

4-1-1975

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### Recommended Citation

Andrews, Judith S. (1975) "Reaching into the Beyond: A Psychic Experience," *New Directions*: Vol. 2: Iss. 2, Article 4.

Available at: <https://dh.howard.edu/newdirections/vol2/iss2/4>

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# Reaching into the Beyond

## A Psychic Experience

By Judith S. Andrews

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Dr. Leon Wright is a courtly man with a wry manner that suggests that he has been somewhere you haven't. For more than two decades at the School of Religion, he has conducted a kind of adventure into the unknown, teaching a course on the New Testament and the occult that is at once traditional and iconoclastic.

For most of his life, Dr. Wright has been a student of the occult. To hear him describe his research into the unknown is to listen to a space scientist discuss, with mathematical exactness, how he has set up outposts in the beyond. He is the true teacher; in fact, a tester of man's views and beliefs rather than the didactic lecturer trying to drum home his lesson for the day like so many ABC's.

"To know God, one must know all about man," he says, using his favorite dictum. He means this. If somehow he is conducting experiments on man's relationship to God and the occult, then his classroom is a laboratory, a place where a student can hold other worldly things up to the light in a test tube or under a microscope.

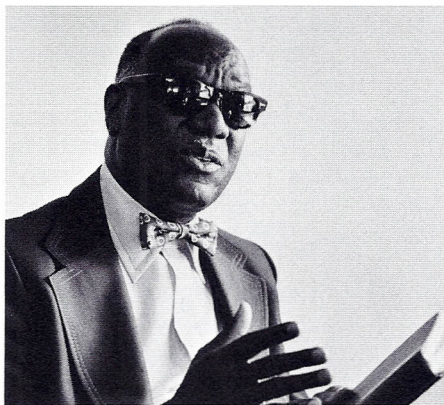
Dr. Wright, professor of New Testament Language and Literature, is often asked about the connection between psychic phenomena and religion. He insists that all aspects of man's reality, including occult phenomena, should be thoroughly studied in order to find the true nature of man. This, he says, is the only means of truly knowing God.

"Christianity has failed to make a difference in people's lives," he says, "because theologians are loath to deal openly and honestly with the concept of spirit and all its ramifications. Unfortunately, most theologians have no real understanding of what is meant by 'the concept of spirit.'"

"They talk about the Holy Spirit with great emotion on Sunday morning, but question them later about what they really mean and no answers can be given," he says. For example he cites the manner in which most theologians handle or mishandle the question of life after death.

Describing resurrection as "one of the

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Dr. Leon Wright

Wright observes that it is constantly confessed to in terms that consistently exalt shadow above substance.

"Thousands of scientifically-oriented individuals have given a plausibility to survival after death too long ignored by theologians and scientists alike," he insists.

To further explore "life after death," Dr. Wright turns to the philosophies and funerary habits of peoples of Africa and China. In particular, he mentions the Voodoo rituals in Haiti, where the loa, a Haitian Voodoo cult deity of African origin, is invited to possess its hungans and hunsis for very serious religious purposes.

On his feelings about reincarnation, he says, "Each individual has a history and future and sometimes it can be helpful to know what you were before." This is possible only with deep spiritual reflection, he explains.

Always, Dr. Wright returns to the roots of his philosophy: "Man must realize that he is part of the cosmic experience. We are spirits first, with the temporary loan of a physical body." It is his opinion that scientists' research in the "occult" have substantiated his belief that humans are spirits first.

One of the scientific examples he likes to use is called Kirlian photography. This is a method by which a specially designed camera is focused on the human body, resulting in the visualization of an aura or emanation extending some six

to eight inches from the body." Russian scientists at the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. witnessed this emanation and described it as a "radiance like the aurora borealis."

The aura reflected varied colors depending on the mood or physical well-being of the individual, and detected illnesses months in advance of actual manifestation. Even amputated limbs were shown to be intact under the camera, it is said.

According to the book *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain*, by Sheila Ostrander and Lynn Schroeder, the investigators of this process examined all types of materials and substances, each showing a completely different pattern of luminescence. Also, the varying fields of energy and the intensities of heat from these fields were scientifically measured to explain the superior healing touch of certain individuals.

What of astrology and its relation to religion? In keeping with Dr. Wright's conviction that all possibilities must be kept open, he talked about the work of Dr. Eugene Jonas, a psychiatrist who has done research on astrological birth control. Combining psychiatric observations, birth data, astronomy and astrology, Jonas drew up a life-time fertility table for women participating in his study. Based on his work, some scientists have established a distinct relationship among the position of the sun, moon, and the major planets at the time of a woman's birth. Jonas' work has been presented to the Czechoslovakian Academy of Science and has been studied by the International Society for Planned Parenthood.

Experiments in "astral projection," the ability of man to move out of his physical body and witness events and places of other times, also have important significance, philosophically and theologically. Dr. Wright said that in this state of projection, some people have been able to communicate with the dead. In the book, *Journeys Out of the Body*, the author, Robert Monroe, describes how through



experimental projections he was able to communicate with his deceased father.

Dr. Wright maintains that a clear understanding of occult experiences like astral projection are necessary for the study of religion, because it would be impossible otherwise to account for the visions, trances and other phenomena experienced by prophets as written in the Bible.

"How else could one account for the reported manipulation of space by an Ezekiel or a Philip?," he asked. "And certainly one can call to mind the trance involvements of both Peter and Paul in Acts."

The only alternative is to explain prophetic experience as a unique occurrence in history. This Dr. Wright is unwilling to accept. If people search deeply enough within their own resources of spirit, they can experience spiritual and psychic phenomena, says Dr. Wright who calls this prospect "the real dynamics of a cosmic experience under God."

For Dr. Wright, extrasensory experience is that "which is short of God." He calls it a "half-way house," with the real challenge being the cosmic experience with God. How can one transcend the prosaic to experience this "cosmic reality?" The answer, according to him, is to be "cosmically attuned."

"The attuned individual is one with a pure heart, which longs within all its parts to do the will of God in impulse, motive and act. At this point of hungry identification with the will of God, one becomes aware of his state as Son of God.

"From that moment on such an individual becomes ultimately aware of reality in often its minutest terms. He sees entities, auras and angels, and perceives in this awareness the intended oneness and unity with God."

Totally confident in his research, Dr. Wright often jokes about his self-acknowledged "controversial" status at the School of Religion.

"My students give me quite a bit of flack the first semester," he smiles, "but I understand that encounters with the concept of spirit can be quite painful, especially for those from traditional church backgrounds. By the second semester, however, they begin to adjust. At least they become more open."

Even though some students take exception to Dr. Wright's theories, it's not uncommon to find him in the halls of the School of Religion surrounded by questioners.

He tends to be embarrassed by the devotion of some of his students. One student walked in during the interview and was anxious to tell this reporter of his

"I'm always trying to bring others here to study at the foot of the master," the student said.

The reference to Dr. Wright as "the master" was generally mentioned in context with meditation and deep spiritual reflection. For example, in an interview with a reporter from the *The Washington Post*, Dr. Wright said he was told by his Buddhist guru that he had reached a state of deep reflection achieved by only one in 10,000 Buddhists.

He studied meditation in Burma when he worked there as cultural attache at the U. S. embassy.

Concerned with the growing interest in meditation, Dr. Wright feels people can easily be exploited by those who claim to know The Method. He said he wouldn't recommend meditation "if it's just to lower the blood pressure or increase the power of memory. Forget it unless it has a deeper reach."

He talked about his ministry to the dying and his sadness that people worry so much over it. "All this stir about euthanasia and pulling the plug, it's too bad people don't realize that there is no death."

Somewhat reluctant initially to talk about the tremendous amount of time he spends in hospitals with the sick and dying, he was urged by a student to talk about "some of his miracles."

Dr. Wright was told of a young woman who had been virtually immobile in the hospital for six weeks after two brain operations. He was urged by a former student, now a bishop, to see the woman and give "a spiritual diagnosis."

"When I entered the hospital room, I could feel the spiritual pulse," Dr. Wright said. "The spirit was there but was living outside the woman's body because of the severe pain she was having. I began to talk to her spirit by asking if she wanted to finish her life's work."

The bishop and the woman's husband entered the room and talked to the spirit in similar terms. This method of having more than one person in on prayers is what Dr. Wright calls "causal nexus" or "the chain."

"The doctors were baffled when this woman rallied that afternoon after so many weeks of unconsciousness," he said.

Another case Dr. Wright mentioned was that of a young girl who came to him after doctors had told her of a serious growth in her body requiring extensive surgery.

After weeks of working with the girl and teaching her about the dynamics of spirit, she experienced "a strange sensation to

her body during a flight to a military hospital for the operation."

"When she arrived at the hospital, the doctors could no longer find a medical problem and diagnosed her cure as a miracle," he said.

Many pass these case studies off as coincidental, Dr. Wright says, and for this reason he avoids talking freely about this aspect of his work. His reticence on the subject is also due to a fear that people might think of him "as some sort of cultist figure."

In talking to him, one senses that Dr. Wright feels the time has come for people to hear him out, perhaps because of the endless rash of crises experienced lately in this country. When asked if he felt "chosen" for his task, he replied:

"I don't like that word (chosen) because everyone is chosen to do something—the problem is just finding out what that something is."

He refers to one's chosen work in life as a "cosmic blueprint" or "pre-fetal contract." Helping people find the means to discovering their blueprint is the mission of his "experimental fellowship," called the Church Without Walls. This congregation meets every Saturday morning for two hours and focuses on the path to spiritual and therapeutic dynamics "for optimum performance in everyday life."

The Saturday morning service is the only actual "pastoring" done by Dr. Wright. His ministry is very individualized, whereby he acts as pastor for individuals who have come his way and feel an affinity for his kind of religion. To see him in a setting with "his flock" is to see a sort of charisma that is impossible to explain.

At a session I attended, there were more than 75 other people present, a heterogeneous group—old and young, male and female, white and Black, Protestant and Moslem. No ritual or music. Dr. Wright stands at a small podium in front of a blackboard which he uses often during the lecture.

He tells his congregation of the risk involved in searching out one's cosmic blueprint: "Of course there is certain risk, but the universe guarantees protection for the pure in heart. Cosmos insures that fire won't burn you, nor will water drown you, despite the obvious discomforts."

After the lecture, the congregation offers names of people for whom prayers are said aloud. Also, those who feel the need to be "touched" by the healing hands of the "gifted" come forward to Dr. Wright. Those with the healing hands grasp each other at the shoulder and form a ring around the person to be touched. Then in unison they recite a prayer for healing . . .