SPIRITUALITY:
THE DESCRIPTIVE PSYCHOLOGY APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

My reading in the domain of spirituality, and my acquaintance with people who have embarked on that way of life, have persuaded me that contemporary spiritual practice has far outstripped its conceptual basis. As a result, further spiritual development is being curtailed, as the progress of astronomy was curtailed by Ptolemaic cosmology. As a contribution toward remedying that deficiency, I present here a Descriptive Psychology articulation of the spiritual domain, an exploration of how we know it, and a discussion of some of the specific problems associated with the study of spirituality and the life of the spirit.

This paper, which I hope will eventuate in a book, has a limited purpose: to indicate the ground that I intend to cover in the longer work, and to suggest the general direction that I plan to take. It will not provide a detailed map of the territory. It contains, therefore, a good many IOUs, and I say this without apology. It is *that* kind of paper—a

general survey of problems in the context of Descriptive
Psychology—and not some other kind.

My investigations began with the conviction that the contemporary
practice of spirituality has far outstripped the conceptual articulation of
the domain itself, so that further development of both its theory and
practice is being curtailed very much as, once upon a time, the
development of astronomy was curtailed by Ptolemaic cosmology. To
illustrate: with very little effort except for the physical labor, my
collection of books on spirituality could be rearranged on their shelves
into two groups: the first, those which offer experiential access to the
domain of spirituality, and the second, those which offer formal access.[1]
Among the first—the experiential—would be classics such as Augustine's
Confessions, The Cloud of Unknowing, and more general books such as
Rahula's *What the Buddha Taught,* Shah's *The Way of the Sufi,* Clasper's
Eastern Paths and the Christian Way. These are written for "insiders",
that is, for those who have already tasted, if not drunk deep, of the wine
of spiritual living.

Experiential access, however, is closed to those who have not at least
started on that way, and many people either have not, or have at one
time begun and then dismissed the enterprise as at best irrelevant or at
worst pathological. If such "outsiders" are to approach this domain at all,
it must be by formal access, that is, by an explication which makes it
intelligible to persons who have not experienced a meeting with a
transcendent Other, or who have not been able to bring their experience
into coherence with the remainder of their lives.

The formal approaches that I am familiar with commonly take off from
a philosophical, theological, or psychological base which do make
spirituality more accessible, but often only to outsiders who are already
persuaded by those doctrines—for example, of process philosophy or
Jungian psychology. One who is not so persuaded, however, may very
well conclude that spirituality per se is indissolubly tied to that
particular philosophy or psychology; hence he may well be even less
inclined than before to investigate spiritual phenomena formally or
explore them experientially. Spirituality does have philosophical
implications and psychological and theological dimensions, but it is also
characterized by concepts and relationships that are peculiar to itself,
and thus are not accessible through any other discipline or domain.

I am embarking here on a pilot project to see if the conceptual
resources and methodology of Descriptive Psychology can give us a more
adequate approach to the domain of spirituality, specifically, a formal
access that will provide "everything needed for an explicit, systematic
delineation of [the] phenomenon in its various aspects" (Ossorio,
1981/1983, p. 14). The object of the enterprise is two-fold: to enable the

"outsider" to understand what is going on in the spiritual domain, and to provide for the "insider" a fresh approach to the domain, thus opening the possibility of facilitating further developments in the practice of the spiritual life.

As a preliminary, it may be necessary to make clear the distinction I am making between spirituality and religion. The concept of religion embraces institutions, doctrines, ethical prescriptions, social practices, rituals, and so on, all of which are—in principle—informed by spirituality. But spiritual living, although it is a social phenomenon, can occur without being institutionalized, and without doctrines, ethical codes, or rituals. Only rarely will religion enter into my discussion except tangentially or by implication.

By "spirituality", I mean paradigmatically a relationship which a human person consciously enters into with an ultimate, transcendent Other, be it a person or thing or state of affairs. The relationship may be taken to be that of the finite with the infinite, the creature with the creator[2], a human child with a divine parent, the relative with the absolute, these being only a few of the possible models. For convenience, I shall refer to this person, thing, or state of affairs simply as the Other—capitalized. It is to be understood as a place-holder concept, which can hold such content as "God", or "the energy that pervades the universe", or "a state of blessedness" or "nothingness", or a wide variety of other contents which are likely to be specified differently by different traditions and, within traditions, by different individuals.

First, I shall propose an articulation of the domain of spirituality, using the method of parametric analysis. Second, I shall inquire into how we know that domain, and third, I shall deal with a few of the specific problems that arise in connection with the study of the life of the spirit.

My plan is to treat spirituality as a range of facts which in principle is no more inaccessible than any other range of facts, e.g., scientific, philosophical, psychological, or historical. Second, I am taking it that fundamentally, what constitutes spirituality is not a special kind of experience, "religious" or "mystical" or whatever, but a relationship between persons and that which is transcendent. The experience of a relationship is whatever it is: compare the experience of a relation between friends, or between a teacher and a student. The spiritual relationship is between individual persons or a group of persons and some transcendent person or thing, or some state of affairs, and how that relationship is *experienced* is not definitive.

I

In order to keep my presentation to a tolerable length, I shall merely summarize two general topics that are fundamental in Descriptive Psychology. The first, comprising a parametric analysis of the domain of spirituality, is based primarily on material that is easily available, notably the transcript of Peter Ossorio's seminar *Positive Health and Transcendental Theories* (Ossorio, 1977), and his lecture "Religion without Doctrine" (1978). In them, he specifies three parameters which, when the domain in question is the real world ("the state of affairs that includes all other states of affairs"), are called the "transcendental concepts": totality, ultimacy, and boundary condition. To these I have added three which are peculiar to the domain of spirituality: transcendence, eternity, and holiness.

This articulation of the domain of spirituality can be compared with a coordinate system. A logically adequate coordinate system will provide formal access to all the possibilities for the territory in question, and will provide all the essential dimensions and none that are non-essential. What we have here is a logical structure which is a kind of coordinate system, with the six parameters as the six coordinates of the system, thereby allowing places for such logical possibilities as the transcendent, eternity, and other aspects of spirituality. Using it, we can investigate the possible facts inherent within the domain without being committed to whether any of them actually exists. Once we see what the possible facts are, we are in a position to decide what are the actual facts. This is of considerable practical, as well as theoretical, importance because apparently many people reject spirituality as a fact because they do not understand how it is possible in principle.

We can use this logical structure to differentiate spirituality from other domains, and at least provisionally, to differentiate complete and mature forms from incomplete, deficient, and defective forms. For example, a form which rules out the parameter of transcendence or holiness in advance is deficient in that respect because it eliminates the possibility in principle, thereby denying us the opportunity even to examine the idea. One which substitutes an infinite extension in time and space for eternity is also formally defective, and so is one that identifies mundane achievement with ultimate significance.

To suggest only two of the very practical applications of this approach: first, here we have guidelines for assessing whether a phenomenon such as a distress is, on the one hand, basically spiritual or with spiritual implications for the sufferer (ourselves or another), or on the other hand, whether it is basically a philosophical, psychological, physical, or other malaise. Second, when it is spiritual, in principle we can specify with considerable precision which concept the defect or deficiency is

related to. Is the person living in a narrow and cramped world, a tiny totality that excludes—let us say—any recognition of the transcendent? Or is he determined to stay immersed in immediacies, and is not willing to press on toward an ultimate? Or is he tormented by the conviction that his mundane life is meaningless, and has never conceived of the possibility of its having an eternal significance? Or is he haunted by a meeting with the Other but has no framework to relate that experience to, no knowledge of others' experiences, and no idea what to do—if anything—about his? Are diverse traditions such as the Judeo-Christian, the Buddhist, the Islamic, the Hindu, the primitive, all really saying the same thing, as many people contend? This way of articulating the spiritual domain—not simply as presented in this paper but developed in more detail—can provide us with a way of making comparisons that are as neutral, objective, and without prejudice as is possible. And we can generate descriptions of different forms of spirituality by identifying the values that each assigns to these concepts. The coordinate system does not answer these questions. It does remind us that there are such questions, and it may help us to answer them.

II

If we take it to be the case that spirituality is constituted by a relationship with a transcendent Other person, thing, or state of affairs, the question inevitably arises, "How do we know that Other?"

Let us begin by taking a step back. Given the nature of the relationship, whether we take our model to be that of the infinite with the finite, the absolute with the contingent, the creator with its creature, a divine parent with a human child, or whatever, apparently there are some people for whom a relationship with a transcendent Other would be difficult if not impossible to establish under normal circumstances. For example, if, as I have proposed elsewhere (Shideler, 1985)— following numerous authorities—an elemental response to meeting the Other is wonder, then someone who for whatever reason is immune to wonder will be handicapped in knowing the Other. Possibly such persons are natively deficient, as some people are born blind or color-blind, or deaf or tone-deaf. Or they may merely be conceptually undeveloped. Children, for example, can have an experience of the holy but not know what it is, and therefore dismiss it. Any of us, at any age, may have been told so often and so emphatically that anything pertaining to the spiritual is illusory or stupid or childish or pathological or impossible or unscientific that we have sealed ourselves against even conceptualizing it. Then there are those who have been frightened or repelled by an early meeting with the Other, as well as those who are so immersed in

the mundane that they are indifferent to anything beyond it. And, of course, we find those who have so often seen hypocrisy, power-plays, and apathy presenting themselves as "spiritual" that they regard all so-called spirituality as fraudulent. And let us not forget certain ones who, having translated spiritual concepts into those of philosophy or psychology, conclude that nothing remains that can properly be designated as "spiritual" (cf. Bridgman, 1938, pp. 269-270).

There remains an immense number of people in every historical period and every human culture for whom their relationship with the Other has been meaningful, and often that which gave their life its meaning. They *know* the Other. How do they know it?

Again to take a step back: how do we know the mundane world? Remember Maxims 6 and 7: "A person acquires facts about the world primarily by observation, and secondarily by thought", and "A person acquires concepts and skills by practice and experience in some of the social practices which involve the use of the concept or the exercise of the skill" (Ossorio, 1969/1981, pp. 32-33).

We observe that this cup has a given shape and size and color, that it clicks when we set it in its saucer, that it contains lukewarm, sweetened tea. We find that outside, the wind is howling and the clouds are threatening. Likewise, there are moments when we find that we are in the presence of something utterly Other than ourselves, ultimate, transcendent, timeless, holy. We may or may not see, hear, touch, smell, taste anything extraordinary. We may or may not identify it as a person, a thing, a state of affairs. What we do have is experiential knowledge that a transcendent Other is *there*, or *here*. This awareness is one of the fairly common ways that people know the Other. It can be compared with other fairly common experiences, like being aware that somebody across the room is watching us, or that another person is in the house although we do not see him or hear his movements. We may not be able to demonstrate conclusively to anyone else that our experience is veridical. But for that matter, neither can we demonstrate conclusively that the objects across the room are a chess-board and chess pieces, and that the persons manipulating those pieces are playing chess.

Another parallel comes from our perception of something as beautiful. I shall not repeat here C. S. Lewis's masterly argument, in *The Abolition of Man* (1947), against the thesis that in such cases we are not perceiving, but merely projecting our own reactions upon that to which we are attributing beauty or Otherness or holiness or whatever. Or to take yet another example, we may perceive—as Dante did—that a young woman walking down the street is transparent to the Other: she is at once wholly herself and the means by which the Other reveals itself. We may meet the Other in a hospital room, a cathedral, a bar, or through

a person, a thing, a conjoining of ideas, a strain of music. Still another way is in a dream or what we attribute to a dreaming state, as Jacob's dream of the ladder. And the meeting may be sudden and decisive, or a slowly developing awareness, or so much a part of our whole life that we take it for granted.

The circumstances of the meeting are too various to catalogue. The fact that a meeting has taken or is taking place is undeniable. But *what* is being met? A figment of the imagination? A hitherto unconscious aspect of ourselves? A projection of our desires or fears? An extrapolation from our mundane experience? A fantasy? As an alternative to these and numerous other ingenious philosophical and psychological explanations, let us recall Maxim 1: "A person takes it that things are as they seem unless he has reason to think otherwise" (Ossorio, 1969/1981, pp. 28-29). And what does seem to be the case is that the meeting with the Other, and the consequent participation in a relationship with it, is a meeting and relationship with something that is as real as the objects, processes, events, and states of affairs that we meet in our everyday, mundane going to and fro in the earth, in that like them, it imposes reality constraints on our behavior. We cannot—at least in the long run, and usually not in the short run—order it or them around. You may remember the aphorism, "The mark of the real is that it resists our will."

The knowledge that we have been considering up to this point is of ultimate significance, goodness, holiness, fulfillment, order and meaning. Less often recorded is the knowledge of its opposite, of ultimate meaninglessness, evil, depravity, destruction, uncleanness, symbolized in one tradition by the head of Medusa which blasts whoever looks at it, and in another by the presence of Satan, whom only to see face to face is everlasting torment. This also is spiritual knowledge, that is, of ultimates, totalities, boundary conditions, and of the transcendent, timeless, and unholy. There is a widespread belief that all spiritual knowledge—and for that matter, all spiritual living—is intrinsically uplifting, but history attests that this is not the case.

In brief, what the spiritual person knows is, fundamentally, all things under the aspect of eternity. Whatever else he knows in the domain of spirit is secondary and, in all likelihood, a reflection of his religious heritage and commitment, and therefore needs to be examined separately, in a study other than this one.

III

Let us turn now to more specific problems within the domain of spirituality, to see if through Descriptive Psychology we can achieve

formal access to them. The first that I shall reflect upon here is the concept of "the will", which has reference far beyond the spiritual life. I include it because of its importance in spiritual writings, and because as far as I know, there has been no analysis of it yet in Descriptive Psychology. Second, I shall inquire into the teaching common to a great many religious traditions, that one must die to the world, and deny one's very self, in order to live spiritually. Third, I shall point out a few of the dangers which especially threaten the person who embarks upon the life of the spirit.

In my reading on spirituality, no terms have been more difficult for me than "the will" and "will power". It is usually clear what phenomena they are referring to, but the terminology reflects a faculty psychology that I am uncomfortable with, not least because the admonition "strengthen your will" has never made much sense to me. It sounds too much like the exhortation to strengthen a particular muscle by exercising it, but I could never locate a will or identify what exercises would be effective. So let us re-examine the phenomena to which "the will" refers, taking as our paradigm case a situation that is simple and familiar. We recognize that we ought to do something; we do not want to do it; yet we do it anyway. In the paradigm case, we have strong reasons to do what we ought to do, but our reasons for not wanting to do it are also very strong. When we do it anyway, in the old language we "exercise our will". In Descriptive Psychology language, we give one motivation priority over other, conflicting motivations, when our reasons for doing what we do not want to do are even stronger than our reasons for doing what we do want to do.

Our reasons for doing what we ought to do may be reinforced by what we might call "second-order reasons", such as our having promised someone that we would do this. And there may be a further reinforcement: "I'm not the kind of person who allows his pleasure (or self-interest or whatever) to interfere with doing his duty". In such second-order reasons, our self-concept is involved, what in earlier times was called our honor. Variants on second-order reasons are—among others—our promises to ourselves, and vows (here "promises" is too light a word) to a transcendent Other. Any of these can be essential ingredients in episodes of doing what we do not want to do.

Conversely, there are the equally familiar times when we are doing what we want very much to do, and persist in spite of serious obstacles—frustrations of our efforts, temptations to deviate, disparagement from our associates, illness or weariness. Again we have a motivational conflict, and again the struggle may be sharp. We ask ourselves, "Do I *really* want to do this? . . . *Should* I want to do this? . . . Is it worth the hassle? . . ." Sometimes we decide that it is; sometimes

we decide that it is not. Either way, we organize our priorities. And this kind of persistence in the face of obstacles is one of the important aspects of what we mean when we talk of determination or "will power".

Lest we fall into the trap of over-simplification, we need to remember that only rarely do we face a situation where the strongest motivation straightforwardly wins out. Sets of motivations—motivational structures—are too complex to admit of so simple a solution. Our "wants" and "oughts" are not discrete like beads on a string; they are interrelated like the elements in a work of art. And, as in creating a work of art, there are no rules for ensuring that we shall do it right, that is, that we shall achieve an organization of our motivational priorities that is right for us in our circumstances. What we have instead are guidelines to help us avoid going wrong, or to suggest how to correct what has already gone wrong. Characteristically, these guidelines take the form of double negatives, and here I shall limit myself to one example.

When we say of a person that he has "a strong will" or "great will power", part of what we mean is that he is not fragmented, cleaving to mutually contradictory values or pursuing mutually exclusive ends. Whatever he wants, knows, and does is held together without internal dissension or behavioral incongruity. He adheres in his personal life to the traditional directive, "A place for everything and everything in its place". This does not, or should not, imply a kind of tunnel vision or a narrowing of interests. Some of the officially canonized saints, and a great many of the uncanonized (Blaise Pascal and Dag Hammarskjöld come immediately to mind), have had very wide-ranging intellectual and social interests, and have engaged in a variety of very practical pursuits, but ultimately, all these were systematically related to each other by being related to the one thing. Wide-ranging though these persons were in what they knew, wanted, and did, yet they were not fragmented. Everything they knew, wanted, and did was integrated by being understood as *sub specie aeternitatis*, that is, as related to the transcendent Other, and if not as implementing that relationship, then certainly as not antagonistic to it.

Not to be fragmented involves almost always, some degree of simplification, the stripping away of what is irrelevant and constraining, as you or I might free ourselves from restrictive clothing when we want to swim or run. Often this is subsumed under the heading of asceticism, a subject on which we shall do well to listen to G. K. Chesterton:

Asceticism, in the religious sense, is the repudiation of the great mass of human joys because of the supreme joyfulness of the one joy, the religious joy. But asceticism is not in the least confined to religious asceticism: there is scientific asceticism which

asserts that truth is alone satisfying: there is aesthetic asceticism which asserts that
art is alone satisfying: there is amatory asceticism which asserts that love is alone
satisfying. There is even epicurean asceticism, which asserts that beer and skittles are
alone satisfying . . . [Omar Khayyam] makes a list of things and says that he wants
no more; the same thing was done by a medieval monk. (Chesterton, 1921, pp. 59-60)

IV

Two kinds of simplification are of special importance for spirituality:
renouncing the world, and renouncing the self. We see them displayed
most clearly in those who have entered the monastic or the eremitical
way of life, but they are not by any means limited to such persons. One
can forsake the world while still living and being very active in it. For
an explanation of this seeming contradiction, let us turn to the
Justification Ladder:

<div align="center">

Perspective, Competence
_____

Principle
Theory
Custom
Judgement

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It seems to be characteristic of people who are deeply spiritual that
their reasons for doing whatever they do—and reasons are potentially
justifications—are in general referred not to custom, theory, or principle,
but to the perspective that corresponds to the domain of spirituality, and
to the ethical and esthetic perspectives. In contrast, many of the
religiously-oriented tend to appeal to customs such as traditional ways
of performing rituals and organizing institutions, to theories such as how
to instill those traditions into children, and to principles such as are
embodied in theological and ethical doctrines.

Because the mundane world has a place within the domain of
transcendence, there need be no fundamental fragmentation involved in
combining a spiritual way of life with mundane activities, any more than
there would be in combining an overriding commitment to a vocation of
scholarship or business with an avocation of playing golf or
embroidering. Each domain has its own integrity which we cannot violate
and still function well within it. What is at stake here, however, is not
what goes on within the domains themselves, but the relationships of
those domains with each other.

Thus the spiritual person who is active in the "marketplace" of
mundane work does not violate the methods and standards of that work
as long as he is engaged in it. Charles Morgan suggests an illuminating

parallel: "When we play a game, we love to win and hate to lose; we don't stand aside in cold indifference but struggle passionately with every energy of body and mind; yet the struggle is unreal; another and deeper life continues independently of the game, and survives it and is not affected by it" (Morgan, 1932, pp. 334-335). Abraham Heschel puts it in another way: "to work with things of space but to be in love with eternity" (1963, p. 48). Teresa of Avila, one of the greatest of mystics, was also an able administrator and astute politician, performing those functions according to the received secular rules. Dag Hammarskjöld was probably the most effective Secretary-General that the United Nations has ever had.

Our self-concept is the summary formulation of our status, our place in the world. Renouncing the mundane world, we no longer have our primary place there, and thereby we renounce—forsake—deny—the selves that we have hitherto been. When we do so as a condition for living spiritually, we achieve a new status within the domain of transcendence, and thereby a new self. If this seems remote or obscure, we can look to what happens in purely mundane circumstances when, instead of our renouncing the world, it renounces us, so to speak. A radical change takes place in our world, such as the death of someone close and dear to us, so that the world itself is not what it was, and consequently our place cannot be what it had been. We suffer what is often called a "little death", and must to that degree be "born again" into a new status. Living in a new world compels us to be new persons. Much more, the change from a mundane to a transcendent orientation compels us to die and be reborn.

"Dying to oneself" has sometimes been interpreted as the kind of self-abnegation that "consists in thinking oneself a worm" (Williams, 1958, p. xliv), or alternatively, as subservience to someone else's demands—becoming what one of my friends calls "an early Christian doormat". According to my observation, however, neither of these is viable, much less commendable. As Dorothy L. Sayers justly says, "To subdue one's self to one's own ends might be dangerous, but to subdue one's self to other people's ends was dust and ashes" (Sayers, 1936/1960, p. 428). This last is another sort of thing altogether, impelled by social, religious, ethical, or other reasons which may not (and often, I suspect, do not) have any transcendent reference at all. How do we distinguish between these two kinds of self-loss? In the same way that we recognize in ourselves and others the difference between forced servitude and gracious, loving service.

V

The dangers inherent in spirituality follow from the very nature of the spiritual life. Thus the appeal of the spiritual person directly to perspectives, skipping the lower rungs of the justification ladder, can explain his readiness to depart from custom and so on, and to ignore or reject commonly accepted ethical rules or precepts. What some spiritual persons have instead is an ethical sensitivity that may lead them to break new ethical ground—e.g., to see that slavery is wrong, or that lepers should be cared for instead of ostracized, or, remembering the dark forms of spirituality, that the unorthodox, instead of merely being cast out of the community, should be tortured until they recant or die. Very frequently, however, such an appeal to perspectives (e.g., to "the will of God") leads spirituals into trouble with those religious and secular authorities who hold to custom, theory, or principle, or to one of the other perspectives. History is replete with instances of their battles and sometimes burnings.

Not infrequently, spiritual persons run into another kind of danger. For the most part, the adoring disciples of advanced spirituals are not competent to encourage wisely, any more than their detractors are competent to diagnose and prescribe accurately. Therefore the great spirituals tend to be isolated from their peers, which is dangerous. Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross had each other, and Evelyn Underhill and Baron von Hügel were close friends for many years, but I know of few other instances where notable spirituals had the ongoing companionship of people who were equally competent spiritually. And both Teresa and John were nearly hamstrung by spiritual directors of less spiritual competence than they.

Farther down the scale of spiritual development are the myriads who, lacking or refusing direction, descend into abysmal aberrations "under the guidance of the spirit". Indeed they may be under the guidance of a spirit, but being unskilled in the discernment of spirits, they can easily fall victim to a spirit of confusion or destructiveness or evil. An interesting parallel can be drawn with the adolescent-type rebellion against customs, theories, and principles, and the elevation of self-interest or pleasure, narrowly conceived, into the primary reason for choosing any behavior.

Apart from peer isolation, the greatest dangers for the spiritual are likely to result from corruptions of his relationship with the Other. All those which I shall mention here—and I can do no more than mention

Merely to have a clear relationship with the Other can generate pride, or to use the Greek term which is more precise, *hubris*, as on the mundane level, a person can puff himself up for being the friend of some famous person. Special forms of this are the holier-than-thou syndrome, and the conviction that having such a status gives one special privileges.

Hubris can lead further. It can result in the claim to be exempt from the social and ethical restrictions under which "ordinary" people live. A prime example comes from the history of sorcery. For an easily available and frighteningly vivid portrait of such a person, see Simon the Clerk in Charles Williams' *All Hallows' Eve*, or Sir Giles Tumulty in *War in Heaven* and *Many Dimensions.*

Conversely, persons can end up being—in the old phrase—"devoured by the god", absorbed into the Other until they become all but incapable of choice. They are less than servants or slaves, merely automatons or perfervidly fanatic.

Other dangers arise from mistaking the nature of the relationship. We take it to be cozily friend to friend, or helpfully parent to child, or benignly ruler to subject, then discover that it is instead—for example—Creator to creature, or Infinite to finite, or Absolute to relative: between us is an awful and awe-filled distance. The Other cannot be confined within the categories of our human relationships, and we bring It or Him or Her or They down to our level at the risk of destroying the relationship. Remember the Relationship Change Formula: "If the behavior of X vis-a-vis Y is *not* an expression of the relationship which holds between them, then that relationship changes in the direction of one for which the behavior that *did* occur *would* have been an expression" (Ossorio, 1970/1981, p. 71). Moreover, if we take the relationship to be merely an enhanced form of our human relationships, we are likely to be thrown off our course, if not shattered, when we discover that it does not conform to our expectations—and almost certainly it will not: "My ways are not your ways, saith the Lord."

The last danger that I shall mention here is that once the relationship with the Other has been established to a certain, if indefinable, degree, one cannot with impunity withdraw from it. Why this condition obtains, I do not know, but it seems to be inherent in the nature of the transcendent Other. I do not say that it is impossible to withdraw, only that apparently we cannot turn back from life in the spirit to a purely mundane life without paying a price that is higher than for abrogating purely human relationships, or for—let us say—going back to our state before we were able to read.

Each of these dangers can be matched with a holy achievement that looks very much like it. The spiritually-grounded person may have a confidence that can be mistaken for pride. He may indeed be called by the Other to perform a certain task, and by virtue of that be endowed with special powers, and with a special authority over those who would deter him. Or he may obey the Other so closely and sensitively that he seems almost a robot although he is not. And so on down the line.

How can we tell whether another person—or we ourselves—are on the path toward sanctity or the diabolic? We cannot—infallibly. We have a few guidelines but that is all. "By their fruits ye shall know them" is one, but the tree may not bear its fruit—good or evil—for generations. Or to give a trivial illustration, the quality of the fruit may be appraised by persons who judge an orange by the criteria for an apricot. Another guideline is whether the life and teaching of the spiritual person has, recognizably, a place within some culture and tradition. The radically idiosyncratic is always suspect because it is not subject to the discipline of a community or tradition. And I say "has a place within", not "in agreement with", deliberately. Teresa could and did defend her position by citing Scripture and the Christian tradition, although she interpreted them in some ways that were alien to her time and place, and were considered obnoxious by certain of her contemporaries to the point where she was accused of heresy. She is now, by papal decree, a "Doctor of the Church". Judgement by the person's peers would be desirable, and probably as close to guaranteeing a correct appraisal as we could get, but where are the peers? How do we who are not spiritual geniuses appraise a genius, or even determine who would be competent to judge whether he is indeed a genius or merely a crackpot?

Yet judge we must, if we are not to follow blindly whichever among them shouts the loudest, or if we are not to dash frantically from one to another of the self-styled prophets. With intelligence, common sense, a critical but not cynical attitude, and patience not to be hasty in our judgements either pro or con, we cannot guarantee accurate descriptions and appraisals, but we are less likely to fall into grave errors than if we neglect those disciplines.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NOTES

1.   On the other side of the room are books not having to do with spirituality as such, but which offer what I call "imaginative access", principally novels, stories, and poems that evoke a sense of "Otherness". They contribute toward preparing us to become open to the Other, and to recognize it, by making us aware of the possibility of an Other without requiring us to commit ourselves to its being a fact. For many children, the first awakening to such concepts comes through fairy tales, or books like C. S. Lewis' Narnia series. For adults, it may be fantasy literature such as J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, or science fiction, or movies like *E.T.*, and *Star Wars* and its successors, or theological thrillers such as the novels of Charles Williams.

2.   On the relation of the human creator of art to his human creation, and of the light which that throws on the relation of the divine creator to the human creature, and vice versa, see Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker*.

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