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# UNITARIAN CHRISTIANITY AND CHRISTIAN SCIENCE

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## NOTE

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### I. *The Foundress*

THE growth of Christian Science, as an organised movement, during the last thirty years is a remarkable testimony to the energy of its foundress, and to her capacity for moulding others to her imperious will.

Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy was nearly ninety-one years of age at her death. In early life she adopted and made her own the principle that all forms of disease and pain are not real as they appear to be, but are only the product of false or distorted mental belief; and she set herself to form a world-wide organised Church which should promote mental and bodily healing on these lines and on no others. Beginning with a small body of people meeting

in a room in Boston, Massachusetts, she became the undisputed and supreme head of a Church with branches and agencies in all parts of the world.

Christian Science stands, among the various schools of mental healing, as the Church of Rome does among the various bodies of Christendom. Just as the devout Catholic owes absolute allegiance to the most Holy Father, the Supreme Pontiff in Rome, so the Christian Scientist does to the Mother Mary, the Foundress of the Church. Just as the Roman Church claims finality for its precepts and principles, so does Christian Science. Just as the Roman Church claims to have the sole rightful key to the interpretation of the Bible, so does Mrs. Eddy. She became rich and famous, popular and powerful. She wrote a book which many thousands of people have been persuaded to set alongside, if not above, the Bible itself; and from the sale of that book she accumu-

lated an enormous fortune. She became the head of a very large organisation which she had made as compact and as obedient to her will as a disciplined army. She worked for years with such singleness of purpose as few men and women have been capable of. And yet she had heavy handicaps to fight against. She was untrained, in early life, to write and speak, and she was fifty years of age before she began to realise her powers. Ill-fated in one marriage, unhappy in another, thirty years at least of her long life were filled with trouble; but her absorption in her one idea never flagged. In the people it drew to her she found disciplined agents rather than friends. She claimed perfection, not in words but in actions that spoke louder than words. She claimed to be morally and intellectually infallible. She claimed an insight at least equal to that which Christendom assigns to Jesus of Nazareth; and she denied, in the

face of facts, that she had ever been at fault in all her conflicts with others. If in the fullness of her time she could have seen her way to claim to be but human as others are, the voice of criticism would have lost much of its sharpness.

Mrs. Eddy has passed away; but her movement remains. At the present moment the last edition of her book, *Science and Health*, the Bible of her Church, is a living force and is devoutly studied by thousands.

The distinguishing characteristic of Christian Science, which sets it apart from all other methods of mental healing, is that it provides its votaries with an elaborate education in a certain philosophy of life, which is treated not as a speculation but as a principle to be acted upon. This education is made fundamental; but it rests on a principle which is not new in the history of human thought. From the dawn of religious speculation in China and



India, down to modern times in the Western world, teachers have arisen who would persuade us to believe that the only Reality is God, the Divine Spirit who is everywhere and in everything, outside of whom there is nothing, and who is in Himself all perfection, all strength, and all happiness. This has been the doctrine of the more extreme kinds of mysticism and pantheism in every age; and this, carried to an extravagant extent, and expressed as we would expect it to be, by an energetic, enthusiastic, and imperfectly educated mind, is the doctrine of the foundress of Christian Science.

As it appears in her writings, it is an exaggerated and crude theory that "God is All," from which is derived the belief that not only *pain and disease*, but all that we understand by *body and "matter,"* are unreal: their apparent reality is due to our mistaken ways of thinking about them. It is evident that the two

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statements, (i) "pain and disease are unreal and due to erroneous belief," (ii) "corporeal existence is unreal and due to erroneous belief," are logically distinct. But in Mrs. Eddy's writings they are constantly confused together; and it is difficult to estimate the extent of the other confusions springing from this fundamental one.

Our purpose here is to examine the main principles of Christian Science from the point of view of Unitarianism. By Unitarianism we understand Unitarian Christianity—the Unitarian version of the Christian religion. Christianity has come down to us as a mighty stream of thought and feeling, creating Churches, large and small. The great upheaval in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries turned the course of the stream in new ways. One result of the new spirit of freedom was the rise of Unitarian Christianity, which, like every form of Christianity, has widened its

sympathies and hopes with the progress of the centuries. What are its ideals to-day?

Unitarian Christianity tries to meet the religious need of our day by claiming the right to exercise even the most drastic historical and scientific criticism of the Christian tradition. Why? In order to penetrate through and grasp *the essential principles distinctive of that tradition*, and proclaim them for what they really are—the pure essence of vital religion; and we find these essentials set forth in the message pervading the first three Gospels: the great argument from human goodness to divine goodness, carrying with it the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, not merely as sounding phrases or glowing visions, but as an experience to be realised and a task to be achieved.

Belief in the Fatherhood of God involves both a Religion and a Philosophy (or Theology). On the one side, we lay stress on

the ethical and spiritual significance of the Divine Fatherhood, understanding it as manifested supremely in the life and teaching of Christ recorded in the first three gospels. On the other side, we emphasise its philosophical or metaphysical significance,—the idea of God as the Source of all Being; in Herbert Spencer's words, "the Infinite and Eternal Energy from whom all things proceed"; in traditional terms, the Almighty Creator.

We affirm, therefore, the Unitarian philosophy of One God and all life in Him, involving belief in the spiritual nature of all reality, but *not in such a sense as to make matter wholly unreal or a mere illusion.*

## II. *The Theology of Christian Science*

When we penetrate through the crudities and obscurities of expression which abound in Mrs. Eddy's book, *Science and*

*Health*, we find evident traces of modern Liberal Christian theology, especially in its Unitarian form. But any doctrines characteristic of Liberal Christianity which can be traced in the book are vitiated by a confused nomenclature and by the extravagant way in which she deals with the principle that *God is Spirit and God is All*. Only Spirit is real; therefore nothing corporeal is real; therefore there is no real world of sense-perception. Strictly and logically it would follow that our errors and misdeeds are not only wrong but non-existent, since they are not part of God, and "God is All." Our own existence would become an illusion—in fact, it could even be that, since the existence even of an illusion would be impossible.

Some of her utterances, however, can be disentangled from these confusions.

One of the earliest chapters in the book, on Prayer, is vague and full of repetitions; nevertheless, underlying it, there is

obviously an endeavour to pass from the idea of Prayer as mere *petition* to the idea of it as *communion* with the Indwelling God.

She teaches that Salvation requires "a better understanding of God as Divine Principle, as Love, rather than as Personality." "The Theory of three Persons in one God suggests Polytheism."

The Incarnation is not limited to any single historic personality; "God's fullness could not be reflected by one human being," hence "Jesus is not God." "Finiteness cannot present the idea or vastness of Infinity." "God cannot be bounded or compressed within the limits of physical humanity."

Jesus is the name of an historical person; Christ is the name of a Divine Principle or Ideal. Jesus, says the Text-book, "wore in part a human form; that is, as it seemed to mortal view." He was "the highest human corporeal expression



of the Divine Idea, rebuking and destroying error." The assumption that the material and the corporeal are not real in themselves is worked into the development of Mrs. Eddy's Christology thus: "This dual personality of the unseen and the seen, the spiritual and the material, the eternal Christ and the corporeal Jesus manifest in the flesh, continued until the Master's ascension, when the human material form, or Jesus, disappeared, while the spiritual self, or Christ, continues to exist in the eternal order of Divine Wisdom." This is evidently much more reminiscent of early Christian "Gnosticism," the "science falsely so called" of the First Epistle to Timothy, than of any modern doctrine. The same may be said of the explanation of the Resurrection as a case of Christian Science healing within the secrecy of the grave.

Her denial of the conventional doctrine of the Atonement is courageous and clear.

“One sacrifice, however great, is insufficient to pay the debt of sin”; and orthodoxy is denounced because it “clings for salvation to the person of the man Jesus.” The real saving power of God, the Divine Wisdom which is “God the Holy Ghost,” is the knowledge of God as Love.

Nevertheless, when we ask to be shown the actual working of the Holy Spirit of God in human life, we are bidden to find its perfect work in Christian Science! And just as the theory of the unreality of matter or body throws her doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ into confusion, so the corresponding theory of the unreality of evil throws her doctrine of the Atonement into confusion. “Evil,” we are told, is “nothing,” “non-existent”; “as manifested by mankind, it is a lie, nothing claiming to be something.” But “the only reality of sin is *the awful fact that unrealities seem real to human, erring belief.*” Christian Science is not the only school of



thought which has attempted to explain evil as unreal, and belief in its reality as an illusion. But *the illusion itself is real*; and for Christian Science, in like manner, "mortal mind," the source of false beliefs, cannot be explained away.

God is Spirit, and Spirit is not only the basis of the universe and of life but also the Supreme Reality. This truth—as old as the human race, taught by Eastern religions as well as by Christianity, and to which such a race as the Greeks gave their best thought—is transformed by Mrs. Eddy into the doctrine that God is the Only Real, and given almost as if it were a new discovery, reiterated sometimes with a wearisome monotony, sometimes with an extravagance which makes it do violence to our experience and leads to intolerable absurdities.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The paragraphs in *Science and Health*, dealing with the procreation of children, afford a conspicuous example of this.

We look in vain, to such a teacher, for the essence of Christianity—the “great argument,” as we have called it, from victorious goodness in man to victorious goodness in God, carrying with it the affirmation of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man as an experience to be realised and a task to be achieved.

### III. *The Method of Healing*

We have insisted that the doctrine of the unreality of the material world, and the doctrine of the unreality of disease and pain, are logically and practically distinct. Experience shows that the influence of Christian Science and its effectiveness in reference to *health of body and mind* spring from the use made of the doctrine that pain or suffering appear to be real only because of our wrong way of taking the facts or thinking about them.

There is a *partial truth* in this assumption.

We may feel inclined to condemn it as childish, or worse; but the situation is too complex to lie open to so rough-and-ready a criticism. How much of what we call evil, in the case of our own troubles, sufferings, and pains is due, at bottom, to the way in which we choose to take the facts? A fact of an evil character may often be turned into a tonic and bracing good by a change of our inner attitude "from one of *fear* to one of *fight*." To a certain real extent the actual good or evil of things is made by our own thoughts about them. In fact the only reasonable question about this conclusion is the question, *How far is it true?*

It is true over a much wider range of life than we usually imagine. Ordinary sanity and common-sense demand that we should not let our minds dwell and brood on every single thing which enters our life as evil. Carry this further, and then, in regard to many of the facts which

destroy our peace, we shall be able to say, with William James, "Refuse to admit their badness; despise their power; ignore their presence; and then, so far as you yourself are concerned, though the facts will still exist, their evil character will exist no longer."

Christian Science takes up these possibilities and makes them into absolute principles, affirmed without any qualification or limitation. In its healing activities the fundamental suggestion used is, that the malady to be cured does not exist. The patient has to make the effort of utterly disbelieving in the reality of his suffering, however severe the pain or disabling the effects of his illness. With this extreme *negative* suggestion is combined an equally thoroughgoing *positive* suggestion, that God is Spirit and Spirit is the Supreme Reality. The keenest critic of Mrs. Eddy's system is obliged to admit that in many cases it works. Indeed if

this is denied its growth becomes an inexplicable mystery. All observers who know the facts are obliged to admit that not only in the effects of bodily disease, but in mental trouble the application of her system has actually brought relief and happiness to hundreds of souls. It has been able to relieve men of vicious habits to which they were slaves. It has relieved them of besieging, morbid ideas that were likely to drive them insane. It has brought back happiness and hope into lives where there seemed before nothing but gloom and despair. *But all this does not settle the question of how much truth there is in the teaching itself.* Like results may be obtained from other kinds of religious belief. A man may be cured and relieved of trouble by a visit to a famous shrine to the Virgin Mary in a little village near the Pyrenees. So it is possible for a man to be relieved by studying and assimilating the doctrine of Mrs. Eddy; yet in the one case



as in the other we know that the belief in the reality of the effect produced does not prevent us from inquiring most critically into the truth and value of the doctrine. And indeed there is another and a very different side to the picture.

Remembering that Christian Scientists do not keep count of their failures, differing in this from our hospitals, we see that there is a very tragic side to the story of their work. The doctrine that disease and pain are unreal has sometimes led to neglect of dangerous symptoms and to injuries which have been serious and even fatal. In reference to young children it may have and has had disastrous effects; and, in the case of adults and children alike, valuable lives have been sacrificed to the fanaticism of ignorant or incompetent healers.

The miracles of Christian Science are almost all in the department of diseases of nerve that affect internal or external move-

ment. They have done scarcely anything in the realms of actual structural disease, as in the case of cancer, consumption, and serious affections of vital tissue such as these. There have been reputed cures of these latter kinds of disease, but they have not been permanent. In the greater number of the cures accomplished by this school of healing *the diagnosis has been that of the patient himself alone.* Take such a thing as cancer, a malignant growth in which it would seem there could be no mistake. It is a matter of medical knowledge that there are growths of that kind that simply die away when let alone. Therefore when a mental healer claims to have cured cancer we want to know what kind of "cancer" it really was. Take paralysis, an example of a functional type of disease. It may be the result of a shock disturbing or suppressing the action of certain nerves of movement; in that case mental treatment is entirely reasonable.



On the other hand, it may be the result of injury to the structure or constitution of some part of the nervous system; and then the problem is a very different one.

Moreover, every physician knows certain facts which enter into recoveries that are apparently unexplained. Many people get well because they were not really ill; others get well because they have ceased to saturate their systems with unnecessary drugs; others get well because of the expulsive power of some new influence which has stirred them out of their miserable selves, widened their outlook, and deepened their objective interests; others get well because of that unexplained power of which medical science has had to take account for ages—vaguely called the Healing Power of Nature. The energies of the body, unaided, struggle against and sometimes conquer a serious disorder which is attacking it in a vital part.

When Christian Science works for good it does so because it seeks to make a vital religious faith into an effective power in the mind, and through that in the body. *This is the common element underlying all forms of spiritual healing.* If we disregard extravagant forms of statement we find the faith to be that the evils and sufferings of life are not the truly real things at all; that the most real things are Almighty Wisdom and Almighty love; that Health, Harmony, Salvation are the things which have behind them all the infinite strength of the Divine Life; that the concentration of the whole mind on this thought makes it a healing and saving power.

Ask yourself what the effect of this principle will be if it is taken as a real belief into your mind. At once, in the case of illness or pain, your attention is diverted from fear about your condition, from studying your condition, from brooding over the

thought of the trouble. Your attention is drawn away from the trouble and diverted to something quite different; and that different thing is the thought that the pain and the trouble in the end have no real power, that the only strong and only real thing in life is the Divine Love and the Divine Power. With your mind fixed upon that, it is claimed that the power of the trouble over you will die away.

Underlying the creed of Christian Science is a conviction which Christian Science did not invent or discover: that the Infinite and Eternal Energy from which all things proceed is present within us—it is the old metaphor, but perhaps there is no better one—as the Source of all health and welfare of body and soul. Christian Science insists on regarding every human ill in the light of that principle immediately and directly. It is as if, in the case of the law of the land, every cause and every claim were taken directly

to the Supreme Court and the validity and very existence of the lower Courts *denied*. But the lower Courts do exist. They are subject to the Supreme Court, but they rightly claim that we must take our cases to them in the first instance. In other words, ordinary medical and surgical treatment have their rightful place.

#### IV. *Present Issues*

In all probability we owe to Christian Science the revival of belief in the possibility of healing by mental and spiritual means. It is a revival only, and not a new discovery of something unknown before. Clergymen, psychologists, and physicians are awakening to its importance; and *there is no need to become a Christian Scientist in order to avail ourselves of it.*

When we inquire what the more progressive minds in the medical profession

are really doing about this matter at the present time, we find that many of the ablest representatives of that profession deeply distrust the whole movement of which we have been speaking. There are various reasons for this. Sometimes the physician takes for granted that his sole purpose is to cure the body; he forgets that it is not the body but the man that is ill, and the man is more than the mechanism making up his bodily frame. If a man's sole idea is that in every case of disease he has to deal only with bodily facts, then, though he is trained in all the science of the best schools, he will ignore what we venture to say is the physician's noblest work, and he will pass by "on the other side" the whole subject which has been before us. But the wisest physicians know better. They know that the fact that the sick man has a mind is beyond comparison the most important factor in the situation. And



in innumerable ways, consciously and unconsciously, they influence him through that side of his being.

What we have just said may be illustrated by quotations from two distinguished medical men of our own time—distinguished alike by general culture and scientific and technical attainments.

In the *Life* of Sir William Osler (Vol. I. p. 546) his biographer quotes a striking letter from which I make the following extracts: "A noteworthy feature in modern treatment has been a return to mental methods of cure, in which *faith in something* is suggested to the patient. After all, faith is the great lever of life. . . . Faith in us, faith in our medicine and methods, is the great stock-in-trade of the profession. . . . As Galen said long ago, confidence and hope do more than physic: 'he cures most in whom most are confident.' . . . While we doctors often overlook or are ignorant of our own faith-cures.

we are a little too sensitive about those performed outside our ranks. We have never had and cannot expect to have a monopoly of this panacea, which is open to all, free as the sun, and which may make everyone in certain cases 'a good physician of Nature's grace.' Faith in the gods or the saints cures one; faith in pills, another; hypnotic suggestion, a third; faith in a plain, common doctor, a fourth. . . . The cures in the temple of Æsculapius, the miracles of the saints, the modern miracles at Lourdes, the wonder-workings of the so-called Christian Scientists, are often genuine. We physicians use the same power every day; but we enjoy no monopoly of it. The faith with which we work, the faith, indeed, which is available to-day in everyday life, has its limitations. It will not raise the dead; it will not put a new eye in place of a bad one; nor will it cure cancer or pneumonia or knit a bone; but



it is a most precious commodity without which we physicians would be very badly off."

This is not, and was not intended to be, a sufficient account of what goes on in the mind in a case of faith-healing; because the mental attitude of the sufferer differs very much with differences in the object in whose healing power he believes. But the statement indicates a very important tendency of thought among progressive minds in the medical profession.

In a famous symposium on "Mental Healing," published in the *British Medical Journal* (June 18, 1910), Sir Clifford Allbut—then Regius Professor of Medicine in the University of Cambridge—observed: "Spiritual gifts . . . certainly do involve a re-animating and re-modelling of matter in the uppermost strands of the brain, and probably of some other, perhaps even of all the other, molecular activities of the body. Probably no limb,

no viscus, is so far a vessel of dishonour as to lie wholly outside the renewals of the spirit; and to an infinite Intelligence, every accession of spiritual life would be apparent in a new harmony of each and all of the metabolic streams and confluences of the body."

Those who to-day are studying the range and extent of the power of spiritual healing are not concerned to question the utility of physical means, or the utility of mental treatment as by what is technically termed "Suggestion." They do not assert the non-existence of the malady—an assertion which is not true. But they are studying the *transforming power of the spiritual in its action on the physical* through faith in the Perfect Wisdom and Perfect Love from Whom may flow into us a spiritual dynamic which can transfigure our bodies, our lives, our selves, and restore us to physical, moral and spiritual health as we learn to abide in union with Him.