

# Three Dimensions of Religious Experience

By THOMAS A. DAVIS

RH 1958

Length, breadth, and depth (or height) are the three dimensions of the physical world. With these measurements available we may describe understandably the proportions of any material object.

In the spiritual realm there are also three dimensions by which the extent of one's religious experience may be surveyed. These are reason, feeling, and faith. These evaluators may, of themselves, be very deceiving if used in the area of purely human thought and observation. But if they operate in the atmosphere of divinely revealed truths, they lead us to understand something of our spiritual measurements as they are, and as they ought to be, rather than as we hope or fancy them to be.

The first spiritual dimension, reason, is a vital one to true religion. Jehovah made man a reasonable creature, although sin has, at times, made him unreasonable. God's invitation is, "Come now, and let us reason together." In spiritual things, and not infrequently in other areas, human reasoning alone is like a train with a broken track. It soon gets off the way of truth and comes to grief. Man reasoning with man in human logic is often like two blind men trying to guide each other. Both fall into the ditch.

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good," is Paul's admonition (1 Thess. 5:21). Sanctified reason measures all the available evidence as to whether it be too narrow with bias or opinion, or whether it be too wide in hearsay or speculation or that which partakes of the fanciful. Thus it discovers verities that compare faithfully with God's Word, and fit beautifully into the growing structure of divine truth.

## Reason Not Sufficient

We must not, however, measure everything in the dimension of reason only. There are some professors of Christianity who seem to believe that to be acceptable everything must be reducible to rule and cold logic and exact science. But reason cannot stand alone here. God has not seen fit to present such an overwhelming mass of evidence as to remove all possibility of doubt. Because of this we discover that even some religious leaders refuse the Bible account of creation, the story of the Flood, and the Bible teaching of the second coming of Christ, as unreasonable, by

human standards. Thus it is that "human reasoning is accepted even by professed Christians, in opposition to plain Scripture facts."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 113.

Yet because some individuals have made shipwreck of their faith upon the shoals of human reasoning is no grounds for any to refuse to analyze the foundations of personal belief. On the contrary, we need to examine them carefully. "Reason, enlightened by the teachings of God's word and guided by His Spirit, must hold the reins of control."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 311.

Our second dimension in the Christian experience, feeling, might be utterly disqualified by some while given primary consideration by others. But feeling is neither to be the central part of religion, nor is it to be ignored. Because we live, we feel, but we are not to live by our feelings. Certain pious folks of bygone years, when asked how they knew whether or not they were converted, might have answered, "We know because we feel"; but the difficulty with such a test is that the next day they

might not have "felt" a sense of spiritual buoyancy and joy. Instead they might have felt gloomy and depressed. Then what? "Impressions and feelings are no sure evidence that a person is led by the Lord. Satan will, if he is unsuspected, give feelings and impressions. These are not safe guides."—*Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 413.

While spiritual exaltation is not necessarily an indication of God's forgiveness and smile, yet on the other hand spiritual heaviness is not necessarily a sign of God's displeasure. Even Christ had His hours when feelings tempted Him to discouragement. On the cross He cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" That was feeling. But then He said, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit." That was faith, a faith that rose above His feelings and gained the victory.

"At times a deep sense of our unworthiness will send a thrill of terror through the soul; but this is no evidence that God has changed toward us, or we toward God. No effort should be made to rein the mind up to a certain intensity of emotion. We may not feel today the peace and joy that we felt yesterday; but we should by faith grasp the hand of Christ, and trust Him as fully in the darkness as in the light. . . . The Christian life must be a life of constant, living faith. An unyielding trust, a firm reliance upon Christ, will bring peace and assurance to the soul."—*Messages to Young People*, pp. 111, 112.

The Christian may not have a perpetual sense of peace and joy, but if a continuous sense of gloom and doubt covers his soul, he should examine his experience closely, for there must be some impediment that hinders Heaven's blessings from flowing into the life.

## Faith Needed

The third dimension of Christian experience is faith. As our everyday religion must have breadth, or reason, and will have some depth of feeling, so it must have the "length" of faith. But as we need to examine both our reasons and our feelings, so we must scrutinize our faith. Is our faith really faith, or is it merely gullibility or presumption? Is our faith subject to reason as our reason must be subject to faith? In whom, or on what, is our faith placed?

We have all met people who hold

---

---

## Love's Rainbow

By MARJORIE THORNBURG

How enchanting to see double rainbows,  
unfurl

Rare tints that bring awe and delight;  
Their fantastic rays  
In opposite ways

By refraction and reflection of light.

Thy presence seems near, Creator of all,  
Great Master Artist above,  
For by Thee we live,  
And grateful hearts give  
Praise, adoration, and love.

As love fills our hearts we desire most of all  
That our lives may Thy prisms be.  
Cut, polish, and try,  
Until by and by  
We are jeweled reflectors for Thee.

Like the hues of the beautiful rainbow,  
The spectrum of love will appear.  
Hope, faith, peace, and joy  
No one can destroy,  
For kind words and good deeds bring cheer.

We pray that sin's shadows may be blotted  
out,  
Through faith in the One who is pure;  
Then love's rainbow bright,  
Whose source is the Light,  
Will forever and ever endure.

to their "faith" in spite of clear evidence against it, merely because a minister or a relative or a friend, or perhaps some book, teaches what they believe. Or feelings may be the basis of their tenacity. On more than one occasion we have studied with someone who has refused the Sabbath because he did not "feel" it was necessary to observe that particular day. Thus faith proves to be presumption.

Whatever is called faith is subjected to test sooner or later. If it is only

presumption, it is manifested as such. If it is weak, it fails. If it is true and tempered, it holds and becomes stronger. Thus James wrote, "Consider it maximum joy, my brothers, when you get involved in all sorts of trials, well aware that the testing of your faith brings out steadfastness" (James 1:2, 3, Berkeley).

And so, to paraphrase Paul, "Now abideth reason, feeling, and faith, these three; but the greatest of these is faith."

✓