

Christian Science

by Craig Branch

Founder: Mary Baker Eddy.

Founding date: August 23, 1879.

Scriptures: *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures, Miscellaneous Writings, Manual of the Mother Church.*

Official Publications: *Retrospection and Introspection, Christian Science Journal, Christian Science Sentinel.*

Organizational Structure: The founding and pillar church in Boston serves as headquarters and is governed by a Board of Directors. All other churches are considered branches of the "Mother Church." Instead of preachers, Christian Science uses readers who read prescribed passages from the Bible followed by an interpretive reading from *Science & Health*.

Unique Terms: Christian Science utilizes "practitioners" who pray for the sick. Eddy believed in "Malicious Animal Magnetism" (M.A.M.), which is negative mental energy or power, on the level of black magic. "Reading Rooms" are local Christian Science libraries where members go to read Eddy's works to aid their spiritual evolution.

Other Names: The Church of Christ, Scientist (official name).

HISTORY

Christian Science founder, Mary Baker Eddy was born in Bow, New Hampshire, in 1821. Her parents were devout Christians and she joined a Congregational Church at age 17. She was chronically sick growing up with many ailments including paralysis, hysteria, seizures and convulsions. At 22, she married her first of three husbands, George Glover, who died within 6 months from yellow fever. Following Glover's death, she began to be involved in mesmerism (hypnosis), and occult practices of spiritualism and clairvoyance (Ruth Tucker, *Another Gospel*, p. 152). Still ill, she married Daniel Patterson, a dentist and homeopathic practitioner, in 1853. It was during this time she met mental healer P. P. Quimby, whose influence would shape her belief of Christian Science. Quimby believed that illness and disease could be cured through positive thoughts and healthy attitudes, by changing one's beliefs about the illness. She claimed that Quimby cured her; she suddenly improved, but later the symptoms returned (*Ibid.*, p. 155).

Mrs. Patterson (Eddy) developed a "psychic dependence" on Quimby, drawing on his spiritual presence, claiming even visitations by his apparition (*Ibid.*). After Quimby's death in 1866, she determined to carry on his work. The event that Mrs. Eddy claimed as the inauguration of Christian Science, occurred in February of 1866. She claimed to have had a near fatal fall on icy pavement but was instantly healed when "the healing Truth dawned upon my senses," and the divine healing ministry was born (*Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 24; *Science and Health*, p. 107). Testimony from her attending physician as well as other correspondence from Mrs. Eddy at that time strongly dispute Mrs. Eddy's "official" version of those events (Anthony Hoekema, *Christian Science*, pp. 12-13). During the formative stages the church saw many rivalries, scandals, and dissident movements. One of the dissidents was Emma Hopkins who, as an independent Christian Science leader, taught Charles and Myrtle Filmore who later founded the Unity School of Christianity. Because Mrs. Eddy wanted to spread Christian Science, especially to the upper class, she increased her control over all aspects of the movement and would not tolerate any disloyalty (Georgine Milmine, *The Life of Mary Baker G. Eddy*, p. 234 ff.).

In spite of these problems, Christian Science began to grow and experience some success. Membership increased from one 50 member church in 1882 to 2466 churches and 350,000 members in 1932. By 1972 they had grown to 3200 churches. Its wealth and influence increased as well partly due to the publishing of a respected newspaper, *The Christian Science Monitor*. The church nevertheless began to experience decline due to several factors. There have been numerous well publicized criminal and civil lawsuits brought against Christian Scientist parents who allowed their children to die of curable diseases by neglecting medical treatment in favor of "spiritual healing" (*Another Gospel*, p. 174). There are significant and complicated issues raised over the right to exercise religious beliefs free of governmental infringement, versus the state's "compelling interest" in protecting seriously ill minors from neglect.

Also controversy intensified in 1992 when it was discovered "that the church had secretly transferred \$46.5 million from endowments and pension funds to help cover huge losses on the Monitor [TV] Channel," which had lost over \$325 million (*Chicago Tribune*, January 27, 1993, p. 2). Additionally, there were losses of \$36 million and the resulting termination of *World Monitor*, a newspaper begun in 1988. *The Christian Science Monitor* is said to be losing \$13 million annually (Martin Gardner, *The Healing Revelations of Mary Baker Eddy*, p. 218).

More internal controversy occurred in 1993. A book, *The Destiny of the Mother Church*, written by a former President of the Mother Church, Bliss Knapp, was published and promoted by the church's board in return for the Knapp family estate bequest of \$98 million. Knapp, who was a church leader and close friend of Mrs. Eddy, wrote that Mrs. Eddy was the fulfillment of the coming of the Holy Spirit foretold in John 16, the literal manifestation of God and the prophesied second-coming of Christ (pp. 213, 274-278). Moreover he claimed that these teachings were affirmed by Mrs. Eddy herself (pp. 267-278). Though put forward by the official publishing arm of the church, this teaching is considered heresy by many in the church. Over twenty percent of the individual Reading Rooms refused to carry it. In addition to controversy, the decline in followers could be attributed to the inability of the faithful, many of whom are now quite elderly, to consistently attract new, young members. The church's membership shrunk to an estimated 150,000 by 1993.

DOCTRINE

The Trinity: Mrs. Eddy frequently oscillated in her writings between a personal and impersonal view of God. Even though Mrs. Eddy denied it, Christian Science teaches at least implicitly, if not explicitly, a pantheistic view of the nature of God: "God is All-in-all. God is good. Good is Mind. God, Spirit, being all, nothing is matter" (*Science and Health*, p. 113). Christian Science clearly repudiates the Trinitarian Godhead: "The theory of three persons in one God (that is, a personal Trinity or Tri-unity) suggests polytheism, rather than the one ever-present I Am" (*Science and Health*, p. 256). "Life, Truth, and Love constitutes the triune Person called God...God the Father-Mother; Christ the spiritual idea of sonship; divine Science or the Holy Comforter" (*Science and Health*, p. 331-332).

God the Son: Christian Science denies that Jesus Christ is God incarnate. It denies that Jesus is one Person with two natures — fully God and fully man. Christian Science presents Jesus Christ in terms of a Gnostic duality: "The spiritual Christ was infallible; Jesus as material manhood was not Christ" (*Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 84). "Christ as the true spiritual idea, is the ideal of God now and forever..." (*Science & Health*, p. 361). "The Christ is incorporeal, spiritual..." while, "The corporeal [physical] man Jesus was human" only (*Science & Health*, p. 332). Yet "matter is mortal error... matter is the unreal and temporal" (*Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 21). So Christian Science actually concludes that the physical humanity of Jesus was an illusion, "as it seemed to mortal view" (*Science & Health*, p. 315).

God the Holy Spirit: Christian Science denies that the Holy Spirit is a personal being. It teaches that the Holy Spirit is Christian Science, "This Comforter I understand to be Divine Science" (*Science and Health*, p. 55). It is the unfolding of the thoughts and infinite mind of God (*Science and Health*, p. 502–503).

Man's Destiny: Christian Science teaches that since God is all good and nothing that is real exists outside God, then sin, sickness, and death are mortal error or an illusion. Christ, as the Truth, therefore came to set man free from these false beliefs by His teachings and example (*Science and Health*, pp. 473, 475, 108). Christian Science denies the penal, substitutionary atonement of Christ saying, "The material blood of Jesus was no more efficacious to cleanse from sin when it was shed on 'the accursed tree,' than when it was flowing in his veins as he went daily about his Father's business" (*Science and Health*, p. 25). "Jesus taught the way of Life by demonstration. There is but one way to heaven, harmony, and Christ in Divine Science shows us this way" (*Science and Health*, p. 242). "Universal salvation rests on progression and probation.... No final judgment awaits mortals..." (*Science and Health*, p. 291).

1) Christian Science denies the incarnation of Christ was the fullness of deity dwelling in human flesh, denies the perfection of the man Jesus, and attempts to explain away the historical death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ (*Science and Health*, pp. 336, 29, 332, 53, 398, 313, 593; *Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 201).

2) Sickness and disease are illusory, the product of a false belief, and not an actual result of sin (*Science and Health*, pp. 348, 386). "The cause of all so-called disease is mental, a mortal fear, a mistaken belief..." (*Science and Health*, p. 377).

3) No true Christian Science member should ever go to a doctor, hospital, or take any kind of medicine, for to do so is to deny "Divine Science" (*Christian Science Sentinel*, May 9, 1942, p. 469). Indeed in the church's official "The Christian Science Standard of Healing," Mary Eddy Baker is quoted as saying, "It is impossible to gain control over the body in any other way [divine Mind-Prayer]. On this fundamental point, timid conservatism is absolutely inadmissible. Only through radical reliance on Truth can scientific healing power be realized" (*Science and Health*, p. 167; *Radical Reliance In Healing*, 1958, p. 1).

4) Even though Mrs. Eddy claimed that "the Bible has been my only authority" (*Science and Health*, p. 126), in actual practice Christian Scientists accept the Bible only as interpreted by Mary Baker Eddy in her writings. In fact, she taught that the Bible has been corrupted, but *Science and Health* is the "first book" which has been "uncontaminated by human hypotheses" (*The First Church of Christ, Scientist and Miscellany*, p. 115; *Science and Health*, pp. 99, 139, 456–57).

BIBLICAL RESPONSE

(1) God is a triune, personal, transcendent Being who created "the world and all things in it" (Acts 17:24). He is not a pantheistic all-in-all. He is holy and just, as well as love. God created and governs the universe, including man (Acts 17:24–27).

(2) Matter is not an illusion but is actual, and was created distinct from God. He pronounced it "good" (Genesis 1:31). Sin, sickness, and evil are not an illusion, but a result of man's willful choice to rebel against a Holy God, and death (both physical, and eternal separation from God) is the result of sin (Romans 3:10, 23; 5:12–14; 1 John 1:8–10).

(3) Jesus Christ is not the divine idea of God but was God uniquely manifested in the flesh, truly God and truly man, one divine Person with two indivisible natures, who is the only Savior and the only truth and Lord (John 1:1–3, 14; Colossians 2:9; Philippians 2:6–7; John 14:6).

(4) Salvation is not gained through "self-immolation," but is the objective righteousness of Christ given to us by grace through faith alone (Romans 5:17, 19; Philippians 3:8–9) in the finished work of Christ on the cross — that is, His death, and bodily resurrection (1 Corinthians 1:30–31; 15:1–4; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8–9).

(5) The Holy Spirit is a personal Being, not "Divine Science" (John 16:13–14).

(6) Christian Scientists believe that Mary Baker Eddy received the Truth through divine revelation (*Science and Health*, p. 110). The fact is that she plagiarized much of what she wrote from metaphysician George Hegel, P.P. Quimby, Francis Lieber and others (Walter Martin, *Christian Science*, pp. 7–13; Martin Gardner, *The Healing Revelation of Mary Baker Eddy*, pp. 145–158).

(7) Whereas the Christian Science approach to healing may help psychosomatic illnesses, it has been scientifically demonstrated that it is not effective with real illness. Studies comparing the cumulative death rates of practicing Christian Scientists with control groups have shown significantly higher death rates among the Christian Scientists (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, September 22/29, 1989, pp. 1657–58, and *Morbidity Weekly Report*, August 23, 1991, pp. 579–582).

RESOURCES

Christian Science: Illusion, Confusion & Delusion. Cassette tape and manual combination. The manual, compiled by Watchman Fellowship's Fred Russell, contains twenty-nine pages loaded with photocopies of essential passages from Christian Science publications, plus more than a hundred scripture references refuting Christian Science doctrines. The tape explains the photocopies, and their use in a witnessing situation. **\$8.**

Kingdom of the Cults, Walter Martin. Classic work on the cults includes forty page chapter on Christian Science. Bibliography, index, 544 page hardback. **\$20.**

Handbook of Today's Religions, Josh McDowell. A large work detailing the history and heresy of many world religions and cults in chapter form. Contains a Christian Science chapter (10 pages). Indexed glossary, 567 page hardback, **\$25.**