

## *Revelation, Reason and Experience*

In the previous section, I discussed external factors that shape our religious beliefs. They were tradition, scripture, and culture. This section looks at internal factors that shape our religious beliefs: revelation, reason, and experience. They are factors of our “inner journey.”

Most people draw from these six factors when they try to make sense of religious and spiritual matters, and so do I. However, for a metaphysical Christian, the internal factors are more important. People have often looked to external factors for answers about why their inner life is a mess. Not so for a metaphysical Christian. We, as metaphysical Christians, find ourselves looking to our inner journey for answers about how our external life is taking shape. To use a theological term, the internal factors are *authoritative* for us.

What is different about the three internal factors is that they emerged as authoritative in different historical eras. The external factors seem to have evolved randomly, but the internal factors emerged one at a time and built upon one another. Revelation came first in shaping our human understanding of God. Then reason appeared with our advance into the Enlightenment. And, most recently and exhibited by Transcendentalism and “new theology,” experience has become authoritative today in theological thinking.

Religious thinking has always included revelation as a formative and authoritative factor, but only since the Enlightenment has reason been included as authoritative. Our awareness of the importance of experience in shaping religious beliefs has come about only in the past 150 years. As I will explain, experience is, for the metaphysical Christian, the most important of all six factors.

Understanding the sequence of these three internal factors is important for understanding their unique strengths and weaknesses. Some of that understanding was given in the previous insight, *Why Truth Transcends Culture*.

The gist of these following three insights is this: revelation helped us see how our life is one with the cosmos but did so at the cost of closing off our perception of separate external realities; reason helped us see how particular external realities function, but at the expense of closing off our sense of love and compassion for others; and experience opened our understanding of love and compassion for others, but at the cost of a diminished sense of oneness with God and individual prosperity.

Understanding these strengths and weaknesses of revelation, reason, and experience is essential to understanding why metaphysical Christianity is the future of the Christian faith.

#### 4. *The Problem with Revelation*

As Phil White says, revelation, an experience of the activity of God, comes “at the initiative of God, not personhood.” This means that Truth can be revealed to us without our knowing its source to be a revelation.

I can affirm his assertion because my childhood experiences were rich with sacred and mystical insights even though I had no religious training. As a child, I was conscious of the sacredness of people and places, and my dream life was filled with unexplainable memories of prior life experiences. Later on, I understood these to be revelations initiated by God, personally, to me.

##### *Is traditional religion childish?*

That revelation is initiated by God and is personal makes many suspicious, declaring that revelation is childish. Revelation has operated in human consciousness for a long time, perhaps since humanoids developed a neocortex, which we know as the rational brain. And, as I said in the last insight, revelation has always been the source of guidance and authority for traditionalists. As previously stated, revelations may come in various ways — the church, the Bible, intuition, by “going to headquarters” or “in the Silence” — but they are revelations, not discoveries. And they are not childish.

The Fillmores went to Silence. In my childhood, I went to perceptions, memories, and dreams. Regardless

of form, revelations were, and continue to be for me, authentic experiences of God communicating with me. I believe they are vital to our development of spiritual understanding because they order our thinking according to the thoughts of God. When our thinking is ordered, our consciousness becomes aligned with God-Mind, thereby eliciting a desire to express our original nature as seen by God, the *Imagio Dei*. This is childish only for a metaphysician who understands such things but does not experience them.

As a child, I had no religious upbringing or training. I have no recollection of attending a church, reading any religious material, or being taught about spiritual things before my 16<sup>th</sup> birthday when I began dating a Methodist girl whose family invited me to join with them for church on Sundays.

So I find myself resonating somewhat with the life experience of Charles Fillmore. He had a spiritually rich childhood void of religious training combined with a romantic attraction to a Methodist girl. I don't mean to push the analogy too far, but it brings into question the persistent criticism we find in some Unity circles of *embedded theology*.

There can be a problem with *unexamined* theology, which is a point I will make further on in this insight. But there is nothing necessarily wrong with *embedded* theology — the theology I received in my childhood dreams, the theology Charles Fillmore received from his Methodist sweetheart, and the teachings many of you received from grandmothers, teachers, or preachers.

Those in Unity who are critical of speaking of God in traditional ways say that it implies we are “less than” God. Yes, it does. Divinity is not deity. Our mind is one with God, but we are not God. My perspective is aligned with what Huston Smith has said, “God and the world are one, that they are ‘categorically distinguished but nowhere disjointed.’” “Nowhere disjointed” means we are one with God. Metaphysical Christianity does indeed teach monism, that we are one with God. And we are one in Divine mind. But we are also “categorically distinguished” from God. Emilie Cady declared in *Lessons in Truth*, “God is, Man exists.”<sup>43</sup> We are not God. We are expressions of God.

This is vitally important because, as Charles Fillmore said in rejecting the agnostic teachings of Robert Ingersoll:

Don't let the fool say in your heart, “There is no God” (Psalms 14:1). I let that kind of fool talk in my heart and it set up a current of thought that kept me for years speechless in the presence of God.

Don't let others tell you there is no God. Please do not let what some refer to as embedded theology shame you from holding to a traditional belief in a transcendent God.

The real problem with revelation is not childishness. Its real problem is that initiated by God, revelation does

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<sup>43</sup> *The Era of Metaphysical Christianity Is Here*. <https://www.truthunity.net/books/emilie-cady-lessons-in-truth-study-edition-1>

not have any rootedness in our external senses nor has any basis in abstract thinking. It is, by nature, “untethered” and therefore capable of becoming wildly misunderstood and misused. That is why revelation needs to be processed in some form with others. A religious community is necessary for the “spiritual, but not religious.” Let me explain.

### *What is Solipsism?*

Revelation with no social processing leads to a state of consciousness known as *solipsism*. Solipsism is a very troubling philosophical condition, especially today.<sup>44</sup> We all know that our world is hyper-connected. Digital media has provided unimagined ways for us to become insulated in our private world of experience. We can change news by pressing a button on the channel changer. We can friend and unfriend people with a simple click of the mouse. Hitting closer to home, we can quickly enter and exit a Sunday church service by pressing the Leave Meeting button. Poof, we're here; poof, we're there; poof, we're gone.

Wikipedia describes a particular form of solipsism, metaphysical solipsism: “the self is the only existing reality and ... all other realities, including the external world and other persons, are representations of that self, and have no independent existence.”<sup>45</sup> In short, solipsism is becoming absorbed in our private world of self. We

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<sup>44</sup> *Solipsism: Our Private World of Self*. <https://www.truthunity.net/the-human-side-of-unity/solipsism-our-private-world-of-self>

<sup>45</sup> Wikipedia, *Solipsism*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solipsism>

may disagree about where to draw the line that defines solipsism. Still, the point I wish to make here is that there is only a tiny difference between living in our private world of self and living in our personal reality of consciousness.

When we in Unity proclaim that “reality is not out there,” we express a foundational Unity teaching. Most everyone I know in Unity teaches that what is Real (capital R) is an internal experience that is shaped by the activity of our thinking. In other words, according to Unity, we create our individual Reality. I will say more about that in Insight 6, *Experience: Transforming Evil into a Greater Good*.

All this is well and good. Well, and good, at least until something on network news brings disturbing realities directly into our awareness. That is when we sense that *the reality we see is out there*; we know that our consciousness has been blinded in some way, perhaps by network news or closed social circles. That is when we know that we have fallen to some extent into our private world of self. I believe that when we have become so shocked or outraged by watching the network news that we can no longer speak with those we once loved, we have fallen into solipsistic thinking.

In the 21st-century western world, we have become isolated in unhealthy ways. One commentator claims this isolation has contributed to identity politics, “selfie man,” bipolarity, and addiction.<sup>46</sup> That may be a bit strong, but

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<sup>46</sup> Joshua Mitchell, *American Awakening*. Encounter Books, 2020.

we cannot assume that our spiritual beliefs and practices are entirely innocent of the problems we face today.

### *What's wrong with solipsism?*

The problem with solipsism is that it closes off the mind. And when the mind is closed off, it cannot love and cannot heal. The same might be said of repression, a normal response to dealing with things that cannot be immediately processed. But repression is a coping mechanism; solipsism is a denial of any external reality. We may differ on the benefits of repression, but I don't know any theology, philosophy, or psychology that embraces solipsism (living in a private world of self).

Further, solipsism may be troublesome, but it is nothing compared to the trouble of solipsism combined with the spiritual practice of affirmation and denials. Solipsism closes off my mind, and affirmations and denials make me feel good. When joined together, solipsism and spirituality are an addictive drug, a dangerous recipe for indifference to all kinds of injustice.

We must not allow our spiritual practice to close us off from the outer world of God's perfect creation by falling into solipsism. I am grateful when the network news punctures my private bubble of self-experience with a healthy dose of reality (lower case *r*), no matter how disturbing it may be. When that happens, I know God calls me to repent of my sin of solipsism.

So I am very concerned about the world we find ourselves in today, a world of “digital discipleship” where, with one click, we can drop in and drop out of Sunday

services, repeatedly, until we find the perfect fit for our own private world of self.

### *How to avoid solipsism.*

One final point. I said above that the most important thing one can say about revelation is that it needs to be processed in some form with others, particularly with a religious community, if what drives one's solipsism is extreme idealism. That is true, but the religious community must not be solipsistic itself.

Many metaphysical communities have embraced the importance of diversity and inclusion, notably Unity. That's wonderful. But true diversity is more profound than racial, gender, and ethnic inclusivity. All races, genders, and nationalities have traditional, modern and postmodern individuals. And I am concerned about the marginalization of those with traditional views in Unity today.<sup>47</sup> We need religion to "bind us together" as a faith community for social justice and to avoid solipsism.

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<sup>47</sup> I will say more about that in Insight 6, Experience, and Insight 21, Prayer Services. A deeper look at how we marginalize others is in *Seven Ways Unity is Not Nearly as Inclusive as We Think*: <https://www.truthunity.net/the-human-side-of-unity/the-biggest-mistake-people-in-unity-are-making-today>.

## 5. The Problem with Reason

Reason is the second internal factor that shapes our religious beliefs. While reason is a human faculty as ancient as humanity, it seemed to flower in many world cultures during the classical era. For those of us in the West, that flowering has come to us in classical Greek and Roman teachings, which are the foundation of our understanding of mathematics, medicine, government, music, architecture, and rhetoric. Metaphysical Christianity draws deeply from these teachings.

Reason did not become an authority in our religious understandings until the Age of Enlightenment in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. At that point, our understanding of the cosmos shifted from what was revealed by the church to what was discovered by rational thought.

The Enlightenment brought unimagined human progress, primarily through what we know as liberal democracy. Liberal democratic ideas emerged from a desire to overcome the devastation of the religious wars in Europe that followed the Reformation. Looking for a solution to endless religious wars, political philosophers found a workable philosophy of government that could accommodate religious diversity. That philosophy is liberal democracy. It is the foundation of our American system of government.

Liberal democracy recognizes and protects a *lower* standard of human consciousness, based on the *rational* pursuit of happiness rather than adherence to a higher