

Christian Science

Interfaith Witness

BELIEF BULLETIN

Cults, Sects, and New World Religions

OFFICIAL NAME: Church of Christ, Scientist (CCS)

KEY FIGURE IN HISTORY: Mary Baker Eddy (1821–1910)

CURRENT BOARD OF DIRECTORS (1996): Virginia S. Harris, J. Anthony Periton, Olga M. Chaffee, William H. Hill, John Lewis Selover

HEADQUARTERS: The First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston Massachusetts

CHURCHES (1996): 2,300 in 68 countries

PRACTITIONERS: Approximately 3,000 worldwide

MINISTRIES ASSOCIATED WITH CHRISTIAN SCIENCE:

Radio and Television: WQTV, Boston, Mass., and Monitor Radio

Publications: *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Christian Science Journal*, *The Christian Science Sentinel*, *Herald of Christian Science*, *The World Monitor*, *Christian Science Quarterly*

This belief bulletin highlights Christian Science doctrines and provides biblical responses.

INTRODUCTION

The Church of Christ, Scientist (CCS), also known by its original name, The Christian Science Church, was founded by Mary Baker Eddy in 1879 in Boston, Mass.

According to the CCS, Mary Ann Morse Baker, as a young person, was frail and suffered many illnesses. In 1844, her first husband, George Glover, died of yellow fever leaving her poor and with an infant son whom she gave up to foster care. In 1853, she married Daniel Patterson. She divorced him in 1873. While living in New Hampshire in 1866, she claimed to have discovered the secret of "Divine Science" after being healed miraculously from a crippling fall. She began teaching her healing techniques and spiritual philosophy to interested students. In 1875, she moved to Lynn, Mass., founded the Christian Science Association, and published her book, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (S&H).

In 1877, she married Asa Albert Eddy (d. 1882) and together they formally established the CCS. In 1890, Mrs. Eddy established "The Mother Church," The First Church of Christ, Scientist, of Boston, Mass.

Mrs. Eddy died in 1910 and authority now rests in the CCS Board of Directors (see above).

AUTHORITY: The Bible and Mrs. Eddy

Christian Science founder Mary Baker Eddy maintained that "as adherents of Truth, we take the inspired Word of the Bible as our sufficient guide to eternal Life" (S&H, p. 497). Nonetheless, Christian Science interprets the Bible in light of Mrs. Eddy's writings, particularly her book *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, in which she interprets it according to her metaphysical presuppositions. Also, Mrs. Eddy seemed to question the textual reliability of the Bible blaming "the manifest mistakes in the ancient versions . . . these facts show how a mortal and material sense stole into the divine record, with its own hue darkening to some extent the inspired pages" (S&H, p. 139).

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: The Bible is the only source of divinely inspired Scripture. No single person or church can claim an infallible interpretation. Mrs. Eddy's metaphysical approach fails to adhere to sound principles of biblical interpretation (see 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21). She ascribes arbitrary spiritual meanings to common biblical terms. For example "Jerusalem" is defined as "Mortal belief and knowledge obtained from the five

corporeal senses" (S&H, p. 589). "Holy Ghost" is defined as "Divine Science; the development of eternal Life, Truth, and Love" (S&H, p. 588).

GOD IS MIND, TRUTH, LOVE, ETC.

"God is incorporeal, divine, supreme, infinite Mind, Spirit, Soul, Principle, Life, Truth, Love" (S&H, p. 465). These are synonymous terms that "refer to one absolute God. They are also intended to express the nature, essence, and wholeness of Deity. The attributes of God are justice, mercy, wisdom, goodness, and so on" (S&H, p. 465).

The Trinity is redefined as life, truth, and love. "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" (S&H, p. 256).

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: There is only one true God (see Deut. 6:4; Isa. 43:10, 44:6-8) who exists eternally in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (see Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14). The CCS use of impersonal synonyms for God diminishes His personal nature as revealed in the Bible. The Bible says "God is love" (1 John 4:8), not "love is God."

JESUS: DISCOVERER OF THE CHRIST-IDEAL

There is an essential difference between Jesus the man and the "Christ Principle" which came upon Him as He comprehended it. "We acknowledge Jesus' atonement as the evidence of divine, efficacious Love, unfolding man's unity with God through Christ Jesus the Way-shower" (S&H, p. 497).

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: There is no distinction that can be made between Jesus the man and Christ, His divine office (Messiah). He did not receive his Messiahship, but rather claimed that title from eternity past (see Isa. 9:6; Matt. 1:16-18, 2:4; Luke 2:11). Jesus died on the cross as an atonement for humanity's sin and rose again *physically* to claim God's victory over death (see Luke 24:36-43; John 2:18-22; 1 Cor. 15:1-8).

"SPIRIT" IS REAL; "MATTER" IS NOT

Since God's essential essence is spirit or mind, and only that which reflects His nature is real, then matter does not really exist. "Spirit is

immortal Truth; matter is mortal error. Spirit is the real and eternal; matter is the unreal and temporal" (S&H, p. 468).

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: Indeed, God is Spirit (see John 4:24). He is creator of all that exists, including the material universe (see Gen. 1:1; Col. 1:16; Heb. 11:3). God declared the entirety of the created order "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Jesus was God incarnated in a material body (see John 1:14; Col. 2:9) and was resurrected physically (see Luke 24:36-39; John 20:26; 1 Cor. 15:1-8).

PEOPLE ARE DIVINE SPIRITS

Since matter does not exist and humanity reflects God's nature then humanity is not really made of matter. "Spirit is God, and man is His image and likeness. Therefore man is not material; he is spiritual" (S&H, p. 468).

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: Humanity has both a spiritual and physical dimension (see Gen. 1:26-27). God created humanity as living souls (see Gen. 2:7). Our future resurrection will be both spiritual and physical (see 1 Cor. 15).

THE PROBLEM: HUMANITY'S ILLUSIONS

Since only those ideas that reflect God's nature actually are real, then sin, death, disease, and pain are not real, but only illusions. "The only reality of sin, sickness, or death is the awful fact that unrealities seem real to human, erring belief . . . They are not true, because they are not of God" (S&H, p. 472). "The cause of all so-called disease is mental, a mortal fear, a mistaken belief or conviction of the necessity and power of ill-health" (S&H, p. 377).

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: Sin is a reality and all people (except Christ) are sinners by nature (see Rom. 3:23). It is a result of humanity's willful disobedience to God and His will. Sin alienates people from God and produces suffering, disease, and death (see Gen. 3; Rom. 5:12-23).

SPIRITUAL HEALING

Since matter, sin, disease, and death are illusions and unreal, then people are not subject to them. "Through immortal Mind, or Truth, we can destroy all ills which proceed

from mortal mind" (S&H, p. 374). Thus when people fully realize this principle, disease should disappear. "When one's false belief is corrected, Truth sends a report of health over the body" (S&H p. 194).

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: Sickness is real. Christians believe God can cure through prayer if it is His will. Inevitably, however, the physical body deteriorates and dies. Medical science is an appropriate adjunct to prayer in curing and maintaining physical health (see 1 Cor. 12:9,30; James 5:14-16). Luke (writer of the gospel of Luke and Acts) is identified as a physician (see Col. 4:14).

DEATH: THE ULTIMATE ILLUSION

Since God and man are immortal spirit or mind, death is also only an illusion. It is a transition from the illusion of the material to ultimate reality of immortal spirit. "So, when our friends pass from our sight and we lament, that lamentation is needless and causeless" (S&H, p. 386).

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: Death is a reality and a result of mankind's sin (see Gen. 2:17; Ezek. 18:20; Rom. 6:21-23, 8:6). It is both physical and spiritual. The spirit of the believer, however, at death, goes to be with the Lord (see 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23-24) and awaits a reunion with the body at the Lord's return (see 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thes. 4:13-18). Those who are unsaved will face judgment (see Heb. 9:27) and eternal separation from God in hell ("the second death"). (See Rev. 20:1-15).

SALVATION

Since sin and death are false beliefs (illusions), salvation involves overcoming the false idea that they exist with a realization of our divine spirit and mind. "We acknowledge that the crucifixion of Jesus and his resurrection served to uplift faith to understand eternal Life, even the allness of Soul, Spirit, and the nothingness of matter" (S&H, p. 497).

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: Salvation is not realized through some special knowledge. It is received only by acknowledging, confessing, repenting of one's sin (see Acts 3:19, 26:20; 1 John 1:9) and putting one's faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (see John 1:12; Rom. 10:9-10; Eph. 2:8,9).

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE TERMS:

Bible Lesson (Lesson Sermon): One of 26 weekly lessons studied and taught in local churches.

Branch Church: Local self-governing CCS congregation.

First Reader: Person who leads Sunday and Wednesday services in local CCS (second reader assists).

Lecture: Free talk sponsored by local CCS given by authorized member of Christian Science Board of Lectureship.

Practitioner: Person in full-time professional work of Christian Science healing.

Reading Room: Local bookstore/library open to the public to access Christian Science literature.

WITNESSING TO CHRISTIAN SCIENTISTS

1. Have a clear understanding of your faith and the Bible.
2. Have a basic knowledge of the beliefs and presuppositions of Christian Science.
3. Seek to establish a sincere personal relationship with the Christian Scientist.
4. Establish the unique authority of the Bible. Tell the Christian Scientist that you do not consider any belief that is not biblically based as valid.
5. Define clearly all terms of biblical Christianity and Christian Science. Christian Science uses many biblical and Christian terms that have different meanings.
6. When appropriate, respectfully discuss significant differences in doctrine. Focus on historic biblical perspectives about God, Jesus Christ, and salvation. Also, establish the reality of sin, disease, and death. Emphasize why Christ's death was necessary.
7. Share your personal testimony of faith in Jesus Christ. Explain how you realized you are a sinner, but have trusted in Jesus' death and resurrection to atone for your sin.
8. When you have clarified all important issues, share the plan of salvation and seek to lead the person to faith in Christ.

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