

# **Will Activism Slay Principle?**

**by Dr. Arthur W. Chang**

The present intention of our national leadership, with the enthusiastic support of many of our churches, to enter the field of social activism should be of grave concern to us all. Our governing Core Council has asked us to discuss the issue of gay marriage that has led to my examination of Principle vs. Activism because this is a more primary concern like being alive is more crucial than owning a home. Gay support is high in our church and rightly so, in my opinion. Nonetheless, this article is not about gay marriage, but what this kind of activism portends for us all, which seems to me an inevitable move away from being a prayer-based institution. Good people will sometimes disagree and this is such an instance.

## **Are Principle and Prayer Dead?**

Will activism slay Principle as the fundamental work of the Science of Mind? Are we witnessing in our time the demise of the institution of the United Church of Religious Science as we know it? Can this be the death of Principle and the birth of activism? Is Cain, the activist, about to slay Abel, the principle-centered person, again?

Mythic themes repeat themselves in everyday life with monotonous regularity, but most of us in the midst of it are as blind to them as fish are to the water in which they are immersed. Jesus, in the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, says, "The kingdom of God is spread out upon the earth and men do not see it." Seeing principles clearly in our culture, where the neon signs and billboards of issues vie for our attention, is an acute problem for the modern person. Science of Mind serves an important function in this way.

Let's get real! Would you accept the Science of Mind teaching that prayer can change conditions from a group of people who themselves abandon that principle to become activists for change? Would you buy gym equipment from someone who is out of shape, or vitamins from someone who is in poor health? Should we not be shining examples for what we teach?

## **Are King's and Gandhi's Methods Appropriate for the Science of Mind?**

Make no mistake about it, I am not arguing against people being activists for any cause they believe in. I am simply arguing that the Science of Mind as an institution, and as Dr. Holmes left it, has one way to bring about change and still remain true to itself-prayer, or spiritual mind treatment. If prayer doesn't work we can fold up our tents and go home, then bring on activism!

Once activism becomes our method of change- as it was for Martin Luther King, Jr.-it may be wonderful and right, but it won't be the Science of Mind. As Dr. King and Gandhi entered the political arena of "for and against," "us and them," so will we. Furthermore, although we can easily admire Dr. King and Gandhi as excellent examples for activism, by contrast we are devastated by activist groups, like Al Qaeda, that feel equally justified and religious in their case as we, ours. As a result of what we may view as bad activism, the horror of war is now a part of the "normal" fabric of daily civilian life. Such are the theme and variations of activism.

As activism is appropriate to most social groups, including church groups like the Catholic Church, so is it inappropriate for the New Thought spiritual organizations that teach that prayer can change conditions. If we became an activist organization for social change could not our critics ask, "if prayer can bring about change, why are you not depending on it? Surely, that must be the test of your faith?" The sad fact is this assertion would be right. Dr. Holmes says, "Either prayer works for all or it works for none."

But are we not justified to say, "Treat and move your feet"? Of course. We must take action in life. My argument is that our organization should empower others to act in principle and take action but not itself be an organization for action in that way. My model for action is one of healing like a hospital that does not stand in judgment of its patients but works to heal all that come to them. That is our mission in the world.

Thus, King and Gandhi were right to use social activism, for they did not teach that prayer is the means for social or any other change. They didn't teach "Change your thinking and change your life." We, however, are the followers of the path of Religious Science and they are not. Dr. Holmes says, "Those who abandon their principles in a time of need never knew them." If Jesus was right in observing that "You can't worship God and mammon," then he is right now also. In short, we can't have it both ways.

**Taking It to the Streets!**

The theme for the 2004 Gathering in March was "Taking It to the Streets." Keynote speaker Dr. Johnnie Colemon warned that we better make sure that we take care of our street before we take it to the streets, and that we need to know whose streets we will be taking it to. This is sound advice from a great and wise leader in New Thought. I intend that my activism is in the spirit of taking care of our street. Our Core Council is doing what they think is best for our institution and it is my intention to support our leadership. A part of that support is to remind them in new ventures to follow the wise proverb that says, "Look before you leap."

It may be true that the Science of Mind has not grown in the world to anyone's jaw-dropping astonishment. But to have even a small group of prayer-centered people as the practitioners of the world, holding the consciousness for centers that are safe havens for people who hold contrary social political views, is a great act that belies our diminutive size. Here, in these centers or churches, such people can come together and hear Principle taught, and thereby gain the use of this "pearl of great price" in thinking about their lives and the lives of others in love and compassion.

But once activism sets in, out will flee people with contrary views. Is it no longer wise to observe Dr. Holmes' thought that the Science of Mind is a system that teaches people how to think, not what to think? If this is true, then to make activism part of our mission in the world is to turn the Science of Mind world upside down.

### **A Principle-Centered Institution**

Dr. Holmes developed a principle-centered institution, free from dogma and superstition. While there may be nothing superstitious about activism, there will be something inevitably dogmatic about it. Activism trades pluralism for a fixed, single-mindedness about issues upon which people will differ. It is action-based not being-based and will demand that the placards be taken to the streets with the appropriate sit-ins and whatnots. It is confrontational.

If it is, where will unconditional love be? Will this be Science of Mind? What will happen to change your thoughts, change your life?

### **Does History Matter Anymore?**

Is the past really dead as it is sometimes treated? Can we learn from history to be wise in the present when we confront a fork in the road?

Historically, Science of Mind developed as a Principle-Centered, Prayer-Centered teaching and not a institution for activism for change. Historically, Dr. Holmes was suspicious of institutions, and initially saw his body of work, called the Science of Mind, as an enhancement to whatever tradition one came from. He once said, "We are teachers rather than preachers, and because we are teachers we are an order of practitioners." We are like spiritual therapists or doctors. These take care of the people who come to them to be healed; they don't cast themselves in the role of social activists for change. Taking sides means, being against the other side. Even if we won't admit it, others will perceive it as such. For them, perception is reality.

This doesn't mean that we can't express opinions and make social comments. It does mean we should avoid, at the national level, activism that threatens to derail our principle-centeredness and consequently our inclusiveness. If not, we will split apart.

In a speech by Ernest Holmes on the evening of January 8, 1959, a year before his death, Dr. Holmes addressed the topic, "Our Mission to the World." He says ". . . let us keep our movement free. We are giving birth to the next great impulsion of the world-and for the first time in history: free from dogma, fear, superstition, materialism, and all that is built on ignorance and the denial of God. The Universe in which we live is a spiritual system now; we are spiritual beings now. In such a degree as any one of us bears witness in his mind to the 'divine fact,' the tomb is open and the dead come forth.

"This is our mission in the world, this is our message. Never forget it. The world is waiting. Waiting, longing, [and] hoping cause the mind of every living soul to sing the same song. There is something listening to and striving toward that which it knows exists, and it is our office in joy, in peace, in communion, and in the sweetness of friendship to so live, to so love, to so aspire, and to so realize. The transformation takes place here. You don't have to wonder if it will take place out there; the world will come when enough of us see through the night into the celestial light 'that shineth more and more, into the perfect day.'"

Dr. Holmes did not intend to have the final word on the movement, and no one will along this unending spiral of evolution. Changes are the way of life. But in a world where opportunities abound ad nauseam for all of us to take sides on an endless number of issues, would it not be a great blessing to have a "United Church" that really lived up to the "united" in its name, and be for all of us, the still center where

principle is taught, love reaches out to all, and where healing is effected through prayer? If we would attempt to live up to this ideal then the issue-driven world would be able to tackle its issues more effectively, knowing that there is a God-center which stands on principle that lets the sun of its wisdom shine upon the good and the evil, and the rain of its love fall upon the just and the unjust.