The Worldview of Edgar Cayce – An Evaluation of His Teachings from a Biblical Perspective

The Edgar Cayce Readings

By all accounts Edgar Cayce was truly a remarkable man. Beginning in 1901 and continuing until his death in 1945 he gave thousands of psychic readings. Broadly speaking, these readings were of two types: health readings and life readings. The health readings consisted of a psychic diagnosis of a patient's physical ailments and a prescription for how these ailments should be treated. The life readings consisted of answers to all sorts of personal, religious, and philosophical questions. One rather interesting aspect of these readings is the manner in which they were given: Cayce would lie down on the couch and put himself into a trance state resembling sleep. It was this manner of giving readings that led one of his biographers, Jess Stearn, to refer to Cayce as "The Sleeping Prophet."{1}

Just how accurate were these readings? Although it is impossible to verify everything Cayce said, some contend that his accuracy rate was over ninety percent!{2} But "with all his vaunted powers," writes Stearn, "Cayce was a humble man, religious, God-fearing, who read the Bible every day of his life."{3} Indeed, Cayce read through the entire Bible every year and regularly taught Sunday school throughout his life. It is probably for reasons such as these that many people believe that the worldview of the readings is generally consistent with biblical Christianity. But is this really so? How well does the worldview of the Edgar Cayce readings

compare with that of the Bible?

Herbert Puryear writes, “The content of . . . the Edgar Cayce readings is . . . always Christ-centered, supporting the ultimate importance of the unique work of Jesus of Nazareth.”{4} But as I hope to demonstrate in this article, such a claim can only be true by redefining the person and work of Jesus Christ to mean something quite different from what the Bible teaches.

For instance Thomas Sugrue, Cayce’s earliest biographer and long-time friend, begins his chapter on the philosophy of the readings by stating, “The system of metaphysical thought which emerges from the readings of Edgar Cayce is a Christianized version of the mystery religions of ancient Egypt, Chaldea, Persia, India, and Greece.”{5} The worldview of the readings actually has much more in common with New Age metaphysics and occult philosophy than it does with biblical Christianity.

Although I have little doubt that, as a person, Cayce was kind and humble and motivated by a sincere desire to help his fellow man, it obviously does not follow that the worldview revealed in the readings is therefore true. And while I certainly acknowledge that Cayce regularly read and taught the Bible, it by no means follows that the philosophy of the readings is therefore biblical.

The Nature of God

According to Dr. Herbert Puryear, “More consequences for thought and action follow from the affirmation or denial of God than from answering any other fundamental question.”{6} It’s difficult to overestimate the importance of this observation. Equally important, however, for those affirming the existence of God, is the kind of God they affirm to exist.

There can be no doubt that God is of primary importance in the Edgar Cayce readings. The readings certainly affirm the

existence of God, an affirmation that they obviously share with biblical Christianity. This being said, however, there is a marked difference in what each source affirms about the nature of God.

Dr. Puryear writes, "The clearly articulated philosophy of the Edgar Cayce readings is a thoroughgoing monism."{7} The doctrine of monism claims that all reality is of the same essence. In other words, "All is one." Indeed, in the introduction to his book Dr. Puryear claims that "the oneness of all force" is the "first premise of the Edgar Cayce readings."

What effect does this first premise have on the view of God presented in the readings? Dr. Puryear writes, "With the premise of the oneness of all force we affirm that *God is*, that He is *all that is*, and *all that is*, is God."{8} This view is known as pantheism. It comes from two Greek words: *pan*, meaning "all" or "every," and *theos*, meaning "God." In other words pantheism, like the Edgar Cayce readings, teaches that everything is God – a view substantially at odds with the biblical doctrine of God. Let's look, then, at what the Bible *does* say about God.

Let's first acknowledge that the Bible, like the Edgar Cayce readings, does indeed affirm that God is one. Moses wrote, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!" (Deut. 6:4) But the biblical affirmation means something very different from the doctrine of pantheism espoused in the Cayce readings. The Bible is affirming that there is only one Lord God. It is not teaching that "All is One," nor that the name we should give to this all-inclusive Oneness is "God." The biblical view that the Lord is one is sometimes referred to as monotheism. It holds that there is only one God – *not many*, as Israel's polytheistic neighbors believed. It also holds that God, as the Creator of all that exists (other than Himself), is not to be identified with any created thing.{9} This view contrasts with the doctrine of pantheism, which clearly blurs

the distinction between Creator and creation.

Since the view of God presented in the Edgar Cayce readings is basically pantheistic,{10} it is also, by virtue of this fact, clearly unbiblical. Next we'll see how this effects the readings' presentations of both Christ and men.

Christ and Men

How did the view of a pantheistic God influence Cayce's doctrines of Christ and men?

Thomas Sugrue, in summarizing the philosophy of the readings, says that in the beginning God "projected from Himself the cosmos and souls."{11} Thus, according to this view, everything that exists (including man) is somehow part of God. Or as Cayce put it in one of his readings: "Each person is a corpuscle in the body of that force called God."{12}

But if the readings affirm the divinity of man, what becomes of the Christian belief in the uniqueness of Jesus? Dr. Puryear declares, "In Jesus we are told that God became incarnate. If we could only see clearly that Jesus' claim for divinity is a claim for the divinity of us all, we would understand that His relationship to God is a pattern which all of us may and one day must attain."{13} Thus, contrary to the Bible, the readings do not understand Jesus' uniqueness in terms of His being God's one and only Son.{14} In fact, the readings actually deny that there is any essential difference between Jesus and the rest of humanity. All souls – yours, mine, and Christ's – were projected from God, and all share the same divine essence. The Christ soul was simply the first to complete its earthly experiences and return to God.{15} But concerned with the plight of its brother souls, the Christ soul decided to return and help us. According to Sugrue, the Christ soul incarnated as Enoch, Melchizedek, Joseph, Joshua, Jeshua, and finally – Jesus!{16} As Jesus, He triumphed over death and the body and once again returned to God, becoming

“the pattern we are to follow.”{17}

How do such teachings square with the Bible? Not very well, I’m afraid. The Bible maintains a careful distinction between God and man. God is the Creator; man is His creature. God created man in His image (Gen. 1:27); He did not project him from His essence. The Bible also maintains a clear distinction between Jesus and other men. Jesus is the completely unique God-man; no other man is like Him. He was both fully divine and fully human (John 1:1, 14). We are merely human. He was sinless (Heb. 4:15); we are sinful (Rom. 3:23). He claimed to have come not merely to be our example, but “to save that which was lost” (Matt. 18:11) and “to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). We, of course, are the lost sinners He came to ransom and to save (Rom. 5:6-11). Thus it’s clear, even from this brief summary, that the readings’ doctrines of Christ and men differ substantially from those of the Bible.

Problems and Solutions

The Bible identifies man’s primary problem as sin, a state of moral corruption that has infected our very nature. It is our sinful nature (and the sinful acts arising from it) that is the source of so many of our problems. The Bible warns us that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 3:23). Death is understood primarily as separation. Physical death is the spirit’s separation from the body (Jas. 2:26); spiritual death is a person’s separation from God (Eph. 2:1-7). All men are conceived in a state of spiritual death, alienated from their Creator and in need of reconciliation with Him (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:12; 2 Cor. 5:20).

The Bible presents Jesus as the solution to our problem. It tells us that He died for our sins and, as Divine confirmation of this fact, that He was raised for our justification.{18} It assures us that *whoever* believes in Jesus will receive God’s forgiveness and the free gift of eternal life!{19}

The Edgar Cayce readings offer a very different perspective on man's fundamental problem and how it should be solved. Before exploring this perspective, however, it's helpful to remember that the doctrine of God presented in the readings is essentially pantheistic: God is *everything* and *everything* is God.{20} We've already shown that this view is substantially different from that of the Bible. And as Douglas Groothuis observes: "Differing descriptions of ultimate reality lead to differing descriptions of the human problem and to differing prescriptions for its solution."{21} Let's now see how the different descriptions of God in both the Bible and the readings contribute to their different perspectives on man's problem and its solution.

Having declared that God "projected from Himself the cosmos and souls,"{22} Thomas Sugrue goes on to observe: "At first there was little difference between the consciousness of the new individual and its consciousness of identity with God."{23} Over time, however, there was a "gradual weakening of the link between the two states of consciousness."{24} Eventually, "The individual became more concerned with . . . his own creations than God's. This was the fall in spirit . . ."{25}

According to Dr. Puryear, these unfortunate souls "were cutoff from an awareness of their oneness with the whole."{26} And while the full explanation is more involved, the readings seem to ultimately identify this ignorance of our oneness with God as our fundamental problem.{27} Of course, if this is so, the solution is rather obvious: we must remember and reaffirm this inherent oneness. Dr. Puryear claims that it is "God's quest" to bring us back into a remembrance of our divine heritage "and into full accord with Him."{28}

Our summary reveals that while the readings' perspective on man's problem and its solution is unique, it more strongly resembles the viewpoint of non-dualistic Hinduism than biblical Christianity. It is important that Christians be

aware of these differences.

Death and Beyond

One of the greatest human mysteries concerns the experience of death and what (if anything) happens afterward. The book of Hebrews declares, "it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). Most biblical scholars agree that this verse leaves no room for the doctrine of reincarnation – a doctrine explicitly affirmed in the Edgar Cayce readings. But if this is so, then how did Cayce conclude "that an acceptance of reincarnation in no way went against Holy Writ"?{29}

When Cayce gave his first "life reading" for Arthur Lammers, he spoke of reincarnation as a fact.{30} On waking from his trance and being told what he had said, Cayce was shocked. He even considered that the Devil might be trying to trick him.{31} But after thinking the matter over, Cayce eventually concluded that even Jesus had taught about reincarnation!{32}

In Matthew's Gospel, immediately after the appearance of Moses and Elijah to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, His disciples ask, "Why . . . do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" Jesus answers: "Elijah has come already, and they did not know him." But notice how the passage concludes: "Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist" (Matt. 17:10-13). Reflecting on this passage, Cayce wondered how the disciples could draw such a conclusion. Had they understood John to be the reincarnation of Elijah?{33} And why did they draw this inference so quickly? Had Jesus already taught them "the laws of reincarnation?"{34}

There are several difficulties with this position. First, the theological context of first century Judaism was decidedly *theistic* – not *pantheistic*.{35} We should thus be very careful before concluding that Jesus taught His disciples about reincarnation. His statement probably meant no more than that

John had come "in the spirit and power of Elijah" – just as the angel Gabriel had said He would.{36} Second, Jesus made His remarks *after* Elijah's appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration. But "since John had already . . . died by then, and since Elijah still had the same name and self-consciousness, Elijah had obviously not been reincarnated as John . . ."{37} If he had, then we should have read about Moses and *John* appearing to Jesus – not Moses and *Elijah*! "Third, Elijah does not fit the reincarnation model, for he did not die."{38} The Bible tells us that he was taken up into heaven while still alive!{39} And finally, such an interpretation would clearly contradict the passage in Hebrews cited earlier. Thus, I think we can safely conclude that Jesus did *not* teach the doctrine of reincarnation.

We've seen that while Edgar Cayce was a kind and humble man, the worldview of his readings is "world's apart" from that of the Bible. Christians must carefully avoid being taken captive by this philosophy.{40}

Notes

1. Jess Stearn, *Edgar Cayce: The Sleeping Prophet* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968).
2. Thomas Sugrue, *There is a River: The Story of Edgar Cayce,* rev. ed. (Virginia: A.R.E. Press, 1994), back cover.
3. Stearn, *Edgar Cayce,* 8.
4. Herbert B. Puryear, *The Edgar Cayce Primer* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 197.
5. Sugrue, *There is a River*, 305.
6. Puryear, *The Edgar Cayce Primer*, 229.
7. Ibid., 209.
8. Ibid., 209.
9. See, for example, Exodus 20:1-6 and Romans 1:18-25.
10. A rather unique feature of the particular version of pantheism presented in the Cayce readings is that "God" is viewed as, in some sense, personal. Dr. Puryear, in a discussion on meditation, writes, "The godhead we seek is a personal one . . ." (*The Edgar Cayce Primer,* 146). This certainly

distinguishes the pantheism of the readings from that of most New Age literature (which tends to conceive of "God" as impersonal, rather than personal). Nevertheless, the view of God presented in the Edgar Cayce readings is still pantheistic and, therefore, unbiblical.

11. Sugrue, *There is a River,* 307.
12. Cited in Sugrue, *There is a River,* 320.
13. Puryear, *The Edgar Cayce Primer*, 221.
14. This, according to New Testament scholar D.A. Carson, is the real meaning of John 3:16. See Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1998), 161.
15. Sugrue, *There is a River,* 314.
16. Ibid., 315-16.
17. Ibid., 316.
18. See 1 Corinthians 15:3 and Romans 1:4; 4:25.
19. See John 3:16; Romans 6:23; Colossians 1:14.
20. Puryear, *The Edgar Cayce Primer,* 209.
21. Douglas Groothuis, *Are All Religions One?* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 24.
22. Sugrue, *There is a River,* 307.
23. Ibid., 309.
24. Ibid., 310.
25. Ibid.
26. Puryear, *The Edgar Cayce Primer,* 213.

27. This seems evident from the fact that, before we can take the next step (i.e. living the Great Commandment) we must first recognize and reaffirm our oneness with the whole. In other words, before we can tackle our other problems, we must first overcome our primary problem: ignorance of our oneness with God. The following remarks from Dr. Puryear help make this clear:

> *If we get the sense of such a Reality and affirm God, the oneness of all force, then we may take the next step and address that which the readings evaluate as the ultimate agenda for mankind: the living of the great commandment. We are to love God with all our heart, mind, and soul, and our*

> *neighbor as ourselves. This Edgar Cayce represented as the ideal for all mankind and the answer to all the problems of mankind . . . A major hindrance and barrier to loving God and others lies in the inadequate understanding we have of ourselves, of our basic spiritual nature, of the spiritual nature of others . . . We must come to understand fully that we are spiritual beings and that all of us are children of God (Ibid., 229-30).*

Notice that it's only after we affirm this pantheistic notion of God that we may take the next step of living the Great Commandment (the solution to all our other problems). Thus, if we can first remember and reaffirm our oneness with God, we can then begin to recognize that, "As children of God, love is . . . the very nature of our being" (Ibid., 231). Armed with this knowledge, we can begin fulfilling the Great Commandment – and watch our problems disappear!

Of course, any Christian would certainly agree that fulfilling the Great Commandment is a worthy ideal for the human race. But there remains a serious problem. In the readings, both God and my neighbor have been redefined. They are supposed to be understood from within a pantheistic worldview. And, as I've already noted previously, this is quite different from a biblical worldview. Thus, what a Christian theist (on the one hand) and a pantheist (on the other) understand by fulfilling the Great Commandment is something very different indeed!

28. Puryear, *The Edgar Cayce Primer,* 213
29. Noel Langley,*Edgar Cayce on Reincarnation,* ed. Hugh Lynn Cayce (New York: Paperback Library, 1971), 176.
30. Sugrue, *There is a River*, 202.
31. Ibid., 210.
32. Ibid., 220.
33. Ibid., 222.
34. Langley,*Edgar Cayce on Reincarnation,* 173.
35. Norman L. Geisler and Ron Rhodes, *When Cultists Ask: A*

Popular Handbook on Cultic Misinterpretations (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 106
36. Ibid. See also Luke 1:17.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. See 2 Kings 2:11. See Colossians 2:8.

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See Also:

- **Edgar Cayce: The Sleeping (False) Prophet***Probe Answers Our E-Mail:*
  - You're a Christian Fundamentalist Narrow Thinker
  - How Dare You Judge Edgar Cayce!
  - You Can't Say Edgar Cayce was a Failure as a Prophet!
  - Family Members are into Freemasonry and Edgar Cayce!