RATIONALITY AND SPIRITUALITY: FRIENDS OR ENEMIES?

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How is it that two children from the same family can grow up, one a believer and the other an agnostic? My answer to this question forms the basis for my paper this evening. An outline of my argument exists in its own way, I think, in the Gospel of John.

John the apostle asked a similar question about the people of his day: "How is it that among those who witnessed the life and ministry of Jesus, some believed and others did not? What fundamental condition of the human personality makes the difference?"

John's answer to that question is simple and profound: Those who did not believe were unwilling to believe. Belief in Jesus so threatened their world-view, they were not even open to the possibility he was "Messiah."

> *Though he had done so many signs before them, yet they did not believe in him; it was that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Lord, who has believed our report, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"*
>
> *Therefore, they could not believe. For Isaiah again said, "'He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes and perceive with their hearts and turn for me to heal them."*
>
> *"He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak.*
>
> *"And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me.'" (John 12:37-40;48-50, RSV)*

This created a tension within the unbelieving Jews, for their experience of the figure of Jesus drew them not to disbelief but to faith. The only way they, already committed to unbelief, could deal with the beliefs arising out of their encounter with Jesus was to persuade themselves that--rather than being Messiah--Jesus was actually Beelzebub. Therefore, he ought to die. A knowledge of God, a belief in the messianic kingdom of Jesus, required of the unbelieving Jews personal growth sufficient to shatter their shield of self-deception. Entering the process of conquering self-deception is what it means to be truly "spiritual."

I must now try and show you why I think this is the case. Let me begin by defining what rationality means, especially in relation to the phenomenon of religious faith.

A. Reason

A1. "Formal" Reason

All agree that, at the very least, reason means the formal activity of thinking logically and mathematically. Anyone who can think recognizes immediately and self-evidently the principle of identity (that "A" is "A") and contradiction (that "A" cannot be "not-A"). In addition, regardless of your cultural, psychological or religious background, once you understand the concept of "two" you know absolutely that "two plus two equals four." This universe of formal logic and mathematics applies, rather remarkably, to the operations of the physical universe in which events that occur outside our minds conform to structures within our minds. More often than not in theoretical physics, for example, we solve a problem mathematically and then observe how the math works in the physical universe.

For this reason, the way to be sure one's computations are correct is to doubt them from every possible direction and see if their consistency stands up. "Doubt" is the way to knowledge, knowledge meaning either "certainty" (as in mathematics) or "high probability" (the scientific descriptions of nature that become known as "laws"). Cartesian rationalism, hungering for certainty, was enchanted by mathematics. If one wished to isolate the indubitable, one had to doubt all that could be doubted. By constrast, empirical thought seemed to put everything on the shifting foundation of sense-perception.

Descartes did not intend that using doubt as a method would translate into doubt and despair as an existential anguish. Confident that God's existence would be secure against the most rigorous intellectual doubt, Descartes the believer was convinced that his method would never result in the despair of skepticism.

In this respect, Descartes was like the professor who, believing in God, nevertheless forces her students to think critically about the existence of God. Descartes was asking not that faith be surrendered, but that it be toughened. Hence, his version of Anselm's ontological argument.

His attempt failed, however, because the reason of mathematics and logic is too limited. Its certainty gobbles up its breadth. Most of the knowledge we need to live our lives cannot be obtained by doubting until all doubt can be removed. We do not begin--even as babies--full of skepticism and gradually acquire beliefs. We begin with some beliefs already present; waiting, as it were, to be awakened by experience.

For example, according to Adventist psychologist Adrian Zytkoskee, bio-feedback research on newborns suggests that the belief in the continued existence of objects is with a child from the very start. If you show a two-month-old child a rattle and then put it behind your back, the baby will call for the rattle precisely because it already "knows" that even though it is out of sight it is not "out of existence."

Now, this is a very sophisticated notion, one that cannot be learned in eight weeks. Obviously, the infant is born with a predisposition for that belief from the moment he begins to experience objects in the world. If we acquired that concept only after we were

old enough to appreciate the evidence supporting it, we would learn very little in infancy, if anything. Therefore, the strictly formal concept of reason which relies primarily on doubt to achieve knowledge must be regarded as deficient.

A2. Reason as "Coherence"

We must see reason more broadly. I believe it should be viewed as a growing coherence of the full range of our experience, including the non-sensory. Rather than being separated from experience in its own formal world of logic and mathematics, reason must be seen as already integrated with the full range of our experience. Such a view of reason frees the reasoner to move beyond the questions of "what" and "how" to "why," from what is to what ought to be, from the actuality of things to their meaning and value. In this enterprise, "trust" or belief is essential to acquiring knowledge.

That is, some things must be believed or assumed to be true to see how well they help us answer questions about meaning, or the "beyond," or what we currently call the "transcendent." Rather than embracing these prior beliefs only after their truth value is established, we abandon them only after their falsity is clear. Reason in this creative or expansive sense, like the juror in a trial, does not assume that everything is false until proven true, but that at least some things must be trusted until proven untrustworthy. This is particularly the case in moral and spiritual issues and in our intimate knowledge of other persons, including God. Trust alone allows persons to come to know one another. Therefore, the abstract reason of logic and mathematics, helpful as it is in so many ways, is not capacious enough to explain coherently the totality of our experiences in the world.

Reason, then, should be seen as a "growing experiential coherence;" that is, a world-view that more and more adequately accounts for the variety in our experience. As it does, its improving interpretations of experience lead to *decisions* we make about how we will live in the world. Thus Kant argued that the pure reason was not to be considered an end in itself but an instrument to the practical reason which decides about values and meanings.[1]

B. Experience

In a similar vein, if--like limiting reason to formal logic and mathematics--one limits "experience" to the sensory, all other feeling states being dismissed as irrelevant to the pursuit of knowledge, one has destroyed the possibility of morality, theology and philosophy. Sense-experience is important and rich, but those experiences that have to do with persons *qua* persons--the sense of moral obligation and freedom for example--are not sense-experiences. Vexatious as such non-sensory experiences may be, it is dogmatic reductionism to limit what is possible in experience to the sensory. We must never adopt the position of telling experience what it may say but let experience speak, as it were, for itself. The experiences persons actually have must determine the nature and scope of experience. Or, as John E. Smith has suggested, we must be wary of starting our reflection from the external, so-called "objective" world which we experience through our senses as if it is the paradigm of authentic experience.[2] Instead we should begin with our experiences as "selves," with the content of our inner world, and see that as equally significant for understanding reality. Thus, if a person is aware of qualities and values in his experience that are not sensed, that fact, in itself, is not a basis for denying their reality. Anything we experience has a *prima facie* claim to being real whether it is perceivable or not, though that claim can be sustained only after it has been critically evaluated by reason.

Clearly, no ultimate separation between reason and experience is possible. If we reason and experience as whole beings, distinctions between them are for heuristic purposes only. Consequently, even as reason critically evaluates experience, experience often helps reason re-evaluate what it once thought was settled. Both correct and tutor each other.[3]

Let us now turn to how these views of reason and experience relate to the problem of rationality and spirituality.

C. Spirituality

C1. Spirituality Defined

Most dictionary-inspired definitions of spirituality speak of it as the realm of the "spirit" in contradistinction to matter, or, of and pertaining to the divine. When one thinks of it more broadly in relation to the history of Christian thought or even as it is used in the vernacular, it refers to a person whose life is centered in God, who lives intentionally in God's presence. We speak of someone being "close" to God or someone who lives as Jesus lived. More often than not, we associate (often wrongly, I think) certain external behaviors with spirituality such as a beatific smile, hours in prayer, Bible reading, meditation and even speaking in what one writer called a "stained-glass voice." Spirituality, therefore, is a subset of the category "religious experience."

As a dimension of religious experience, spirituality is distinguished from theology (the rational structuring and explication of the religious experience) as the third voice is distinguished from the second voice in ordinary discourse. Theology speaks about God; spirituality speaks with God. Or, to put it another way, while exegesis is concerned about the meaning of the biblical text to the original writer and hearers, and theology might ask how the text applies to the church today, spirituality wants to know how the text applies to me personally in my relationship with God or to the religious community in its relationship to God.

As we shall see, this in no way makes spirituality "emotional" rather than rational. It is a synthesis of both. Even religious believers need a sense that their experience with God is coherent with the experience of others and with all else that is known in human affairs. Spirituality, therefore, while weighted more in terms of affect than cognition, has a cognitive significance we must not overlook.[4]

C2. Spirituality as Solitude

Writers on spirituality also speak frequently about the importance of solitude. They acknowledge that one can indeed experience God consciously and powerfully through corporate worship. But, say they, the depths of spirituality are related to solitude, to the biblical imagery of the desert and prayer in one's closet where no one can see or hear what you are saying to God.[5] In their view, such solitude and the discipline that supports it is important because one earmark of a profound spirituality is an honesty with one's self that occurs most freely in the presence of God alone. Other people force me, as it were, to adopt the mask of my "persona."[6]

C3. Spirituality as Sharing

While the importance of being honest with one's self should not be questioned, I must confess my disquiet with an exaggerated mystical emphasis on solitude. Separation from others in order to unite with God is not the ultimate goal of the creation. It must not become an end in itself. Rather, we are created to be with each other, to empathize, to connect, to enjoy deep, lasting relationships. Solitude is important and helpful, but only when it is balanced with connection, only when it is seen as a means to that end. A famous family therapist advises his clients to not talk to each other for at least one hour after they come home so they can unwind from the day's pressures. He does that so that when they do talk, each is refreshed and ready to listen to the other.

Women on the forefront of revolutionizing what they perceive to be male-dominated psychiatry argue persuasively that maturity should not be seen as autonomy and separation. Self-reliance and self-realization are not wonderful, because these theories mean that others must not "impinge" on me. Ultimately, the notion that I am born, live, and die alone is a denial of reality.

Women know this from experience. They know that they thrive in relationships. For them "the apex of development is to weave themselves zestfully into a web of strong relationships that they experience as empowering, activating, honest and close. 'The girl's self esteem is based on feeling that is a part of relationships and is taking care of relationships. . .'"[7] This element *must* be present in authentic spirituality, it seems to me. That is why small groups are important. Even the monk who lives monastically shares a common life with others. They are on the spiritual journey *together.*

Spirituality, then, consists of an intentional seeking after God through a time of solitude that assists the process of honesty with self and God, and a time for sharing and mutual empathy with others. With these definitions and this background, we are ready to explore how rationality and spirituality relate to the sin that afflicted the Jews condemned in John's Gospel; the sin of self-deception.

D. Pre-Disposed Beliefs, Reason and Spirituality

D1. Self-Deception About Our Predisposed Beliefs

Self-deception is a peculiar notion, for it suggests that we somehow *choose* to be deceived. Yet, if deception is *chosen,* how can we become aware we are deceived? Self-deception *depends* on my accepting the idea I am not self-deceived. Here the relation of decision, trust and spirituality in our pursuit of a knowledge of God becomes clear. This is the point at which Kierkegaard makes a significant contribution.

According to Stephen Evans, Kierkegaard supports the position that all knowledge of so-called "facts" involves judgments on the part of the knower that cannot be presumed to be infallible. One has unprovable beliefs at the beginning which lead to knowledge. In that sense, only "faith" allows us to act in the world.[8] This is not the same as a voluntaristic view of faith in which one's beliefs are simply "willed." Like the baby's belief in the continued existence of objects, these are beliefs we cannot help but have. Drawn to them from the beginning we find ourselves inclined to accept them as true unless they prove to be inconsistent or incoherent with the rest of our experience. Even our belief in God arises this way. Therefore, in *this sense,* we cannot eliminate subjectivity from the knowing process. All our knowledge is dependent on and affected by such predisposed beliefs.[25]

D2. Our Predisposed Belief in God

I have always been intrigued by the testimony of unbelievers who have been either tempted to believe or led to belief. The episodes that either tempt people to believe or actually lead them to faith are varied. David Hume, for example, admitted to the strong "theistic pull" he experienced from the design argument. Even those believers seeking to establish theism on a rational basis--like Immanuel Kant--admit their attraction for the God hinted at in the "starry heavens above." In a similar vein, Charles Peirce insisted that the attitude of "musement," an openness to allowing ideas to flow unimpeded from experience, would lead anyone who looked at the heavens to the idea of God, while skeptic C. S. Lewis was impressed by our universal sense of moral obligation.

Those, like Hume, who unduly narrowed either reason or experience, could not overcome their doubts. Those more open to what the experience seemed to be suggesting became believers. Belief in God arose out of experiences that, by themselves, provided initial justification for that belief. One would abandon that belief only if it proved to be untrustworthy. This view presupposes that the experience already possesses, in some sense, a rational content--an idea--that comes with it. Reason and religious experience come to us already fused.

Let me give two examples of how some events seem to lead the open-minded person to faith. The first comes from Elaine Pagels' new book *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent.* In her second chapter, Pagels recounts story after story of the early Christians martyred because they would not offer sacrifices to the Roman emperor. Only the God of Jesus Christ could be so worshipped. Executed by the thousands, they faced death with unbelievable courage.

People like the philosophers Justin and Tertullian, Pagels says, were "astonished and moved" by the spectacle of Christians fearlessly facing death. Their bravery seemed superhuman. In addition, when the Romans reflected on the *kind* of people being slaughtered, their values seemed "right." What kind of "crime" can it be to refuse to worship the traditional gods who supported sexual promiscuity, private vengeance and the slaughter of innocent people.? As a result, the entire theology of Rome began to unravel.

Out of that agony came a

> *. . . new vision of the basis of social and political order--an order no longer founded upon the divine claims of the ruler or the state, but upon the qualities that Christians believed were inherent within every man, and, some dared insist, within every woman as well, through our common creation "in God's image."*[9]

Because Christians faced death so bravely and revealed a lifestyle that continually called Roman values into question, many pagans were led to belief. An experience of the power and integrity of Christianity moved them out of their skepticism.

My second example comes from a recent article in *Theology Today.*[10] *Diane Komp, a Professor of Pediatrics at the Yale University School of medicine, specializes in pediatric cancer. She began her career as a more-or-less agnostic whose*

> *. . . literary role model was Albert Camus' doctor who worked tirelessly and eventually died fighting against an absurd situation (bubonic plague) for which there wa no higher explanation, only a biological reality. "Don't try to find a meaning in suffering--just fight against it."*[11]

Early in her career, she implemented a home death program in the rural South. Convinced that terminally ill children at home do much better in every way, Komp was unprepared for what happened with her first patient.

> *The first time I sat at the bedside of a child dying of cancer, I sat from duty rather than anticipated joy. Before she died, this seven-year-old, who had suffered for five years with leukemia, found the final energy to sit up and say: "The angels--they're so beautiful! Mommy, can you see them? Do you hear their singing? I've never heard such beautiful singing!"*[12]

She asked herself: "Have I found a reliable witness to the numinous?" Other children died, also full of faith, children whose dying witness and words transformed the lives of hardened adults. Even her encounter with a Down's syndrome child rocked her easy assumptions about God's reality. She ends her article with the following observation:

I doubt that many of my parents would report that they have had all of their hard theological questions answered. Neither can I, and we continue to pose some awfully tough ones. At least, when you ask tough questions, you keep the conversation going. And, occasionally in the conversation, God interrupts, so to speak, and gets a word or two in edgewise.[13]

Still, like members of our own families or some of the Jews in John's Gospel, not every pagan in the Roman empire was led to belief. Neither are all pediatric oncologists. Why not? Why, if as even Langdon Gilkey argues, so many experiences contain "hints of the transcendent,"[14] is belief in God not universal?

Kierkegaard gives the reason. It is what sin has done to us.

D3. Spirituality Overcomes Sin as Self-Deception

All "natural knowledge"--knowledge we cannot help having, such as God created the world--is conditioned by what Kierkegaard calls "inwardness" or "subjectivity." According to Evans, inwardness refers to those basic attitudes, ideas and feelings that make me the person I am. I interpret Kierkegaard as describing the deepest part of our selves, the center of our being, that which underlies all feeling and thought. For Kierkegaard, our inward lives are distorted by sin which he defines as a failure to become our true selves coupled with a rebellion against God. We become our true selves by developing the right kind of subjectivity and passions. If one does not, rebellion against God is inevitable. When God approaches us, he comes to us in our inwardness, in our predisposed beliefs. This way our freedom is protected. Should God overwhelm us with an objective revelation, our freedom would be compromised.

Our equality before God would also be in jeopardy. The divine must not be accessible only to the intellectually brilliant. All human beings are essentially equal in their capacity for inwardness. Moral and religious passions and dispositions can be found equally in the rich and the poor, the educated and the ignorant, the intelligent and the simple. The testimony of dying children can lead both M.D.s and hillbillies to faith.

It follows, then, that if the knowledge of God is conditioned by inwardness, spiritual development and personal growth are indistinguishable. Kierkegaard's model of what happens to the person who comes to know God, who becomes "more spiritually developed," is in many respects identical to the model psychotherapists use when they describe the growth that results from therapy. Even the notion of "inwardness" has affinities with psychological categories about the unconscious life of feeling and attitudes that fuels our conscious thinking, willing and experiencing.

This brings us to the crux of the relation between rationality and spirituality. *The precondition for growth either in therapy or in a knowledge of God is an attitude of wanting to know the truth regardless of the cost to ourselves.* A growing knowledge of God is always a personal growing into honesty with one's self and others. It is overcoming the sin of self-deception. Such personal growth must include the agony of self-examination which, in turn, implies the courage to change whatever hinders one from "knowing" God. It means that those experiences that lead us gently into belief not be rationalized away. It means that the stirrings of faith be allowed to grow, abandoned only if they prove incoherent or untrustworthy. It means that we see in an experience that leads to belief a rational content, an idea, if you please, of the transcendent.

It also means removing the hindrances to belief in our thinking and in our deepest selves. Such a removal may involve breaking down many of the same defense mechanisms that prevent a person from knowing herself or understanding the patterns in her human relationships. For example, low self-esteem and its attendant anxieties not only hinder my human relationships, they hinder my relationship with God. I have seen this again and again in church members with whom I have counseled. Personal and spiritual growth are fundamentally the same process. What makes spiritual growth different is that instead of understanding my functioning in the context of human relationships, my relationship to God is my focus. Like therapy, spiritual and moral life is, at least in part, a process of self-examination and introspection.

Therefore, personal and spiritual growth always means the overcoming of self-deception, for self-deception is the phenomenon that allows us to stay in our sin and reject the true beliefs that our experiences and rational insight offer to us.

D4. Both Our Feelings and Our Reasoning May Summon Us to Honesty

There is a corollary in therapy to this phenomenon of experiences leading us to religious and moral insights that reason cannot achieve on its own. It has to do with the epistemological value one attaches to our feelings. While everyone recognizes the importance of critical thought in the pursuit of truth, many regard our feelings as inimical to that pursuit. In a recent article in the *Hastings Center Report*, Sidney Callahan discussed the importance of emotions to the moral enterprise. What he has to say applies with equal force, it seems to me, to the spiritual quest.

He points out that pure rationalists will dismiss the role of our emotions (or, as in Kierkegaard, our passions and feelings) by arguing that they "fog the mind." Feelings, they say, are irrational and cognitively misleading. Our only concern should be the consistency and force of rational argument. If you have feelings and intuitions, don't employ them.[15]

Rational persons may have a more difficult time noticing and assessing those less dramatic but equally disabling disorders consisting of deficits of emotion. In philosophical arguments the problem of such deficits is regularly ignored and that of excessive emotion emphasized. Yet in our technological culture perhaps the greatest moral danger arises not from sentimentality, but from devaluing feeling and not attending to or nurturing moral emotions. Numbness, apathy, isolated dissociations between thinking and feeling are also moral warning signals. . .

Some persons are too "burned out" from stress to see or care about moral [or spiritual] dilemmas. Other are so accustomed to isolating and not attending to their emotions that when they inadvertently must confront feeling, they are overwhelmed by what seems to them an alien external force. They are all the more susceptible to moral collapse and making poor ethical decisions.[16]

Reasoning and feeling--as activities of whole persons--tutor and monitor each other in their interaction. They are so woven together in our existence that it is often difficult to separate them.

. . . emotions induce thoughts that may induce emotion. This interplay between thinking and feeling in personal consciousness can become open to introspection, and long before experimental psychologists began their studies these inner processes were depicted in poetry, drama, fiction, philosophy, and religious writing.[17]

According to Callahan, children who do not acquire feelings of guilt and shame at the appropriate age often become sociopaths and psychopaths who are, by definition, below average or deficient in emotional responsiveness. Such persons--even with high

intelligence--can know the moral rules but not know through their feelings the emotional force of moral obligation. Thus they are able to violate moral rules with impunity.

> *Emotions energize the ethical quest. A person must be emotionally interested enough and care enough about discerning the truth to persevere despite distractions. Even more, a person who wrestles with moral questions is usually emotionally committed to doing good and avoiding evil. A good case can be made that what is specifically moral about moral thinking, what gives it its imperative "oughtness," is personal emotional investment.*[18]

If moral thinking must include feelings, if it is a cognitive-affective construct rather than one or the other (what Callahan calls the "thing and the feeling-about-the-thing"), then spirituality is no different. Rationality and theology, or feelings and spirituality, are inseparable. If they become enemies, the integrity of both are compromised.

This certainly characterized the lives of the prophets. Heschel shows that the unique prophetic quality was "feeling as God feels," a feeling that had cognitive significance. Their passion about God was a tutored, rationally infused passion.[19] Emotional associations affected their thinking and their thinking affected their emotions.[20] As Callahan says: "When we feel strongly and persistently that this is wrong, wrong, wrong, but we can't articulate why, we withhold assent."[21] In other words, trust your feelings and figure out what is going on at the rational level later.

People whose emotions are good impress us as morally trustworthy in their views, much more so than those whose reasoning is crisp but whose emotive life is deficient. Selfish, immature, persons do not always reason well about moral and spiritual issues. Philosopher Jonathan Bennett recommends

> *. . . checking of one's principles in the light of one's sympathies. . . It can happen that a certain moral principle becomes untenable--meaning one cannot hold it any longer--because it conflicts intolerably with the pity or revulsion or whatever that one feels when one sees what the principle leads to.*

Even more interestingly, Bennett sees principles themselves

> *. . . as embodiments of one's best feelings, one's broadest and keenest sympathies. On that view principles can help one across intervals when one's feelings are at less than their best, that is through periods of misanthropy or meanness or self-centeredness or depression or anger.*[22]

This, it seems to me, is precisely the reason the traditional Seventh-day Adventist positions on divorce/remarriage and polygamy came under scrutiny. Too much suffering was coming out of what appeared at the theoretical level to be the "right thing." At one time, virtually the entire community was persuaded that the biblical views and the official denominational positions were one and the same. Yet, as we began to feel more and more emotionally uneasy about keeping abused women in marriages or forcing African men to abandon several wives, we were forced to re-examine the Bible and to rethink the ethics we derived from it.

Feelings alone, of course, can be misleading. Even in brilliant people, one often sees the emotions of a child. It certainly happens to a number of elderly. Depressed people are similar. They resist the rational tutoring of their emotions. For this reason, moral and spiritual conflict may be understood as immature thinking-emotions in conflict with more mature thinking-emotions.

E. Self-deception in Religious Faith

By definition, moral and religious self-deceivers are committed to morality and spirituality. Lloyd Steffen argues that self-deception "serves as an instrument of the moral and religious imagination, acting as a psychological accompaniment to moral wrongdoing."[23] Once the imagination has, with my consent at the subconscious level, drawn me into self-deception, its hold on me is so strong that rational argument can seldom overpower it. Usually, it takes a powerful *emotional* experience to penetrate the barrier. An abusive father, for example, persuaded that he is doing the "right thing" for his children, is jolted into seeing the truth not by arguments but by the suicide of his child.

F. Spirituality, Self-Deception and our Self-Concept

According to Steffen, even our self-concept may be an example of self-deception. We see ourselves in the best light. While we think we can detect the failures and weaknesses in others, we are blind to those problems in ourselves. We fail miserably in appreciating the complexity of our attitudes, decisions and behavior. We see ourselves in naive simplicity.

As pointed out earlier, sometimes we can only confront the truth about ourselves when we join a group. Like the man who goes to AA for the first time repeatedly denying he is an alcoholic, only when we are jumped on by *others* for being dishonest, do we sometimes finally understand the depth of our denial. Spirituality is to help us judge the extent to which our behavior--moral and religious--is consistent with our moral and religious commitments. This is immensely difficult. Self-deception is a willful ignorance. I want to do something that violates a moral or religious obligation at the same time I care deeply about being faithful to that obligation. The only way out of this dilemma is to deceive myself with a variety of rationalizations.

In the same way, we can be willfully confused about our beliefs in God as well as the nature of our relationship to God. We can persuade ourselves we care deeply about God at the same time we relate quite cynically to God in our behavior. A preacher can speak about love and forgiveness from God at the same time he despises and seeks revenge against his brothers and sisters who challenge him.

If our emotions deceive us, we need sound theology to shatter our naivete. If we have embraced rationalizations, we may need the shock of a powerful experience (Paul on the road to Damascus) to smash our self-deception.

G. Self-Deception and the 1888 Minneapolis Conference

In October of this year, Adventist churches around the world commemorated the 1888 gathering in Minneapolis, the so-called "righteousness by faith" conference. If we look at that meeting in the terms of my paper, several interesting observations can be made.

To begin with, Ellen White admitted several times--in public--that she, like the other delegates, was hearing Waggoner's material on the law in Galatians for the first time. She had not arrived at any settled convictions on what he had to say. Nevertheless, Ellen White was sure that what he had to say was basically approved by God and that those who opposed him were doing the work of the evil one.

Where did this assurance come from? According to her, it came from (a) the contrasting spirits manifested by the protagonists, (b) her sense that those opposed to Waggoner (and later Jones) had decided in advance not to accept what they offered and (c) the

insistence of so many that no discussion about these issues should take place without the personal leadership of Elder George Butler, General Conference president. In short, it was the "spirit" or "emotion" manifested and her feeling reaction to it that persuaded her the devil was behind the vitriolic opposition to Waggoner and Jones. She accused their critics of pharisaism and self-deception and hoped that her words would break through that self-deception. These men had rationalized their opposition in the name of the "old landmarks" and the "truth we have held for decades." Ellen White would have none of it. When her mind could not tell whether or not Waggoner's views were correct, her feelings could tell that Waggoner's spirit was Christian while the spirit of his detractors was not.[24]

As an aside: Ellen White's behavior in Minneapolis suggests something to me that deserves further reflection, and that is that if we cannot regard Ellen White as a systematic or historical theologian, or as an exegete, can we regard her as a "spiritual" theologian? I mean by that one whose most basic self, attitudes and feelings has come to a knowledge of God through the disciplines of spirituality, including solitude. It seems to me that this is Ellen White's contribution to Adventism, that, like the prophets, she felt as God feels about our human situation, especially within the church.

H. Summary and Conclusion

To sum up: We saw that if reason and experience are narrowly defined as formal logic/mathematics and sense perception, knowledge is thought to be achieved largely through the methodology of doubt. On this view, reason and experience are not only distinct but very separate realities.

In contrast, I argued that reason must be defined broadly enough to accept as wide a range of experience as possible for its reflection. Reason, therefore, is best construed as a growing experiential coherence and experience must, by definition, include our conscious states as selves. These more expansive definitions in which reason and experience interpenetrate each other mean that trust as well as doubt is seen as a way to knowledge. This is especially the case in moral and spiritual matters. Being open to a wider range of experience, I argued, leads us to accept certain predisposed beliefs that grow out of experience unless and until they can be shown by further experience and reason to lack the consistency and coherence required.

Belief in God should be seen as that kind of belief. One who attempts to get to belief in God through doubt cannot succeed. Only when one is open to the beliefs that seem to flow naturally from certain ordinary experiences that contain traces of the transcendent, can one enjoy belief in God. Many of those who do not believe in God have closed off their openness to such experiences or are living in self-deception, as did the Jews who rejected Jesus in the Gospel of John.

Therefore, like reason and experience in general, rationality and spirituality are flip sides of the same coin, inseparable realities in our quest for knowledge. Spirituality is for transforming the person, not simply informing her. This transformation always implies an improved quality in my relationships with others, especially God. As such, a dialectic between solitude and relationship with others is needed. Out of this process must emerge a level of honesty that repeatedly challenges our proclivity to self-deception, one of the most devastating consequences of our sinfulness. This is the essence of authentic spirituality.

Further, to the extent an increasing knowledge of God shares affinities with the improving knowledge of ourselves usually achieved in therapy or existentially acute moments in our lives, to that extent the affective or emotional dimension in our existence must be given great significance. Only when we want to grow at the personal level regardless of the pain, only when truth is more important than comfort, can we be freed from the trap of self-deception. Both our feelings and our ratiocinations must be seen--at least in many situations--as equally reliable guides to truth, though neither functions safely without the other.

I concluded the paper by suggesting that Ellen White functioned--at least in Minneapolis, if not her entire life--as one who often judged the truth and falsity of ideas and the spirituality (defined in part as openness and honesty) of people on the basis of her biblically and rationally informed feelings. Like the prophets, then, her insights into the nature and character of God, into history and the church, should be seen as those of a spiritual theologian rather than a systematic or exegetical one. This makes her no less correct in her wisdom, only different. Reading Ellen White therefore can help give to the contemporary believer the spiritual tools and courage to cope with the ever present temptations to self-deception and to achieve a truly profound spiritual life.

Footnotes:

1. For a thorough discussion of these issues, see Nels F. S. Ferre's *Reason in Religion*, (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1963), pp. 8 ff.

2. John E. Smith, "Self and World As Starting Points in Theology," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion, I* (Summer, 1970), pp. 97-111. See also Smith's *Reason and God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961) and *Experience and God* (New York: Oxford Press, 1968).

3. Let me further illustrate the unity of reason and experience point with a brief discussion of the so-called "subject-object" problem in epistemology. How do I, a knowing subject, relate to the so-called "object" or "thing?" At this time in my philosophical life, I hold the following: I can directly experience other objects and other persons, including their existence and inner intentions, but that I have directly experienced them is never self-evident in the experience alone. What knowledge there is to be gained from the experience of an "object" arises out of my reflecting on the experience itself, this reflection being--on occasion--almost instantaneous. If this were not so, hallucinatory experiences would be indistinguishable from authentic ones.

   Some argue that unless we collapse the subject-object distinction, a knowledge of God is impossible. The difficulty with this view is that my experience of God becomes the only basis for faith. As such, it must be self-authenticating. If that is so, adjudications between different faiths become infeasible for each has as its bedrock its own version of the religious experience. In contrast, I hold that the rational and experiential are together right at the beginning of an experience, sensory or otherwise. Knowledge claims of others growing out of the experience are always inferential, even if the experience itself is direct.

4. It is this sense of the importance of feelings that has given rise to an appreciation of the Bible as a literary document in which the meaning is partly--if not largely--conveyed in what one feels. Ultimate insight into a religious text is now seen to be experiential as well as rational. If this is not the case, the text can only inform, not transform.

5. See Kenneth Leech's *Experiencing God: Theology as Spirituality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), especially the chapter entitled "The God of the Desert," pp. 127-161.

6. I would offer this caveat: Even as therapists have discovered that some people and some problems are better solved in small groups, in the midst of how we relate with others, so a profound spirituality may be created in a small group, not just in solitude.

One example comes from the treatment of pedophiles who more quickly understand the enormity of their crime when put in a mixed group of sexual abusers and the sexually abused. As the saying goes, "no one can con a con man."

7. Christina Robb, "A Theory of Empathy: The Quiet Revolution in Psychiatry," *The Boston Globe Magazine*, October 16, 1988. A number of the papers and books developed by the Stone Center for Developmental Studies and Services at Wellesley College amplify this point.

   See also Carol Gilligan's, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982), *Woman and Moral Theory*, ed. Evan Feder Kittay and Diana T. Meyers (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1987), and a review of it by Claudia Card entitled "Women's Voices and Ethical Ideals: Must We Mean What We Say?", *Ethics*, October, I, 1988, pp. 125-135.

8. C. Stephen Evans, "Kierkegaard and Plantinga on Belief in God: Subjectivity as the Ground of Properly Basic Religious Beliefs," *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 5, No. 1, January, 1988.

9. Elaine Pagels, *Adams, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1988), p. 55.

10. Diane M. Komp, "Hearts Untroubled," *Theology Today*, October, 1988, pp. 273-279.

11. Komp, p. 273.

12. Komp, p. 274.

13. Komp, p. 279.

14. Langdon Gilkey, *Reaping the Whirlwind: A Christian Interpretation of History*, (New York: Seabury Press, 1976).

15. Sidney Callahan, "The Role of Emotion in Ethical Decisionmaking," *Hastings Center Report*, June/July 1988, pp. 9-14.

16. Callahan, p. 12.

17. Callahan, p. 10.

18. Callahan, p. 10.

19. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets: An Introduction* (New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1962), especially Chapter 1, "What Manner of Man is the Prophet?", pp. 3-26.

20. Callahan notes that the emotions or thoughts that seem to pop into our heads are not at all random. There seems to be a selective process, almost a filtering activity, going on all the time at the preconscious level that "brings a thought or feeling to consciousness...[because it has] personal significance [for us]..." (p. 11)

    Philosopher Iris Murdoch, quoted by Callahan, had this to say:

    If we consider what the work of attention is like, how continuously it goes on, and how imperceptibly it builds up structures of value round about us, we shall not be surprised that at crucial moments of choice most of the business of choosing is already over. This does not imply that we are not free, certainly not. But it implies that the exercise of our freedom is a small piecemeal business which goes on all the time and not a grandiose leaping about unimpeded at important moments. The moral life, in this view, is something that goes on continually.

    Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1985), p. 37: quoted in Callahan, p. 11.

21. Callahan, p. 12.

22. Jonathan Bennett, "The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn," *Philosophy 49* (1974), 123-134; quoted in Callahan, p. 13.

23. Lloyd H. Steffen, "The Moral Imagination," Unpublished paper delivered at the 1988 Meeting of the Society of Christian Ethics, Durham, North Carolina, p. 5.

24. Notice the following statements from *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, Volume 1, pp. 1-446, published by the Ellen G. White Estate:

    "Not one confession has been made; there has not been a single break so as to let the Spirit of God in." (p. 151)

    "I entreat you to exercise the spirit of Christians. Do not let strong feelings of prejudice arise, for we should be prepared to investigate the Scriptures with unbiased minds, with reverence and candor. It becomes us to pray over matters of difference in our views of Scripture. Personal feelings should not be allowed to influence our words or our judgement." (p. 163)

    "...I was surprised to hear Elder --- make the kind of speech he did before a large audience of believers and unbelievers--a speech which I knew could not be dictated by the Spirit of the Lord...And for the first time I began to think it might be we did not hold correct views after all upon the law in Galatians, for the truth required no such spirit to sustain it." (p. 221)

    "I returned to my room questioning what was the best course for me to pursue. Many hours that night were spent in prayer in regard to the law in Galatians. This was a mere mote. Whichever way was in accordance with a 'Thus saith the Lord,' my soul would say, Amen, and Amen. But the spirit of Jesus, so contrary to the spirit that should be exercised toward each other, it filled my soul with anguish." (p. 223)

    "Dr. Waggoner has spoken to us in a straightforward manner. There is precious light in which he has said. Some things presented in reference to the law in Galatians, if I fully understand his position, do not harmonize with the understanding I have had of this subject; but truth will lose nothing by investigation..." (p. 163)

    "...I believe him to be perfectly honest in his views...I have no reason to think that is not as much esteemed of God as are any of my brethren, and I shall regard him as a Christian brother, so long as there is no evidence that he is unworthy." (p. 164)

    "I entreat you, brethren, be not like the Pharisees, who were blinded with spiritual pride, self-righteousness and self-sufficiency, and who because of this were forsaken of God." (p. 166)

    "We should guard against the influence of men who have trained themselves as debaters, for they are in continual danger of handling the Word of God deceitfully. There are men in our churches...who will pervert the meaning of the Scripture to make

a sharp point and overcome an opponent. They do not reverence the Sacred Word. They put their own construction upon its utterances. Christ is not formed within, the hope of glory. They are educated critics, but spiritual truths can only be spiritually discerned. These men are ever ready and equipped to oppose at a moment's notice anything that is contrary to their own opinions." (p. 167)

25. For a careful discussion of the many facets of self-deception, see *Perspectives on Self-Deception*, eds. Brian P. McLaughlin and Amelie Oksenberg Rorty (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988).

Fry, Northrup —