argues

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that unless doctrine and corporate worship practices are plausibly reconnected the Reformed tradition is doomed (17).

Relevance for Churches of Christ

Churches of Christ should be interested in this discussion. There is something here of vital concern for the Stone-Campbell tradition. Of course, we are not interested in connecting with a confessional heritage of Calvinism or encouraging practices such as infant baptism and the irregular observance of the Lord's Supper. We clearly differentiate ourselves from the Reformed tradition in a number of ways. Yet, most of the early leaders of the Restoration Movement were Reformed ministers. And the shadow of the Reformed legacy falls heavily over us. Take the architecture of our buildings and the form and tenor of worship occurring within them. With respect to the former, most within Churches of Christ can relate to Hart's description of Reformed church architecture. Quoting Evelyn Underwood, he notes that "the bleak interior of the real Calvinist church is itself sacramental: a witness to the inadequacy of the human against the Divine" (70). With respect to the latter, our traditional order of worship shows close affinities with the pattern established by Calvin in Geneva even to the point of using the regulative principle to determine what is done in the assembly.[1]

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[1] The "regulative principle," as it emerges with regard to public worship, is the idea that whatever is done in the assembly must find explicit warrant in scripture. Hart explains, "If the Bible does not require something, then it may not be done, even if the thing proposed is not inherently sinful" (32). Exercise of this principle has caused endless debates not only among Reformed churches but also among Churches of Christ. (For example, what about the use of a church year, personal testimonies in the assembly, etc.?) As I understand it, Hart is not so much contending for the strict use of this principle as he is arguing that it has shaped worship in churches of the Reformed tradition. He is asking whether the Reformed tradition can be viable without adherence to some version of this principle. It should be noted that the point in using the principle was to be faithful to the practices of the ancient church. Both the Reformers and the Puritans were vitally interested in worship in the ancient church and were anxious to remove what they considered to be unauthorized additions mainly stemming from Rome. It is ironic today that worship practices formulated under the regulative principle are attacked as "dry

Moreover, the two-century journey of the Restoration Movement in America in many ways parallels the recent course of the Reformed tradition. Taking their cue from mainstream Presbyterianism, the Disciples of Christ embraced liberal Protestantism only to arrive at their new destination about the time that mainline Protestantism was becoming oldline/sideline. Meanwhile Churches of Christ and independent Christian Churches, like conservative Reformed groups, increasingly move within the circles of Evangelicalism.[2] Similarly, as Hart has noted with the Reformed tradition, for most of our history our pilgrimage revolved around viewing corporate worship as the crown jewel of spiritual formation centering in the life of "Mother Kirk."

But now things are different. These days it is unusual to hear people in Churches of Christ refer to themselves as "members of the church" and in the new suburbs throughout the Southwest few seek out and socialize with other families in our tradition desirous of forming new fellowships to carry on time-honored practices. At the same time one senses for many who grew up in Churches of Christ a growing reliance for spiritual development on inter-denominational Bible studies. Typically these, along with a host of other activities, take place outside congregational life and worship. Given these trends one may well echo Hart's plaintive cry, "whither our tradition?"

Of course, this is no stealth enterprise that has crept into the church. Many leaders in Churches of Christ openly support these trends. Some are reacting against expressions of legalism they have encountered. Others wish

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ritual," the "binding of human opinions," and "legalism" by some within the Restoration Movement. We need to be careful that the criticisms do not function as a stalking horse for the use of a host of worship practices currently popular in the culture but having little to do with the practice of New Testament Christianity, which the regulative principle sought to preserve.

[2] See my article "Churches of Christ Meet the Evangelicals: A Review Essay," *Christian Studies* 19 (2003): 71-78.

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to incorporate patterns of worship that they admire in other traditions. Still others believe that current practices of corporate worship in Churches of Christ are antithetical to church growth. A common denominator in this state of unrest is that time-honored liturgical practices are reckoned only as "dead traditions." In order that nothing stand in the way of bringing people to Christ, it is assumed that doing corporate worship as we have known it can be scrapped with no great loss.

The Crux of the Matter

But it is precisely at this point that we come to the crux of the issue. Hart's analysis of the conservative Presbyterians' flirtation with Evangelicalism captures it well.

> Since the rise of pietism in the seventeenth century and the Anglo-American revivals of the following century, the goal among God-fearing Protestants has been to eliminate observant Protestantism. Of course, this is not how pietist or evangelical leaders identified the enemy. The words they used were *dead* religion or *formalism,* and what they had in mind was a nominal Protestant faith whose observance was one of simply going through the motions. Even so, the objection to nominal Christianity launched a strain of suspicion against the very forms of devotion that characterize a churchly Christian piety, whether Reformed, Lutheran, Episcopalian, or Roman Catholic. With the religion of the heart triumphant, going to church was too easy a way of showing one's religious devotion. After all, people could nap through sermons, hypocritically partake of the Lord's Supper, or mouth the words of a hymn. And going to church involved only one day in the said Christian's weekly routine. To test the believer's mettle, more strenuous forms of piety needed to be devised, ones that demanded time and were apparent for all to see. Thus, anti-formalism ironically launched both the forms of evangelical kitsch that sell briskly in Christian bookstores and the presumption that truly heartfelt religion will be eye-felt as well (247).

There we have it. At the end of the day spiritual formation informed by the tenets of pietism and that which is nurtured in a confessional church community inevitably conflict. With respect to the Reformed tradition, Hart notes bluntly that the Westminster Shorter Catechism states that properly ordered corporate worship services of the word, sacrament, and prayer are

"ordinances necessary for salvation" (245).[3] One may brand the traditional order of worship of a confessional community as cold, nominal Christianity or view it as the basic mode of spiritual formation. But it is hard to see both perspectives as compatible. In which direction will we go?

Conclusion

Until recently an impartial observer could describe Churches of Christ as a communion that recognizes that spiritual formation centers in the regular practice of corporate worship. In short, the core elements for the development of spiritual life are found in the assemblies of "Mother Kirk." There are good reasons for this. In keeping with both the practice of the ancient church and the sensibilities of our early Restorationist leaders, corporate worship centering around Word and Table functions as the *sine qua non* of spiritual development for the believer. Regular participation is indispensable for spiritual development and ultimately our salvation.

Now the ocean of cultural change is at full tide. And one of its most powerful currents is the view that authentic religious experience and spiritual formation can bypass liturgical practice. Those who are pulled by this current are bent on exchanging scripture-centered worship based on the regulative principle for more contemporary idioms. Supporting a scripture-based idiom of worship is a rich legacy of prayers and hymnody that gave additional texture to spiritual development around Word and Table. If this tradition is abandoned, can evangelical piety being incorporated into our assemblies be sufficient to take its place?

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[3] That is, they are understood as the means of grace that communicate the benefits of redemption. In other words they are both essential for salvation and for nurturing the spiritual life of the believer. Hart puts it in an adversarial way, "the practices of Christian worship accordingly, are not trivial matters that can be packaged as a commodity to attract a new set of customers or discarded in favor of the small group Bible study. Instead, they are the elements that put flesh on the bones of faith and repentance." Hart, *Recovering Mother Kirk,* 246.

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Alasdair MacIntyre has rightly drawn attention to the tragic consequences for Western society that has lost a common basis for morality. D. G. Hart argues along the same lines when he discusses what happened when the fragile link between doctrine and liturgy was broken in the Reformed tradition. With respect to Churches of Christ, something similar is happening in the assault on the simple worship service of Word and Table. In the present climate of dismantling historic worship practices, we wonder whether the connection between corporate worship and spiritual growth can be recovered? If spiritual formation is not encouraged by what takes place in the assembly, how or where in the coming days will the faith be passed on and Christian character formed?

There are many who see little or no value in tradition—especially as it applies to contemporary worship practices. Our point is not to advocate blind assent to our tradition nor to maintain it mechanically. We need to recognize that the connection between doctrine and liturgy has served as an adequate framework for the spiritual development of many generations. Fragile as this may be, we need to think long and hard before discarding our traditions.

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Adapting to Survive

Our church is, I believe, the first split-level church in America. It has five rooms and two baths downstairs–dining area, kitchen and three parlors for committee and group meetings–with a crawl space behind the furnace ending in the hillside into which the structure is built. Upstairs is one huge all-purpose interior, divisible into different-sized components by means of sliding walls and convertible into an auditorium for putting on plays, a gymnasium for athletics, and a ballroom for dances. There is a small worship area at one end. . . . Thus Peoples' Liberal is a church designed to meet the needs of today, and to serve the whole man. This includes the worship of a God free of outmoded theological definitions and palatable to a mind come of age in the era of Relativity.

Peter DeVries, *The Mackerel Plaza* (1958)

Fearful lest it be relegated to the position of an isolated sect, Christianity seems to be making frenzied efforts at mimicry in order to escape being devoured by its enemies—a reaction that seems defensive, but is in fact self-destructive. In the hope of saving itself, it seems to be assuming the colors of its environment, but the result is that it loses its identity. . . .

Leszek Kolakowski, *Modernity on Endless Trial*

Christian Education

The purpose of a Christian education would not be merely to make men and women pious Christians: a system which aimed too rigidly at this end alone would only become obscurantist. A Christian education would primarily train people to be able to think in Christian categories, though it could not compel belief and would not impose the necessity for insincere profession of belief.

T. S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society*

The recent developments in American education raise the question of whether the church can tradition itself in a highly secular and pluralistic society

without once again establishing church schools. This is a very difficult decision for many Protestants who have, in some measure, identified public education with the kingdom of God. The secularization of public education, however, the teaching of courses in such a manner as not to leave open the possibility of faith, or to make faith in God an unnecessary hypothesis, endangers the faith at its very fundamental roots. Therefore Protestant churches, if they are to survive, will have to face with all seriousness the questions of church schools in a way that has never been raised in America until now.

John Leith, *From Generation to Generation*

Christian Universities

What seems to me an intolerable anomaly is the church's maintaining at great cost schools and colleges which are indistinguishable in every important respect from secular institutions. In doing this it finds itself often actually supporting and maintaining cultural forces hostile to both the thought and ethos of the church, at the cost of resources with which it might be equipping its children better to understand and resist these destructive pressures.

John Knox, "The Identifiability of the Church,"
Theological Freedom and Social Responsibility

Confident Revival

Common, generic Evangelicalism and the activistic denominations that make up Evangelicalism do not possess theologies full enough, traditions of intellectual practice strong enough, or conceptions of the world deep enough to sustain a full-scale intellectual revival.

Without strong theological traditions, most evangelicals lack a critical element required for making intellectual activity both self-confident and properly humble, both critical and committed. In order to advance responsible Christian learning, the vitality of commitment must be stabilized by the ballast of traditions. Tradition without life might be barely Christian, but life without tradition is barely coherent.

Mark Noll, "Lowest Common Denominator Evangelicalism,"
First Things 38 (October, 2004)

Disturbing Ignorance

Deeply disturbing as the world's ignorance of God is, the fact that there can also be an ignorance of God on the part of the church is incomparably more sinister.

Karl Barth, *The Christian Life*

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Existence of God

To the extent we deny God, we reduce ourselves to accidental beings on a temporary planet in a random universe expanding into nowhere. To the extent we have a sense of the existence of God, we discover creation confessing God's being and see all beauty as a confession of God.

Jim Forrest, "Rest for Our Souls" *Touchstone* 16 (October, 2003)

Faith and Obedience

The dimension of faith most central to the biblical tradition is obedience.

Luke T. Johnson, *Faith's Freedom*

Faith therefore involves personal decision, trust, commitment and obedience; it is a wholehearted acceptance of the claim of God upon a man, in the situation in which he exists, with the appropriate response in life and action. Thus it is that in the NT obedience becomes virtually a technical expression for the acceptance of the Christian faith.

Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*

Modern Media

The secularization of education from the kindergarten to the graduate school is a most serious problem, but it is aggravated by the secular or pagan perspective of the media. This is true of newscasters and, in particular, of the soap operas that consume so much television time. The impact of television which brings alien theological, philosophical, and moral ideas into the bedrooms and the livings rooms of church people is difficult to calculate.

John Leith, *From Generation to Generation*

Openness/tolerance

Openness used to be the virtue that permitted us to seek the good by using reason. It now means accepting everything and denying reason's power. . . .

The fact that there have been different opinions about good and bad in different times and places in no way proves that none is true or superior to others . . . . the difference of opinion would seem to raise the question as to which is true or right rather than to banish it.

Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*

Restoration Plea?

[R]eflection upon the Church of the New Testament will lead us to conclude that not all the subsequent developments in the Church can be authorized by its origins; there have been errors and false developments in its history. The New Testament message, as the original testimony, is the highest court to which appeal must be made in all the changes of history. It is the essential norm against which the Church of every age has to measure itself. The New Testament Church, which, beginning with its origins in Jesus Christ, is already the Church in the fullness of its nature, is therefore the original design; we cannot copy it today, but we can and must translate it into modern terms. The Church of the New Testament alone can show us what the original design was.

Hans Küng, *The Church*

Times of Emergency

[I]n times of emergency, it may prove in the long run that those problems we have postponed or ignored, rather than those we have failed to attack successfully, will return to plague us.

T. S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society*

Worship

Any practice, if it lasts long enough, can be cloaked in a theological justification, but there is a profound difference between a theology that shapes a congruent pattern of worship and a theology that simply adapts itself to patterns of worship forced on it willy-nilly by quite untheological forces and concerns.

In Isaiah's day the human crowds were still present for worship; it was God who had opted out. The problem for religious leaders then was not how to get the people to come back to attending worship; it was how to get God to attend. It might be wise even in the present to look at worship from that perspective. Perhaps we are spending far too much energy trying to figure out how to adapt worship so as to interest and attract a disinterested public. Perhaps we might better spend our time trying to please a potentially disinterested and increasingly irritated God.

J. J. M. Roberts, "Contemporary Worship in Light of Isaiah's Ancient Critique," in *Worship and the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honour of John T. Willis*

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