

Ernest Holmes: The First Religious Scientist

by
James Reid

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James Written by James Reid

"There is a power for good in the universe greater than you are - and you can use it."

The man, who first stated that positive belief, choosing those exact words, was speaking to those sharing the Twentieth Century with him. Because of him countless others have discovered and countless millions yet unborn will discover a rewarding awareness of their infinite potential.

A lifelong searcher and student himself, he was inspired to write a book that would become a textbook, a guidebook, for other searchers and students. His book, *The Science of Mind*, correlated "the laws of science, the opinions of philosophy and the revelations of religion applied to the needs and the aspirations of man." This correlation, something completely new to the world, was also the beginning of the Institute of Religious Science and School of Philosophy, Inc. where he and others were to teach and inspire. This, in turn would lead to the beginning of the Church of Religious Science, later to become the United Church of Religious Science.

As he always insisted, he did not legislate any of the laws that govern the universe and he did not invent a secret new way by which mankind can partake of the unlimited good in the universe. He sought only to explain the infallibility of the laws and express the essence of the ever existent way. No one before him had done that. His work was to make this modest man "a man for the ages" a pioneering guide to all humankind.

His name was Ernest Holmes. He was born January 21, 1887, on a small farm near Lincoln, Maine. His parents, William and Anna Heath Holmes, had nine sons. The youngest was named after a poetic young preacher of that area, Rev. Ernest Shurtleff, who later wrote the hymn, "Lead On, O King Eternal." In the order of their arrival, Ernest Holmes' older brothers were: Walter, Luther, William, Charles, Harry (who died in infancy), Fenwicke, Guy and Jerome.

He acquired "the basics" of education in rural schools, grammar school in Lincoln and Gould's Academy in Bethel, Maine. He once said, "I quit school when I was about 15 and didn't go back except to study public speaking." From 1908 to 1910, working in a store to pay his way, he attended the Leland Powers School of Expression in Boston.

The rest of his prodigious learning came from an insatiable search for what would be most meaningful for any man to know. He was an omnivorous student of and finally an authority on the universal truths and imperishable ideas manifested through the ages in literature, art, science, philosophy and religion. He spent a lifetime synthesizing his discoveries. The result, *The Science of Mind*. Near the close of his life, he talked to an interviewer about his own beginnings and the beginnings of Religious Science.

His Method of Learning

Asked about his quitting school at 15, he said: "I didn't want to be taken care of, so I went to work. What I have gathered has been from reading, studying and thinking, working, experiencing. It is a long, laborious, tough method but it pays off. I don't believe there is really another method for me.

"What you will really learn in life will be what you tell yourself, in a language you understand that you accept because it is rational enough to accept and inspirational enough to listen to with feeling.

"From the beginning I was a non-conformist, asking so many questions I drove my relative's crazy." (But he never stopped asking, then or later.) "Fortunately, I was brought up by a mother who refused to have fear taught in her family. New England, theologically, was pretty strict but she was a wise woman and she determined we should never be taught there was anything to be afraid of . . ."

Except for that inner drive to ask questions, he said: "I wasn't strange in any particular way." He saw no visions, had no hallucinations. Even at an early age he started to study Emerson on his own initiative. About Emerson he said: "Studying Emerson was like drinking water to me. I have studied Emerson all my life."

At the Leland Powers School in Boston, some of his fellow students were Christian Scientists; an instructor was a reader in the Mother Church. He became interested in some of their thinking, especially about the healings they believed possible by those who prayed in a certain way. If such things were possible to them, he reasoned, such things must also be possible to others.

Long afterward, he elaborated on this reaction: "Anything anyone has ever done, anybody can do; there can be no secrets in nature. This I have always believed. There is no special providence, no God who says, "I am going to tell you what I didn't tell any others."

He came to California in 1912 on an exploratory visit. Two years before, his brother Fenwicke had sought a warmer climate for reasons of health. He had written Ernest glowing reports about the Los Angeles suburb of Venice, where he had become a "home missionary" and built a small, thriving church.

Ernest, too, liked the climate, he liked "helping out" on Sunday in the church and he found a job he liked, as a purchasing agent for the city of Venice. What he especially liked about the job was that it allowed him plenty of time to study.

He found Los Angeles an exciting place, a growing city of progressive people, in a ferment of expanding their horizons, not only physically but mentally and spiritually. It was a community of stimulating intellectuals. Anything anyone might want to study was taught there.

He said, many years later: "I began to read and study everything I could get hold of no one thing. I started from the very beginning with the thought that I didn't

want to take one bondage away from myself and create another. I have always been very careful about that.

We happen to have the most liberal spiritual Movement the world has ever seen, yet it is tied together by the authority of the ages and the highlights of the spiritual evolution of the human race, all of which I have become familiar with, over a long period of time, studying it and thinking about it . . ."

How the Speaking Started

An engineer who frequented his purchasing office became curious about the books on philosophy and metaphysics and assorted other subjects he had around him and asked to borrow some of them. After a while, the engineer suggested inviting a few friends to his house one evening and having Ernest talk to them. "That was the first talk I ever gave," he later revealed. It led to others, in the homes of other friends. One evening, a lady informed him that she had told the librarian at the big Metaphysical Library, then at Seventh and Grand that he would talk there the following Thursday. "Talk on what?" he asked. Her answer was, "What you have been talking about to us here. You're better than any of the people we hear there."

He investigated. The hall rented for \$1.00 a class and the admission price per person was 25 cents. He decided to talk on Troward and the Edinburgh Lectures. Enough people showed up and stayed so that he went home with a \$5.00 gold piece after paying his rental. It was a heady experience.

The year was 1916. Within the next two years he was speaking to thousands of people a week in Los Angeles. He wondered how he might fare in other places and began speaking around the country. He soon had a national reputation as a man who stimulated others to think for themselves. Wherever he went, people wanted to hear his message. They were ready for what he was already embarked upon, the great synthesis that would result in the book, *The Science of Mind*.

He said later, "It's true that you learn from yourself in doing." He decided to halt the long speaking tours, confine his speaking to the Los Angeles area and concentrate on completion of the book. The year was 1925.

Perhaps because he lacked a formal education, he never considered himself a professional writer. Yet he wrote prolifically and most persuasively on every subject that deeply interested him. His first book, published in 1919, bore the title, *Creative Mind*. Even that early, he was beginning to find answers to his impelling search.

The Science of Mind was first published in 1926. (His revised edition now translated into numerous other languages including Japanese was first issued in 1938.)

And the Consciousness Grew

In 1926 he started speaking each Sunday morning in a theatre in the Ambassador Hotel that seated 625. Within a year, latecomers couldn't get in. The Sunday morning talks were moved in November, 1927, to the Ebell Theatre which seated 1295. Within a year that auditorium was too small.

During the next few years progressive moves were made, one being to the beautiful Sala de Oro of the Biltmore Hotel. In 1934 the services were moved to the large Wiltern Theatre, at Wilshire and Western, with a seating capacity of more than 2800. There too before long hundreds were turned away every Sunday.

In 1926, far-sighted friends, important men in Los Angeles, had begun to urge him to form a corporation and organize for the inevitable growth of what he was teaching. He said, "No, I don't want to do that. I don't want to start a new religion or be responsible for it."

But the friends persisted. As he expressed it later, "They argued this was something they thought valuable and the greatest thing in the world and finally convinced me. A Board of Governors was chosen and we became incorporated as a non-profit religious and educational organization, The Institute of Religious Science and School of Philosophy, Inc. it was called." The incorporation date was February, 1927. Ernest Holmes was 40 years old. The purpose of the Institute was to furnish instruction not only in the Science of Mind with Ernest Holmes' book as the textbook but also to offer lectures by recognized authorities on diversified, allied subjects.

Soul-Searching, Mind-Searching

Like the university professors who soon were speaking at this new center of learning, throngs of students were attracted there by its climate of soul-searching as well as mind searching. Both instructors and students discovered that this unassuming, self-educated, American-born philosopher, Ernest Holmes, was very practical and highly inspirational. This discovery was something they wanted to share with others.

In other ways 1927 was to be a milestone year for both Religious Science and its founder. Headquarters and offices, including Practitioner offices, as well as a library and lecture halls, were established at 2511 Wilshire Boulevard.

Organizing the Institute led to the launching only a few months later of a monthly magazine, Religious Science. The Institute was not yet equipped to enroll all the would be students who wanted to attend. The magazine was created in an effort to sustain and build the interest that the Institute already had generated by word-of-mouth.

Vol. 1, No. 1 of Religious Science there was this announcement by Ernest Holmes. "The purpose of this magazine will be to instruct ethically, morally and religiously from a scientific viewpoint of life and its meaning. A semi-religious periodical,

ethical in its tendency, moral in its tone, philosophical in its viewpoint, it will seek to promote that universal consciousness of life which binds all together in one great Whole. It will also be the purpose of Religious Science to present to its readers a systematic and comprehensive study of the subtle powers of mind and spirit, insofar as they are now known and to show how such powers may be consciously used for the betterment of the individual and the human race."

Like so many other ideas of Ernest Holmes that first issue contained features that have endured. One was a meditation for each day of the month; it was a one-line meditation, at the top of a page, in the first issue. Also, there was a listing of Religious Science practitioners. That first issue carried eight names, one was Anna Holmes, Ernest's mother.

A Statement of Purpose

In October 1929, the magazine was to acquire a new cover design, a new makeup inside, and a new name, Science of Mind Magazine. It was a reflection of the proven appeal of this new teaching and the book that explained it. A new "announcement" assured all readers; As one of many channels for giving to the world the invaluable truths of Science of Mind, this magazine will, to the utmost ability of the organization behind it, serve men and women everywhere seeking to help them realize their greatest good, not alone in a far-distant future, but here and now.

The magazine recently celebrated its 68th birthday. From the beginning, it has been sent out into the marketplace by those confident of its appeal to anyone willing to listen. Today it has a world-wide circulation. Each issue is read by many thousands.

But let us return for a moment to 1927 lest we forget another event that made that a special year for Ernest Holmes. On October 23, 1927 in Los Angeles, he was married to widow Hazel Durkee Foster. They were to be inseparable companions for thirty years.

On April 16, 1935, the organization founded by Ernest Holmes was reincorporated as the Institute of Religious Science and Philosophy.

On August 1, 1935, the Institute, having outgrown its quarters on Wilshire Boulevard at the corner of Carondelet Street moved to 3251 West Sixth Street. A new home office building named The Holmes Center was completed on this site in 1990.

Recognized the World Over

In 1945, in recognition of his book, This Thing Called Life, Ernest Holmes was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Philosophy by India's famed Andhra

Research University. Among several other honorary degrees bestowed on him in recognition of his writings and his work were L.H.D. in 1945 from what is now the California College of Medicine, University of California at Irvine and Litt.D. in 1949 from the Foundation Academic University of Spiritual Understanding, Venice, Italy. Even earlier, in 1942, he was named Commander of the Cross by the Association of the Humanitarian Grand Prize of Belgium and in 1944 he was named honorary member of the Eugene Field Society, a national group of authors and journalists.

In 1949, he began a popular radio program at 4 p.m. each Sunday on the Mutual network. It too, was titled, "This, Thing Called Life." Each Sunday his opening words were, "There is a power for good in the universe greater than you are and you can use it." Millions heard him, millions heeded him.

The growth of the Institute and the number of its graduates; the demand for edition after edition of Ernest Holmes' book, *The Science of Mind*; the constantly increasing readership of *Science of Mind Magazine*; the response to his radio program; and the interest shown in talks on *Science of Mind* by other speakers, wherever they appeared, all led to a change of name for the non-profit religious and educational corporation, Institute of Religious Science. On January 4, 1954, it became officially the Church of Religious Science.

By then, even Ernest Holmes was convinced that the world wanted such a church. As he expressed it later, "I finally came to see that all this had to be organized so it wouldn't fall apart. And we have a wonderful, democratic, responsible organization, governed by a Board made up of laymen as well as Ministers."

In 1956 a special bequest made possible a half-hour TV program, "This Thing Called Life," once a week for 26 weeks, with Ernest Holmes visible, as well as audible, to still another fascinated audience. For the greater part of each half-hour, he was alone in front of the camera, not by his choice but by viewers' choice.

On May 21, 1957, he lost his chosen life-companion.

Founder's Church Dedicated

In January, 1960, he presided at the dedication of Founder's Church of Religious Science, Los Angeles. It was built at a cost of more than \$1,500,000 on property at the corner of Sixth and Berendo Streets.

The magnificent organ in Founder's Sanctuary is a memorial to Hazel Holmes and on the lower level of Founder's is a beautiful chapel, serene and inspiring like the mind of Ernest Holmes, The Holmes Memorial Chapel.

Ernest Holmes made his transition to the next experience on April 7, 1960, in Los Angeles. He left no children. But he left all mankind an enduring legacy; the way of life he called Religious Science.

On that way of life, he said this in 1958, "We have launched a movement which in the next 100 years will be the great new religious impulsion of modern times, far exceeding in its capacity to envelop the world anything that has happened since Mohammedanism started. We have to have the same faith in what we teach and practice that the scientist has or the gardener has and when that great simplicity shall have plumbed and penetrated this density of ours, this human stolidness and stupidity, this debauchery of the intellect and the soul, something new and wonderful will happen. It is the only thing that will keep the world from destroying itself. . ."