

Review Article

An Analytic Anglican: The Philosophical Theology of William P. Alston

ROBERT MACSWAIN*

Observers of Anglicanism have often remarked on the tradition's relative dearth of theologians. Biblical scholars, patristic scholars, and liturgical scholars, yes—but systematic theologians, no.¹ This seems particularly true in the United States, where one is hard pressed to think of a single contemporary Episcopal theologian who has exercised a significant, formative influence on the discipline as a whole.² In the past generation, figures such as Paul Tillich (Lutheran), Karl Barth (Reformed), and the Niebuhrs (German Evangelical) dominated the thinking of Episcopal theologians. And the present is hardly different from the past. Today, Episcopalians still look to Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Roman Catholics, Anabaptists, the Orthodox, and perhaps Anglicans from other provinces to provide the substance of our theological training.

* Robert MacSwain is the Ramsey Fellow and Chaplain at St. Chad's College, University of Durham, where he is also pursuing doctoral studies in philosophical theology as a Fellow of the Episcopal Church Foundation. He thanks William P. Alston, Daniel Howard-Snyder, and Peter van Inwagen for their help in establishing certain points of detail; and also David Brown, Joe Cassidy, and Paul Murray for their comments on an earlier version of this review article.

¹ See, for example, David L. Holmes, *A Brief History of the Episcopal Church* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1993), 159-163.

² The exception which proves the rule would be the late Hans Frei of Yale. Writing as an ECUSA priest studying in England, I should make it explicitly clear that by "Episcopal theologian" I mean only scholars who formally belong to ECUSA itself (regardless of where they live), and so major Anglican figures such as Rowan Williams and Sarah Coakley (despite her residence in the United States) are ruled out. I should also make it clear that I am in no way denigrating the excellent work of many ECUSA theologians. My observation here is not meant to be contentious or controversial, but simply matter-of-fact. I take it as agreed that even our very best and most prominent contemporary ECUSA theologians, some of whom are deeply respected in the academic community, are not (or at least not yet) as influential as Frei or comparable figures from other Christian traditions—even within the circles of ECUSA theology.

By contrast, over the past thirty years the field of philosophy of religion has been strongly influenced by Episcopalians, one or two ordained, but mostly lay. Whereas their theological counterparts have been educated within seminaries, divinity schools, and departments of theology or religion, these scholars have been formed primarily by secular departments of philosophy. Rather than grand system-building, they are concerned with basic issues of conceptual analysis and clarification.³ Nevertheless, such Episcopal philosophers are often surprisingly forthcoming about their theological convictions and ecclesial identity as Anglicans. Several are converts to the Episcopal Church who care deeply about the doctrinal integrity and intellectual substance of their adopted denomination. Thus, among the most important and influential philosophers of religion in the world one must include—at the very least—Marilyn McCord Adams (formerly of UCLA and Yale, now Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford), Peter van Inwagen (Notre Dame), and William P. Alston (Syracuse). There is also a wider penumbra of significant Episcopal philosophers who, while not necessarily at the discipline-shaping level of these three, have still made considerable contributions.⁴

Of these Episcopal philosophers, William Alston is notable both for his immense influence on the field and for his articulation of explicit Anglican commitment. In this review article, I will sketch the outline of his career, summarize the salient features of his work, and highlight its significance for Episcopal theological reflection. In so doing, I hope to draw attention to a neglected intellectual resource which is both *for* and *of* the Episcopal Church—namely, its many philosophical lay members.

³ See William J. Wainwright, ed., *God, Philosophy, and Academic Culture: A Discussion between Scholars in the AAR and the APA* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1996) for a fascinating dialogue between the different intellectual mindsets exemplified by philosophers of religion in the American Academy of Religion—usually trained in departments of religion—and those in the American Philosophical Association—usually trained in departments of philosophy.

⁴ Two collections of spiritual autobiographies by philosophers contain a number of Anglicans or Episcopalians, and in particular a number of converts to the Episcopal Church. See Kelly James Clark, ed., *Philosophers Who Believe: The Spiritual Journeys of 11 Leading Thinkers* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993); and Thomas V. Morris, ed., *God and the Philosophers: The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). Adams, van Inwagen, and Alston all tell their stories in the Morris volume, as does William Wainwright, who converted to the Episcopal Church partly due to his undergraduate experience at Kenyon College.

An Analytic Anglican

If they are close readers, many Episcopalians will have already come across Alston's name in the widely used reference volume *The Study of Anglicanism*. In A. S. McGrade's survey of the historic Anglican commitment to reason, only two Americans are mentioned: Hans Frei and William Alston. Near the end of the chapter—and thus at the culmination of his discussion of contemporary developments—McGrade refers to Alston's work in the epistemology of religious experience by observing that “an analytic philosophy not compelled to identify intelligence with scepticism can argue for the cognitive value of ‘Christian mystical perceptual practice.’”⁵ Likewise, in a chapter titled “The Anglican Tradition” in Blackwell's *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, Alston is the only American mentioned by name. The author, Brian Hebblethwaite, writes that “within the remarkable Society of Christian Philosophers in the United States . . . there are to be found a number of Episcopalians, some of whose names will feature elsewhere in this volume, most notably that of William Alston (b. 1921), whose major study in the epistemology of religion, *Perceiving God* (1991), exemplifies a quintessentially Anglican penchant for unashamed natural theology.”⁶ Both McGrade and Hebblethwaite single out Alston's book *Perceiving God* for special consideration. While I will discuss this book briefly toward the end of this review article, let me here pause to observe that Alston's endorsement of natural theology is rather more nuanced than Hebblethwaite's comments would suggest.

William Payne Alston was born in 1921 in Shreveport, Louisiana. Although brought up as a Methodist, he writes that his “undoubtedly imperfect recollection of this particular religious ambiance was that it was perfunctory and lacking in warmth of conviction.”⁷ This non-compelling early religious experience, combined with a certain rationalist outlook, led him to “abandon ship” as an adolescent. He studied

⁵ A. S. McGrade, “Reason,” in Stephen Sykes, John Booty, and Jonathan Knight, eds., *The Study of Anglicanism*, 2nd ed. (London and Minneapolis, Minn.: SPCK and Fortress Press, 1998), 126 and 128 n. 9.

⁶ Brian Hebblethwaite, “The Anglican Tradition,” in Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro, eds., *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 171-178, at 178.

⁷ William P. Alston, “A Philosopher's Way Back to the Faith,” in Morris, ed., *God and the Philosophers*, 19. Subsequent references to this essay will be included in the text.

music at Centenary College in Shreveport with a primary focus on the piano. While his professional interests gradually shifted from music to philosophy, his love of music remained, and in fact contributed to his eventual (re)conversion to Christianity in general and Anglicanism in particular.

During his doctoral studies in philosophy at the University of Chicago, one of Alston's primary teachers was the great Charles Hartshorne (1897-2000). Hartshorne's "process theology" is, of course, one of the most important schools in twentieth-century American theology and is considered an important alternative to the so-called "classical theism" of Thomas Aquinas. One of Alston's signal achievements is a rapprochement between these two competing systems—a rapprochement he attributes, if somewhat facetiously, to his preference for the Anglican *via media*.⁸

Alston received his Ph.D. in 1951 and his first appointment was at the University of Michigan, where he taught from 1949 to 1971. According to Daniel Howard-Snyder, "There his eyes were opened to contemporary English analytic philosophy and he underwent a fundamental shift, accelerated by trying to teach Hegel."⁹ From this point onward, Alston became a practitioner of the analytic method, and it was as an analytic philosopher that he continued to teach at Rutgers (1971-1976), the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (1976-1980), and Syracuse (1980-1992), where he is currently Professor Emeritus of Philosophy. It was also as an analytic philosopher that he made his mark on the discipline, providing some of the most distinguished contributions to epistemology, metaphysics, philosophical psychology, and philosophy of language in the mid- to late twentieth century. These contributions led to numerous honors, including presidencies of (what is now) the Central Division of the American Philosophical Association and the Society for Philosophy and Psychology, becoming the

⁸ "Hartshorne and Aquinas: A Via Media," in William P. Alston, *Divine Nature and Human Language: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), 121-143. For his comments on the *via media* of the title, see page 10 in the introduction.

⁹ Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Alston, William Payne (1921-)," at <http://www.ac.wvu.edu/howardd/alston/alstonfortheommes.pdf>. Much of the basic biographical information on Alston in this and in the previous two paragraphs was derived from Howard-Snyder's essay, a shorter version of which was published in John R. Shook (ed.), *The Dictionary of Modern American Philosophers* (Bristol: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005).

founding editor of the *Journal of Philosophical Research*, and receiving a fellowship in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.¹⁰

But under the surface of his gleaming academic career, Alston was engaged in a fitful spiritual search. During his first year teaching at Michigan, he joined St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Ann Arbor, and was confirmed in 1950. In an autobiographical essay, he writes that he "chose Episcopalianism over Methodism, Presbyterianism, and so on, partly because I was drawn to the liturgy and partly because I found the intellectual climate of Anglican thought congenial" (p. 20). As Alston makes clear, however, this apparently positive development did not last. For one thing, he was still not convinced of the *truth* of Christianity, and so there was a pervasive element of cognitive dissonance. For another, he says that at this point he was "seeking to use the church and the Christian faith as a refuge from life" (p. 21). When Alston realized that he was practicing a dead religion, he left the church for a second time. And so for the next fifteen years he resumed his secular stance and continued on with his philosophical career.

In 1974-1975, however, while he was teaching at Rutgers University, Alston and his wife Valerie spent a sabbatical year in Oxford. Alston says that he had never been a convinced atheist, and the question of Christian faith decisively re-presented itself during this time. At the suggestion of their daughter—once an agnostic herself, now an Episcopal priest—the Alstons attended a service at Christ Church Cathedral. He writes, "This was literally the first religious service, apart from weddings and funerals, that I had attended in about fifteen years. Something happened, which I still find it difficult to put my finger on. But I definitely made a positive response to the proclamation of the gospel and to the sacramental presence of our Lord, and we began attending services regularly" (p. 23). He adds, "Oxford is a marvelous place for being drawn back into the church if music plays a large role in one's communication with the divine, as is true in my case."

On returning to New Jersey, Alston continued to explore Christianity with this newfound freedom and openness. But the cognitive dissonance remained, and so, he says, "Insofar as I had any expectations of my religious future, I supposed I would adopt some sort of watered-down Christianity in which I would participate in the services of worship, supposing the doctrinal elements to be symbolic of

¹⁰ Howard-Snyder, "Alston, William Payne (1921-)."

some ineffable supreme reality” (p. 23). But two elements conspired to alter this prediction: attendance at All Saints’ Episcopal Church in Princeton, and a subsequent exposure to the charismatic movement.

At All Saints’ the Alstons encountered the now retired rector, A. Orley Swartzentruber. Alston credits Swartzentruber’s example of pastoral care, wisdom, scholarship, faith, and—in particular—his remarkable sermons with finally making Christianity credible to Valerie and himself. In these sermons, he says, one “not only heard the gospel being interpreted in a way that had direct application to one’s situation then and there, but one could, as it were, literally see the gospel being lived out in front of one” (p. 24). Swartzentruber—a parish priest—profoundly shaped Alston’s perception of Christianity, including its doctrines, as an intellectually substantial interpretation of reality which could and should be taken with utmost seriousness.

The second aspect of All Saints’ which influenced Alston was his first encounter with the charismatic movement. This was in early 1976 and charismatic elements were beginning to percolate through various Episcopal and Roman Catholic congregations. While his initial response to the charismatic members of the parish was dubious, Alston was gradually drawn to share their basic perspective. He writes, “I began to see that these people were really in touch with God as a more or less continual living presence in their lives, and that this influenced, to a greater or lesser degree, every facet of their existence” (p. 24).

In short, these various strands from Oxford and Princeton combined to provide Alston with an intellectually and experientially integrated vision of Christianity. He soon reengaged for the first time in twenty years with questions in philosophy of religion and philosophical theology. This return was to have momentous implications for the field. While I will consider some of his scholarly contributions in a moment, let me here mention some more broadly institutional accomplishments.¹¹

In 1977, a year after his return to the Episcopal Church, Alston initiated the founding of the Society of Christian Philosophers and was then in 1978 elected its first president. This society now has over a thousand members and has been instrumental in spearheading a

¹¹ I have deliberately spent much of this review article on Alston’s spiritual journey in order to emphasize an important fact worth further reflection: the most significant influences on his theological development—aside from reading classical figures such as Aquinas—have been a parish priest, worshipping communities, and the living example of “ordinary” Christians.

renaissance of interest in philosophical issues raised by Christian doctrine. In 1981 Alston also became the founding editor of the Society's journal, *Faith and Philosophy*, which is one of the leading journals in philosophy of religion.¹² He is also the founding—and continuing—editor of an important monograph series published by Cornell University Press: Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion. In all three of these initiatives, Alston has exercised an enormous, if sometimes indirect, influence on the shape, health, and direction of the discipline. It would be difficult to imagine the past three decades without his involvement.

Alston's final teaching position was at Syracuse University. As his Syracuse period began soon after his return to faith—and at the height of his academic career—a number of younger Christian philosophers went to Syracuse to study with him and receive their doctorates under his supervision. In addition to university commitments, he also writes that since “coming to Syracuse in 1980 I have, God help me, become increasingly involved in ecclesiastical affairs in both St. Paul's Cathedral, where we are members of the congregation, and the Diocese of Central New York” (p. 25). After officially retiring from the university in 1992, he continued to teach until 2000. Since then, he has continued to write and edit; he is still a vibrant philosophical presence.

Alston's Manifesto

In 1989, Alston published two collections of his most important papers to date, one in epistemology and one in philosophy of religion.¹³ The volume in philosophy of religion—*Divine Nature and Human Language*—begins with an introductory essay which functions as a convenient manifesto of Alston's basic convictions and methodology in thinking about religious belief. While he denies being a systematic thinker, in the sense that he is not concerned to develop an overarching structure in which all the doctrines of Christianity fit together in a

¹² See William P. Alston, “Some Reflections on the Early Days of the Society of Christian Philosophers,” 141-143; Arthur F. Holmes, “Reflections on Divine Providence,” 147-150; Alvin Plantinga, “Twenty Years Worth of the SCP,” 151-155; and Michael L. Peterson, “A Long and Faithful Journey,” 156-159, all in *Faith and Philosophy* 15 (April 1998).

¹³ William P. Alston, *Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge* (Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 1989); William P. Alston, *Divine Nature and Human Language: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 1989).

particular shape or according to certain criteria, he does acknowledge having a “fundamental religious and philosophical orientation.”¹⁴ He thus provides his readers a fairly detailed description of that orientation, which is key to understanding his relevance not only for philosophy of religion but also for contemporary discussions in Episcopal theology.

Rather unusually for a philosopher, Alston begins with a frank expression of faith:

I am a Christian of a relatively conservative cast, by current standards outside evangelical and fundamentalist circles. I am not a fundamentalist about the Bible, and I am alive to the need of each age to rethink the substance of the faith. But I take the Christian tradition very seriously; I don't feel free to ignore it whenever it doesn't jibe with my own personal predilections. Hence the interest, displayed in these essays, in exploring, partly refashioning, and defending a fairly traditional conception of God and His work in the world, a conception that owes a great deal to medieval philosophical theology. This enterprise involves the use of much up-to-date philosophical equipment.¹⁵

He further observes that this “blend of fairly traditional Christianity, heavy borrowings from medieval philosophical theology, and the employment of contemporary analytical philosophy is typical of much recent work in philosophical theology.”¹⁶

Coming from one of its most influential practitioners, this statement is an important expression of an intellectual strategy which—for better or worse—sets analytic philosophy of religion apart from other current modes of theological discourse such as process theology, liberation theology, feminist theology, postliberal theology, postmodern theology, the existentialism of John Macquarrie, the antirealism of Don Cupitt, or the revisionism of Maurice Wiles. Although Alston is being descriptive rather than prescriptive at this point, it is partly due to the impact of his own work that his observation is so accurate. His example has helped create the school which he describes and to which others have subsequently contributed.

¹⁴ Alston, “Introduction,” *Divine Nature and Human Language*, 5.

¹⁵ Alston, “Introduction,” *Divine Nature and Human Language*, 5.

¹⁶ Alston, “Introduction,” *Divine Nature and Human Language*, 6.

Having stated his basic starting point and methodology, Alston further elaborates his views under three headings: (A) “Anti-positivism, anti-scientism, anti-naturalism”; (B) “Realism”; and (C) “Multiple sources of religious knowledge.”¹⁷ In positive terms, (A) declares that his approach to philosophy is not in principle closed off to the theoretical (both metaphysical and epistemological) possibility of the supernatural. In this regard, he maintains the right *as a philosopher* to take religious claims seriously, although not uncritically. Thus, Alston’s work represents a sea change from the unremittingly hostile methodological naturalism which characterized most Anglo-American philosophy in the middle of the twentieth century.

In outlining his commitment to realism Alston identifies disagreement on this issue “as perhaps the deepest divide in current religious thought.”¹⁸ He says:

I find myself at odds with most contemporary liberal theologians and religious thinkers (outside the ranks of “analytic philosophy”) in accepting an uncompromisingly realistic interpretation of religious belief. I take it that when someone believes that God created the heavens and the earth, then, assuming that the belief is sufficiently determinate, that belief is true or false depending on whether things are as asserted.¹⁹

In other words, “There is a truth of the matter that is independent of us, our ‘conceptual schemes,’ our social institutions and associations, our conventions and values.” Specifically addressing the guild of theologians, he adds: “I note, to my dismay, that many colleagues in theology and religious studies find it unutterably quaint that serious thinkers still take this realistic stance.” Alston is not naive: he recognizes the enormous difficulties involved in seeking to obtain sufficient clarity on a particular religious belief to determine whether it is, in fact, true or false. But he still maintains that *truth* and *falsity* are relevant categories in dealing with religious doctrine.

Finally, under (C), Alston takes a firmly Anglican view on religious epistemology: “In opposition to exclusivists of all stripes—Biblical fundamentalists, ‘traditionalists,’ rationalists—I hold that there are

¹⁷ Alston, “Introduction,” *Divine Nature and Human Language*, 6, 7.

¹⁸ Alston, “Introduction,” *Divine Nature and Human Language*, 7.

¹⁹ Alston, “Introduction,” *Divine Nature and Human Language*, 6.

multiple sources of religious knowledge and/or rational (justified) belief.”²⁰ While he does not pause to acknowledge it, it is interesting to note that in listing those three “exclusivist” positions he has in fact reproduced the familiar (if contested) Anglican triad of Scripture, tradition, and reason, although as considered in their disconnected (and hence problematic) condition. He then describes the character of these various multiple sources and defends his right to take account of them all:

I take very seriously the idea that people are experientially aware of God, that God presents Himself to their experience in various ways and thereby provides them with an empirical basis for beliefs about His presence and activity. . . . But I also take seriously the idea that God has revealed Himself, facts about His nature and character, and some of his purposes and intentions, through certain selected recipients and, more generally, through the religious community and its traditions. The traditions of the community thus serve as another avenue of religious truth, not to be taken uncritically, but not to be rejected out of hand either. Finally, I do not reject the enterprise of natural theology, the attempt to establish basic truths concerning the existence and nature of God by reasoning that does not rely in any way on data or convictions taken from the religious life. I do not think that natural theology can live up to the expectations of its more enthusiastic advocates, but nor do I take it to be worthless.²¹

In making these latter claims about natural theology, Alston seems to set himself at a slight distance from the “more enthusiastic” portrait suggested earlier by Brian Hebblethwaite, who cited Alston as an example of Anglicanism’s alleged “penchant for unashamed natural theology.” Nevertheless, Alston certainly includes such philosophical reasoning as one of his various sources of religious knowledge.

Contrary to the stereotype of the abstract, a priori character of philosophy of religion, Alston insists that it must be rooted in the lives of actual religious individuals and communities. He also maintains that philosophers must adopt an appropriate degree of humility before the mysteries they investigate and not set too high expectations for themselves. In short, although he is a contemporary analytic philosopher using cutting-edge techniques and developments, Alston views his

²⁰ Alston, “Introduction,” *Divine Nature and Human Language*, 7.

²¹ Alston, “Introduction,” *Divine Nature and Human Language*, 7.

work as simply contributing to the classic project of faith seeking understanding. He says, "I seek to bring rational intelligibility and order into a system of belief and thought within a religious tradition, rather than examine the system's credentials from without."²²

Conclusion

From this analytic perspective, Alston goes on to consider a number of theological issues. I have already mentioned his important work in developing a *via media* between the rival concepts of God provided by Hartshorne and Aquinas. Other theological topics he has investigated philosophically include the nature and limits of religious language,²³ God's action in the world,²⁴ divine command ethics,²⁵ the Trinity,²⁶ the Holy Spirit,²⁷ and biblical interpretation.²⁸ And his major work on the epistemology of religious experience—*Perceiving God*—concludes with a sustained discussion of religious pluralism and the place of experience within the general grounds for religious belief.²⁹ All of this material is well worth careful attention

²² Alston, "Introduction," *Divine Nature and Human Language*, 8.

²³ See the five essays in Part I of *Divine Nature and Human Language*, 17-117.

²⁴ See "God's Action in the World" in *Divine Nature and Human Language*, 197-222; "How to Think About Divine Action: Twenty-Five Years of Travail for Biblical Language" in Brian Hebblethwaite and Edward Henderson, eds., *Divine Action: Studies Inspired by the Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 51-70; and "Divine Action: Shadow or Substance?" in Thomas F. Tracy, ed., *The God Who Acts: Philosophical and Theological Explorations* (University Park, Pa.: Penn State University Press, 1994), 41-62.

²⁵ See "Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists" in *Divine Nature and Human Language*, 253-273.

²⁶ See "The Holy Spirit and the Trinity" in Stephen T. Davis, ed., *Philosophy and Theological Discourse* (London: Macmillan, 1997), 102-123; and "Substance and the Trinity" in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ, and Gerald O'Collins, SJ, eds., *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 179-201.

²⁷ In addition to "The Holy Spirit and the Trinity," in Davis, ed., *Philosophy and Theological Discourse*, 102-123, see also "The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit" in *Divine Nature and Human Language*, 223-252.

²⁸ See "Biblical Criticism and the Resurrection" in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ, and Gerald O'Collins, SJ, eds., *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 148-183; and "Historical Criticism of the Synoptic Gospels" in C. Bartholomew, C. S. Evans, M. Healy, and M. Rae, eds., *"Behind" the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003), 151-180.

²⁹ William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 1991).

from systematic theologians, even if they disagree with Alston's conclusions or methodology.

Aside from its inherent interest, Alston's work is also indicative of a significant shift in the philosophical and theological landscape. Much of his work is explicitly critical of figures who were highly influential among the previous generation of Episcopal theologians, figures such as Paul Tillich, John Macquarrie, Langdon Gilkey, Gordon Kaufmann, Maurice Wiles, and of course the process theology of Charles Hartshorne and his followers. *Pace* such "revisionist" thinkers, Alston is impressed by the coherence and resilience of classical Christian doctrine, although he finds it needs tweaking here and there. Although they are not normally included in such company, Alston and his fellow analysts may thus be placed within the broad trend of *ressourcement* which looks primarily to traditional sources for inspiration rather than contemporary culture, praxis, or innovatory insights. Unlike the currently dominant influence of much Barthian thought, however, Alston's stance is far more theocentric than Christocentric (although he does accept a Chalcedonian model of Christ's two natures).

Alston's work has generated a considerable body of commentary, both critical and appreciative, positive and negative: articles, symposia, conference discussions, numerous citations throughout the literature, and two festschriften. Very many questions could be posed to him.³⁰ In this review article, I am primarily interested in presenting his journey into the Episcopal Church and the analytic methodology underlying his work. I am not here seeking to commend the *results* of his work to the readers of this journal, but rather to recommend that we take him and it seriously. Not simply as a philosopher, but as a dedicated lay member of the Episcopal Church and as a builder of a substantial intellectual community, Alston is arguably the most influential Episcopal academic we have in the overlapping disciplines of philosophy, theology, and religious studies. If we Episcopalians pride ourselves on our commitment to "reason," it might behoove us actually to listen to those who have made reason their life's study.

³⁰ To name just two concerns relevant to this review article, James Kellenberger has asked if the genuine insights expressed in Alston's spiritual autobiography are in fact fully integrated into his academic work; see "The Fool of the Psalms and Religious Epistemology," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 45, no. 2 (1999): 99-113, especially 105-107. And Sarah Coakley raises a question mark over what she sees as the overly individualistic nature of his methodology in "Response to William Alston, 'Biblical Criticism and the Resurrection'" in Davis et al., *The Resurrection*, 187.