They expressed this in terms of the outward, but it was an inner experience that lead to its expression.

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"The Place of Reason and Experience in Finding God"

[13 September–23 November 1949]  
[Chester, Pa.]

King wrote this essay for the second assignment in Davis's course Christian Theology for Today. In the paper, King poses the neo-orthodox theology of Karl Barth against the theological liberalism of Baptist Edwin E. Aubrey, Methodist Edgar Sheffield Brightman, and Quaker Rufus Jones. Barth denied the capacity of human reason and experience to attain knowledge of God; the liberal theologians sought to vindicate the human capacity to know the divine. King sides with the liberals against Barth, asserting the primacy of experience and the responsibility of reason to interpret experience and "lead man into the presence of God." The essay includes the earliest indications of King's awareness of Brightman, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Henry Nelson Wieman. Davis marked the paper B + without further comment.

It seems that man is animated by an unquenchable desire to enlarge his vision and to know the ultimate

1. Karl Barth (1886–1968) was a Swiss Reformed theologian who taught at the universities of Göttingen, Münster, Bonn, and Basel. Perhaps the foremost of the neo-orthodox theologians, Barth restored a biblical basis to Protestant theology. He challenged Emil Brunner's natural theology and Friedrich Gogarten's doctrine of the state and, as a leader of the German Confessing Church, opposed Adolf Hitler. Edwin Ewart Aubrey (1896–1960) was a Baptist theologian and ethicist. He taught at the University of Chicago from 1929 to 1944 and was president of Crozer Theological Seminary from 1944 to 1949. In 1949 he founded the Department of Religious Thought at the University of Pennsylvania. Edgar Sheffield Brightman (1884–1953) was a Methodist theologian who taught at Brown, Nebraska Wesleyan, and Boston universities. Brightman developed his interests in epistemology and metaphysics into an empirical theological personalism. Rufus Jones (1863–1948) was a Quaker mystic, philosopher, and theologian. The author of more than fifty books, he was the founder and lifetime president of the American Friends Service Committee. He taught for forty years at Haverford College.
meaning of things. Man is a metaphysical animal ever longing for answers to the last questions. This in some way accounts for man's continual search for the object of religious faith known as God. The search has often been a difficult and devious one, yet amid all of its difficulties many have continued to search for the un-failing source of eternal value. In this great religious odyssey many have fallen out on the way, some disillusioned and some content.

Those who are content may be divided into two groups, one ostensibly religious and the other irreligious. The irreligious group has resolved the problem by eliminating all mystery from the universe. For them the natural cause is an adequate explanation of anything they may perceive.

The religious group on the other hand will admit that there is mystery in the universe, but they claim to know to much about this eternal mystery. They will speak as if they have just had a chat with the divine on the cosmic Boulevard. Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr has said that many people in this group will speak as if they know the geography of heaven and hell and the furniture of the one and the temperature of the other. At least the agnostics and fundamentalist have one thing in common: they have given up the search for the eternal mystery of the universe.

But any genuine Christian faith will not be content with such dogmatic assertions. It sees that there is an element of mystery both in the natural world and the unseen world, and that the search for God is a process not an achievement. We never find all of God.

There is also another group which has given up this great religious search. This group is represented by Karl Barth and the crisis theologians. They argue that it is almost blasphemous to talk about man seeking or finding God. Does not God, rather, find us? Are not Rufus Jones and other liberal theologians a little wrong when they speak of a "double search?"

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2. Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971) was one of the most influential figures in American religious and political thought. As a founder of the journal *Christianity and Crisis*, and the political group Americans for Democratic Action, he exercised considerable influence as a proponent of Christian or liberal realism. King refers to *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation* (New York: Scribner, 1943), 2:294: "It is unwise for Christians to claim any knowledge of either the furniture of heaven or the temperature of hell."

3. The phrase "crisis theologians" is often used interchangeably with "neo-orthodox theologians."

4. The "double search" is God's search for man and man's search for God.
Such are their questions and they occur over and over again in their theology. Their basic argument is that man was once made in the image of God, but this image and likeness of God were totally effaced by the fall, leaving not a trace behind. In this fall man's humanity was so corrupted by sin that even his reason was distorted. And so they conclude that man can never know God through reason or experience, for God is "wholly other." Following the Hegelian dialectics they see God as the synthesis between every thesis and antithesis. We may know the thesis and antithesis, but never the synthesis. "The reason sees the small and the larger but not the large."*

This view of the fall of man held by Dr. Barth and others seems to me quite inadequate. It seems more reasonable to hold that the fall of man is psychological rather than historical. In other words, I would be inclined to accept, along with many others, an individual fall rather than a racial fall. Moreover, I cannot follow the Barthian interpretation of reason. This Barthian attempt to undermine the rational in religion is one of the perils of our time.5 As Dr. Brightman says, "unless religion allows man to retain some degree of self respect and of intelligence, it is doomed. A God about whom we dare not think is a God a thinking mind cannot worship."†

Although there are some who have given up this search for God, we must realize that a vast majority of believers are still searching and will continue to search for the being who is the "source of human good."6 Those who seek with clear heads and sincere hearts will in some measure find. Of course the true seeker will realize that there is no one way to find God. To be sure, there are many possible ways of finding God. Hence he will seek to find God in as many ways as possible in order to enrich his own experience. Here we will discuss the place of two methods that men have constantly used in seeking God: reason and experience. Let us first turn to the realm of experience since it is the logical prelude of reason.

First we may say that religious experience is the awareness of the presence of the divine. Religious experience is not an intellectual formulation about God,

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5. Davis corrected "undermind" to "undermine."


it is a lasting acquaintance with God. So it is quite obvious that religious experience ranges from an everyday experience with reality to the very height of mystical ecstasy. Although this great range has brought about a variety of religious experiences, as William James reminded us in his Gifford Lectures, there is one common trait running throughout. "Religious experience is always a thou experience."* In every religious experience the creature is standing in relation with that other than self or other than human factor in the universe. It is the "I" seeking the "thou."

Before carrying this discussion to its logical conclusion we must at least recognize the fact that there are many individuals who distrust religious experience as evidence for God. The first group has a psychological objection. They argue that religious experience is subjective and emotional. Therefore they contend that through so called religious experience we find our nerves, our sex nature, our wishes, or our subconscious, but not God.†

We must admit that error and illusion result from many religious experiences, but is not this true in every other field of human endeavor, including psychology? It seems that these psychologists dwell on the abnormal cases rather than the perfectly normal cases of religious experience.

On the other hand the Barthians, who were mentioned above, give a negative answer to the value of religious experience because it implies that there is something that man can do to find God. So they have a disdain for the very use of the word experience in a religious context. But I have never been able to see how the Barthians can call the divine confrontation or the crisis situation anything less than experience. It seems at this point that we are lead into another Barthian paradox.

However, religious experience is important and it

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8. Davis corrected "Giffort" to "Gifford."

9. Brightman, Finding of God, p. 111: "The distrust of religious experience as evidence for God is, however, so widespread that more should be said about it. Certain psychologists regard religious experience as subjective and emotional. It is true that religion, like every other great value in life, arouses intense emotions. . . . These facts lead some to deny the truth of the claim that we can find God through religious experience. We may find our nerves, our sex nature, our susceptibility to drugs, our wishes, or our subconscious, say these doubters, but we do not find God."
has a place in the finding of God. For an instance, the very idea of God is an outgrowth of experience. The idea of God did not burst forth in the mind of man with no concomitant experience. On the contrary, man noticed the order and beauty of the cosmic universe amid all of its disorder and ugliness; he came to a realization of his own needs and fears; he came to realize his dependence on his fellows; and from these experiences he framed the idea of God.

Then again it is through experience that we come to realize that some things are out of harmony with God's will. No theology is needed to tell us that love is the law of life and to disobey it means to suffer the consequences; we see it every day in human experience. It is religious experience which shows us that much of the misery and weakness of men's lives is due to personal fault of the individual. It is through religious experience that we come to see that social and biological urges often overwelm reason. No profound theology is needed to set forth these facts. We need only turn to the verdict of experience.*

Although experience is not the only way to find God, it is probably the primal way. It is a road that every man can travel. This way is open to all levels of human intelligence. Every man, from the ordinary simplehearted believer to the philosophical intellectual giant, may find God through religious experience.

Now we turn to the realm of reason in finding God. Certainly we are aware of the fact that men throughout the ages have believed in the validity of reason in finding God. We find it in a Plato teaching that God is a rational being to be found by reason. We find it in a Jesus speaking of loving God with our minds. We find it in a Spinoza speaking of "the intellectual love of God." Certainly this list could go on ad infinitum. On the other hand we must recognize the fact that many seekers have a persistent suspicion of reason as a road that leads to God.10 We have already stated above the Barthian objection to this method. Briefly we might discuss the objections which an earlier theologian gives to the validity of reason in finding God, viz., Kierkegaard. He reverses the Hegelian dialectic

* Brightman, op. cit., p. 114.

10. Brightman, Finding of God, p. 54: "Yet long before Tertullian, Plato had taught that God was a rational spirit to be found by reason; and long after Tertullian, Spinoza's religious experience was 'the intellectual love of God.' . . . It would seem to follow that, if there is a reasonable God, reason must be a road to him."
in such a way as to place the unity (synthesis) prior to the diversity (thesis and antithesis); and he goes on to attribute the diversity to the inevitable limitation of human thought. In others words the Divine synthesis manifest itself to reason as a contradiction. Therefore, he argues, reason can never lead to God because it is by nature self-contradictory.*

But as Dr. Brightman has reminded us, “if God exist at all, he must be the Supreme Reason, and hostility to reason is one form of hostility to the divine.”† If God is Supreme Reason, then it seems to follow that reason is the road that leads to him, notwithstanding the fact that God is far above man.

The reasoner, then, starts his search with the facts of experience. It must be remembered that it is the duty of reason to examine, interpret, and classify the facts of experience. In other words, experience is the logical subject matter of reason. And so the reasoner takes the clues of experience and carries them through the method of analysis. Of course, this must not be a stopping point, because analysis alone is an incomplete picture of reason. The reasoner must somehow understand the experience as it relates to the wholeness of the universe. When experience is interpreted in the light of the wholeness of the universe, reason will come closer and closer to the eternal value of the universe.

We must grant freely, however, that final intellectual certainty about God is impossible. Our knowledge of the absolute will always remain relative. We can never gain complete knowledge or proof of the real. This, however, does not destroy the stream of rational religion. On the contrary, it reveals to us that intellectual finality is unattainable in all fields; all human knowledge is relative, and all human ideas are caught in the whirlpool of relativity. But we cannot give up the search because of this limitation. Certainly if God is the real that we are seeking, we can always learn more about him. Thus, reason, when sincerely

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* E. E. Aubrey, Present Theological Tendencies, p. 70.
† Brightman, op. cit., p. 11.
and honestly used, is one of supreme roads that leads man into the presence of God. 14

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14. Brightman, Finding of God, p. 72: “Carried far enough and honestly enough, reason is one of the ways that leads man into the very presence of God.”

“The Sources of Fundamentalism and Liberalism Considered Historically and Psychologically”

[13 September–23 November 1949]
[Chester, Pa.]

This essay for Davis’s Christian Theology for Today focuses primarily on religious liberalism and its ability to accommodate scientific discoveries. King makes substantial use of The History of Fundamentalism, by a former Crozer professor, Stewart G. Cole. King’s interpretation of the two movements is for the most part uncritical of liberalism and scornful of fundamentalism: “Unlike liberalism, fundamentalism is essentially a reactionary protest, [fighting] to preserve the old faith in a changing milieu.” Davis circled the word “Psychologically” in the title and commented: “You do not do justice to this. Think of what the psychological factors are which lie back of these two movements.” King received a B+ on the paper.

As we look through the arena of contemporary history we are immediately struck by the salient changes which have taken place in modern society. Any serious observer can notice, with a deal of facility, the changes in the social, economic, and scientific realms of modern life. Whether these changes have been for the best or for the worse, it is not mine to discuss at this point, but the fact remains that they have come