

## IN MEMORIAM: WILLIAM P. ALSTON 1921–2009

William P. Alston, the founding editor of this journal, died Sept. 13, 2009. The day before, a Eucharist was held for him in St. James Episcopal Church in Mishawaka, IN. Peter van Inwagen, a longtime colleague and friend of Bill, read a scripture, Isaiah 50. According to verse 5, “You opened my ears, and I did not rebel.”

This verse was splendidly fitting in the context. As many of his friends know, in 1975 Bill Alston had a powerful religious experience at evensong in Christchurch Cathedral, Oxford. This experience led to his return to the Christian faith. It also led to deep personal change in other ways: he became much more confident, much more open with other persons, with a much greater sense of focus and direction. Bill prayed repeatedly for the Lord to show him how he wanted Bill to spend the remainder of his life. He came to the conclusion that God wanted him to work at philosophy of religion—a subject he had only addressed fitfully before. Bill then worked at philosophy of religion with a dedication, seriousness, focus and energy that is unmatched in my experience. He was the founder of the Society of Christian Philosophers; there were five others involved in its inception, but it was Bill’s idea. At Mike Peterson’s urging, Bill also embraced the idea that philosophers of religion needed a journal; he persuaded the rest of us; the result was *Faith and Philosophy*. He was the first editor of *Faith and Philosophy*, and a magnificent editor he was. Of course he worked hard at the things a journal editor usually does, and *Faith and Philosophy* soon became a genuinely excellent journal. But in addition he took it as his mission to be helpful to those philosophers, especially those young philosophers, who submitted papers for publication. (In this he set the pattern for subsequent editors.) Bill worked long and tirelessly at this project, helping people rewrite and improve their papers; many philosophers were his beneficiaries.

Obviously this was of great importance. At least as important, however, was his own magnificent work in philosophy of religion. Amid his many publications, one in particular stands out: his magisterial *Perceiving God*, surely an unexcelled landmark in the last 100 years of Christian philosophy and philosophy of religion.

And Bill did much more: he routinely taught courses after his “retirement,” gave reading courses in the summer, carried on an extensive philosophical correspondence, lectured widely, both at conferences and for university audiences in the USA and many other countries. He made many of the rest of us look like sluggards.

Bill was mentor, model, and friend to many, including me. We grieve—both because he was our friend, and because we will no longer have his splendid contributions to our subject. But we need not grieve for Bill. Two more scripture verses, the first summing up Bill’s earthly life: “Well done,



good and faithful servant . . . enter into the joy of your master" (Matt. 25:21). Bill's earthly life, however, is but the tiniest initial segment of his complete life; it isn't so much as a fraction of it. For, as the second verse has it, "there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:11).

*Alvin Plantinga  
University of Notre Dame*