

What My Church Actually Teaches About God

Glen Clarkson

“**W**E BELIEVE in God the Father, infinite in wisdom, power, and love, whose mercy is over all His works, and whose will is ever directed to His children's good. . . .” This is the opening statement of an Affirmation of Faith that is often used during services in Methodist churches. This sets forth in very brief form the basic beliefs of the people known as Methodists; though this affirmation states quite simply these professed beliefs, its use does not insure the application of these truths. To really understand the implications of this affirmation, we must have a knowledge of God and the effects of His controls over all of His creation. To know the relationship of man to God and to all of creation, we must seek an understanding of the existence and nature of God. Although it would take several volumes to record everything that the Methodist Church teaches about God, in the succeeding paragraphs I shall attempt to set forth briefly what we teach about God in my church.

The very nature of man points toward the existence of God. To say that man is an animal is a statement of the truth, but to say that man is just an animal is an absurdity, even though we may sometimes desire the lazy life of a cow. Man in his quest for perfection tends to exemplify those traits which the Christian faith ascribes to God—the capacity for love and goodness, wisdom, and the power to create. The theory of evolution of man is acceptable only if there is a supreme power, a mind, spirit, or personality to direct the formation of man. This power, mind, spirit or personality is that which we call “God.” In Genesis we find it written, “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish . . . fowl . . . cattle, and over all the earth. . . .” Man has been placed in the position of ruler here on earth; man has jurisdiction over the birds and beasts and over the crops that he raises. But even though man has attained great knowledge, he can never acquire the powers of God. Man through all his manifold powers can never create life. Even as the old proverb, “Water cannot rise higher than its source,” man cannot rise above God.

In the discussion of the existence of God as it is indicated through the nature of man, some things have been mentioned concerning the nature of God. Who or what is God? This is one of the oldest questions of mankind. God as the power or spirit that controls our world does not need a physical body; in order to be a personal God unto each man, there is a need for means of expression but not

necessarily for a visible nature. This expression of the wondrous power of God can be found in all of nature, history, and human experience. The greatest revelation of God to man was through the appearance of Jesus Christ on earth. If God is personal, this means that man can have a personal fellowship with God; this brings the prayer, life, and service of each individual to God and others into a sublimely meaningful position. This relationship imparts a challenge to all to strive toward the goal of Christian perfection that was taught by Christ, "Be ye therefore perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect."

The religious strivings of man indicate that God, although capable of complete support, does make demands upon the lives of men. God has given man all that he possesses, even life itself. Our God in His boundless mercy is not a vindictive God; He is a God of compassion and love. The character of God is both the warrant for and the standard of all Christian behavior. In the tenth verse of the Fifty-ninth Psalm, we find the words, "The God of my mercy shall prevent me." The word *prevent*, according to Webster, once meant to make impossible by prior action; by prior action means to go before. In the light of this definition, this passage could be interpreted, "My God in His loving kindness shall meet me at every corner." This is God's world, and He can be trusted to exercise His divine leadership. When things go wrong we can still look to God and know that we can trust in His love and mercy; as Paul said, "All things work together for good to them that love God." The man of faith knows that God is going to have the last word in our world, and he rests the future in God's hands.

His Father's World

Linda Seidle

THAT MORNING Billy awoke long before dawn. He lay motionless, his wide-open eyes staring into the familiar darkness of his room. Today he was to be initiated into that mysterious brotherhood to which his father belonged and of which he so longed to be a part. Today his father, the tallest, bravest, strongest man in Billy's world, was to take him hunting. In spite of the promise of a week ago and the numerous reassurances since, Billy tensely awaited the masculine sound of his father's voice summoning him. Maybe he'd forgotten or even changed his mind; maybe he'd decided that a boy of nine was too young to participate in such an adventure. But I'm ready, thought Billy fiercely, I'm ready to go with the men. I won't stay home again this time! I won't! Through the window Billy watched the East lighten into grayness and saw the pale sun begin to appear in the bleak November sky; and, as the sky grew brighter, his hopes grew dimmer. The sun had shown its full circumference above the horizon, and Billy had resigned himself to