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## FROM MYSTERY TO MEANING A Methodist Minister Speaks His Mind

(A talk given by Rev. Robert D. McIntyre of Glendale, Arizona, at the April-1957 Los Angeles Conference)

It is amazing how much schooling one can get without getting insight especially in this field of Christianity. Now I have had a good deal of religious training at various kinds of schools: the Moody Bible Institute Evening School and Northern Baptist Theological Seminary for two years. In addition to my A.B. degree, I studied three more years to graduate from the Garrett Biblical Institute (School of Religion at Northwestern University), and I have taken additional graduate work at U.S.C.

I do not speak for my ministerial brethren; I just speak for myself – and I mention all this education simply to emphasize the Fact that when I got through with all of this, Christianity was still a mystery to me.

The title for my thinking tonight has been borrowed from a book by one of my colleagues, Rev. Archie Matson, Minister of the Broadway Methodist Church in Glendale, here in California. I see that Archie has made sure there are some copies of his book on the book table! If you are interest in this whole subject I think you will find Archie's book very rewarding.

My talk is not based on the book; I have just borrowed the title. But it was from the book that I got the idea it might

be respectable for an ordained, orthodox minister to believe in reincarnation. Archie tells the story that after twenty years' consideration, he had been reluctantly forced to believe in reincarnation and it has added a great deal to his insight. Acceptance of reincarnation as an hypothesis means, I think, *moving from mystery to meaning*.

For the acceleration of my own movement *from mystery to meaning* I wish especially to express my indebtedness to the A.R.E. Not that I have reached meaning yet; but I feel intuitively I am moving toward it.

In the desire to grow in wisdom and stature, in favor with God and man - a desire almost akin to desperation - I had dabbled in various fields of New Thought and the occult, as perhaps many of you have done. But the research and enlightenment which come from following the Edgar Cayce readings the Study Group work are helping me immeasurably today. I like to feel that I am in the process of becoming a member of the Association, although I'm not one yet. So whatever I say, please don't allow it to reflect upon the Association.

The Cayce readings and the Study

Group work are taking me back, actually, to the fundamentals of conservative Christianity which, through a lack of understanding, I had evaluated and could not accept. Now I find that these readings and teachings in our A.R.E. Study Group have allowed me to retain concepts which I had found of value in those other fields in which I had dabbled; yet in some strange and illuminating way are integrating them with the fundamental principles of Christianity I had learned in the more conservative Seminaries! Concepts are being harmonized which previously I thought were just irreconcilable. I used to feel, "Well, if I believe this, I can't believe that - and it's so difficult to choose between them for they both seem so valid." Now With the insight that comes in the Association's study group, I'm finding it's possible to harmonize the seeming opposite.

Even more important than the value of mental stimulation is the fact that the readings and teachings are helping me, a minister, to pray and meditate in a new way - with new understanding and I believe new results. I sometimes tell the people of my congregation that I wish I had the time for prayer that they have. A busy minister often cannot spend as much time praying as the man in his congregation. I complained one time to my District Superintendent, "I just don't have time to pray - how do I get time for prayer?" He said, "Well, you just have to learn to pray *on the run!*" The A.R.E. is giving me more practical help. The guidance from the kind of meditation you teach makes me more efficient and *saves time!*

It seems to me, also, that in this movement of mine from mystery to meaning, I have progressed by lifting up

a very much neglected doctrine of orthodox Christianity - one I don't hear very much about. That is: the doctrine of the Holy Ghost, or Holy Spirit, or the indwelling Christ.

Have you heard a sermon recently on the Holy Spirit? No? Why not? It is, in my opinion Protestantism's most neglected doctrine. One reason lies in the fact that the Old Testament stresses what we call, technically, the transcendency of God - *God as being outside the individual!* The New Testament stresses the *immanence* of God - *God dwelling within you.* The Old Testament is longer and greater in bulk than the New Testament, And all the hero stories are in the Old Testament: David and Goliath; Daniel in the Lion's den, Joseph and his brothers, etc. Apparently the Old Testament seems to make more of an impact upon people in church than the New Testament does.

When Moses wanted to talk to God (and if you have seen Cecil B. DeMille's 'Ten Commandments', you know how graphically and dramatically this is portrayed) where did Moses go to talk to God? To the mountain top, and Moses had to go there if he wanted to talk with Him. God is represented as speaking with a finger of fiery lightning, in thunder, earthquakes, and all that sort of thing. God is represented as a force outside of Moses.

How different this is from the New Testament! Jesus says that when you want to speak with God, "Go into the closet and close the door and be by yourself", and feel that still small voice within you. Yet the Old Testament seems to be more vivid; and if you ask almost any youngster in Sunday School where God is, he will point up somewhere.

If we are going to move from

mystery to meaning, I feel that we must start with the concept that *God is within* - at least I have had to start with this. Of course, God is also in the tree, He is in the skies and the sea; but He is within you and within me. And my most immediate contact with Him is with this indwelling divinity which is in me and within all men.

I like to think of it as being something like the electricity which is lighting this room. We all know it comes from a powerhouse outside the room, but it is the electricity at work *in this room* which has the most meaning to us when we want insight and light.

Where did Jesus say the Kingdom of God is? Within, He said. And as I understand these two wonderful books published by the A.R.E. Press *A Search For God*; contacting the Divine Presence within is one of the major emphases or the Cayce readings. And believe it or not, I don't think there are many people in the church who know how to do this. When most of us in the church pray, our prayers seem to bounce off the ceiling and prayer is a very neglected thing in churches simply because churches are not teaching people how to pray. If other ministers are like me, the reason for the neglect is that they themselves don't know how to pray. The mountain top of God's presence is reached by ascending to higher levels of spiritual awareness, realizing the consciousness of the Christ within us; and we do this by raising the Creative Life Force of the physics body. In this way, I believe, God reveals Himself to man.

### **DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH**

We wonder why there are so many different denominations. We know the churches are vertically divided into denominations; but actually there is

Fundamentalist-Liberal division that cuts across these denominations. A fundamentalist-Methodist is more like a fundamentalist-Baptist, for example than either one is like a liberal-Methodist or liberal-Baptist, etc. The question that really cuts across denominations is this: *How does God reveal Himself to man?*

We have two answers in the orthodox church today. One is that God reveals Himself to man through some agency *outside* of man - maybe the church, or some leader such as Mrs. Eddy with her Key to the Scriptures or perhaps some set of laws such as those stressed by the Seventh Day Adventists. In almost every denomination, however, there is a group of people who feel that God reveals Himself through an inner experience.

The Roman Catholic folks say that we Protestants have discarded the Papal Pope and set up in his place a paper Pope: the Bible, This is because so many Protestants feel that the Bible is God's word - infallible and inerrant.

Now, I didn't get this from the A.R.E. and I'm not entirely sure that the Association would agree with me. I got this from a liberal Seminary: I was taught that the Word of God is the Christ - not the Bible. The Bible is the "written Word of God" that is, the record of the Word. The Living Word was Jesus the Christ. To quote the Bible itself: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and Word was God...And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us..." John (1:1-14)

Then Jesus the Christ was the Word of God, in an historical demonstration, and the Bible is a record of this historical demonstration. The Work of God is a *continuing* experience.

As I read of Jesus' relationship to

His disciples, it seems to me that many times Jesus was impatient to be up and going, as though it were frustrating for Him to be limited by the slowness of his disciples. You remember when the little child was brought to them and they couldn't heal it; so they brought the child to Jesus. He said, "O Ye of little faith, how long must I remain with you?" Yet the time came when Jesus could safely leave His disciples. He gathered them together for one last supper and they were quite upset when He said He was leaving. Did He say: "Don't Worry, I will give you a book that will tell you all the answers?" No! He said, "I will send another counselor"- or as the King James version renders it, "another Comforter that He may abide with you forever."

This counselor or comforter would dwell with them and in them, even the Spirit of Truth. The inner voice of wisdom would lead and guide all disciples into truth. So it is a continuing inner experience. And Jesus said, "It is expedient for Me to leave you, else you will not receive this spirit of truth." It's almost as if He were saying that as long as He remained with them, He was an *outside* authority and the disciples would depend upon Him; but if He left them, they could experience *within themselves* the spirit of truth. Then they would no longer need to depend upon any outside person, even Jesus Himself; but would discover the truth within themselves and then be able to do all the wonderful things that He did-- and even more wonderful things than He did.

Now you see how the question of *how* God reveals Himself to man cuts across denominational lines. And it seems to me that the Association Study Groups are teaching that we find God primarily through this inner authority;

that as we use the historical record (the Bible) as a guide and grow in understanding, the Book will come to mean more and more to us. One day we would get a certain glimmer of truth from it; at another reading of the same passage, a deeper truth will be revealed. Like a mirror, the Bible reflects back to us our own spiritual condition and need. As we grow in awareness of the Christ within, the Bible's meaning to us correspondingly changes. And so we have Jesus the historical human being who demonstrated this Christ Spirit to such an extent that we call Him the Christ; and we also have a written record of Him. In addition we have the Christ Spirit living in us today.

Jesus said that the important thing is our attitude toward God and our fellow man. If they are in harmony with the attitudes of the Christ, then we know we are moving from *mystery to meaning*. And if we are sincerely trying to live up to the little light we have - even though we do not have much light - then we will grow in our understanding. There is an old saying, "Light obeyed increases light; light resisted brings night." Then it isn't so vital for our eternal security that we have the correct intellectual explanations but that we sincerely try to grow, and that we have right attitudes. It isn't a matter of our head-religion; it's a matter of heart-religion. I find "gracious tolerance" is the right way in which people can live and cooperate on different levels and not try to force them into one mold. I find this in the Association, and I like it.

#### **THE CHURCH NEEDS US**

I like, too, the words attributed to Edgar Cayce and repeated in this Handbook for Group Study: "If Study Groups have one message above all others to tell their members, it is that

each person should go to his own place of worship and make it a better place because he worships there." For even though I may have dabbled around in various offshoots, sects, and cults, finding much of value in them, I still have the conviction that the church isn't to be counted out yet! The church was ordained by Jesus Christ. All these movements may be a necessary corrective for the church; nevertheless it is the church, I think, which will help the greatest majority of people.

I wish, however, that we had a few more people in our churches like you who believe in reincarnation. Last summer I got up enough courage to preach along these lines: "Now I'd like to preach a summer vacation sermon--a vacation from the usual things. I would like to preach a make believe sermon. Let's pretend that this is true. Of course it may not be true, but let's pretend it is." Then I went into reincarnation right down the line. When I got through, I said, "We are just pretending but you know it might be true, at that!"

That was the closest I ever came to preaching on the subject. Then had to back up! I do wish we had more folks like you in our churches, who would speak up. I don't know how it is with other denominations, but a group of Methodist ministers in Chicago have formed a group called *Spiritual Frontiers* and many of them believe in reincarnation. As I talk to ministers, I find that many of them have certainly considered this question; and if they don't yet accept it, they certainly don't discard it. Most of them, I would say, lack the courage or are too cautious to let their people know they believe in reincarnation. As Jesus said to His disciples: "There are things I would have you know, but you cannot bear them

yet."

If some of you folks would go back into your churches and begin to create an atmosphere so that the minister would feel more free to speak, I think it would help a great deal,

#### TRUTH IS PARADOXICAL

As we move from mystery to meaning, one thing we have to face is the problem of evil. This in quite a problem, isn't it? I was attracted to Christian Science because it seemed to offer a solution: there's no such thing, it is an illusion. That's one way - to deny its existence. I tried it for a while but then I went back to orthodox Christianity. Yet the orthodox explanation of evil doesn't appeal to me, either; and I have finally gotten to the place where I can believe both the orthodox and the Christian Science explanations, even though they contradict each other! I am discovering, in this movement from mystery to meaning, that we have to include the idea of *paradox*.

You know what paradox is; but is it a new thought when applied to religious thinking? It means that often we have to concede one thing is true--then turn right around and say that just the opposite is also true. They apparently conflict, yet both are true!

This I think is what we have to do with the problem of evil. Evil is one of the most real experiences man ever has, yet there isn't any such thing as evil I can say I believe both of those statements.

Let us take a familiar analogy: what is darkness? Something that isn't - merely the absence of light. We know what light is: rays of energy from the sun. No heavenly body is giving off rays of darkness. Darkness is a real experience but actually there is no such

"stuff" as darkness.

So we have to adopt paradox, I think, in moving from mystery to meaning, on the intellectual level. The reason is simply because we are talking about infinite truth and we are finite. We are attempting to describe infinite reality using terms that are limited.

The geographer has the same problem when he has to reproduce a three dimensional sphere in an Atlas. He has to take the sphere and squash it, distorting it badly in order to get it on a two dimensional plane. He gets aground this by producing two maps in one - neither one accurate, each a half truth - always a dangerous thing.

So paradox, with its conflict and contradiction, is often our best finite method of representing infinite truth. We see each part of it as an aspect of truth. Only by holding them together in a contradictory tension can we get an approximation of truth.

I say, for example, that I believe in the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. The Father is not the Son; the Son is not the Father; the Father isn't the Holy Spirit. Yet God is all three of these. Now there is a paradox, if ever there was one! Intellectually and logically, it doesn't make sense. Yet, experienced, it makes complete sense!

Turning to analogy again, consider H<sup>2</sup>O. We all know it is as a liquid, but it is also a solid and a gas. These are three aspects of its reality. Water is not ice or steam - and their properties are entirely different. But you can't tell my little boy who puts his hand into hot steam from a tea kettle that he has touched ice! He knows different. How can water, ice and steam be H<sup>2</sup>O, yet different? A scientist could explain it.

I suppose an angel could explain the truth of the Trinity, just as a scientist

could explain H<sup>2</sup>O. I am not a scientist nor an angel, yet I can experience the reality of both the Triune God and H<sup>2</sup>O. The Association studies are helping me grasp the paradoxes of religious faith and practice, and intellectual understanding.

We call this dualism "polarity" in the field of physics: positive and negative poles, opposites which attract each other and belong together. In the field of Logic, this phenomenon is called the "dialectic": as truth moves from a thesis to an anti-thesis and the two unite to become synthesis, which in turn becomes a new thesis. So you keep moving from one extreme, etc. ad infinitum.

Paradox is certainly characteristic of religious truth.

We see something of this in the nature of God. God is love, and God is law; and so many people become confused by the paradox of God's love and His law. They feel that if they violate Godly law, then God in unloving anger has turned His back on them. It is true we must obey the laws of God, but His love is so great that it enfolds the greatest sinners - to use the old - fashioned term. His law is so universal that it embraces the finest saint, too. These two apparently contradictory elements of God's nature are really not opposing each other; and as I study the Edgar Cayce readings, I gain more insight into this.

Finally, one last thought. I want to express it in church language because it is the language with which I am most familiar, but I find it more meaningful in the Association language. That is: what it means to accept Christ as Saviour and Lord.

Let us consider the word Lord for a moment. When scholars were

translating the New Testament from Greek into English, back in the days of King James and before that, they had to find some commonly understood English term to express the Greek word which showed the relationship between the believer and Jesus the Christ.

In those days, the cultural economic system was feudalism. You remember how that goes, I'm sure. The King owns everything, but he had a lot of relatives and he parcels out the land to his relatives. They were called *Lords*. The people who lived on the land had an agreement with the Lord which went something like this: "We will do whatever you say; we are in your hands; we'll work for you, fight for you, serve you." On the other hand, the Lord was to furnish ground upon which to live; also forests in which to hunt game, streams in which to fish, land on which to grow corn, etc. The Lord provided the means necessary for livelihood.

Now it was this word *Lord* which the New Testament translator deliberately chose in order to show the relationship between Jesus and the believer. And we too must come to the place where we feel we *must* obey His will, serve Him, and live on His bounty - that is, if we are to find the sense of security and satisfaction which,

in church terminology is called salvation.

Jesus doesn't become our Saviour until He is first our Lord. For me this means a deliberate decision to do that which I believe He wants me to do. It means a lifelong search to discover and obey the Will of God, as I best understand it.

This, in a nutshell, is the meaning of that phrase I hear so often in our Association Study Group which uses *The Search For God* as a text book: "Not my will, but Thy Will be done O Lord."

Thus I have tried very haltingly to describe my own intellectual pilgrimage from *mystery to meaning*. Even more important than the intellectual pilgrimage is our movement from *mystery to meaning* by determination on our part - determination to make persistent efforts to experience the God within.

"Not my will but Thine, O Lord, be done in me and through me. Let me ever be a channel of blessings, today, now, to those that I contact in every way. Let my going in, my comings out be in accord with that Thou wouldst have me do; and as the call comes, here am I send me, use me!"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Page 22 "A Search for God"

**NOTE:** This is a REPRINT of a former monthly publication of the Association for Research and Enlightenment, Inc.