Christian Science

History, Beliefs, Practices

Identity: A religious body that may be classified as one of the Mind Science groups (Unity School of Christianity, Religious Science, New Thought, aspects of the New Age movement, and others).

Founders: Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910); Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (1802-1866)

Statistics: The bylaws of the church prohibit publishing statistics. The church reports that there are about 2000 churches in 80 countries worldwide.[1] As an organization, Christian Science has experienced a sharp decline in members over the past 30 years.[2]

History: Mary Baker (Eddy), the founder of Christian Science, was born in Bow, New Hampshire, in 1821. Raised as a conservative Congregationalist, she joined a Congregational Church in Tilton, NH, in 1838. However, she was never content with its doctrines, especially the Calvinist doctrine of "double predestination." Plagued by illnesses throughout most of her life, Eddy acquired a passionate interest in medicine and healing. In 1862 she met Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, whose treatments, Eddy claimed, healed her of a spinal inflammation. It was Quimby who actually developed the religious thought behind Christian Science and the "mind sciences." He had been studying "animal magnetism" and "mesmerism." Animal magnetism was a theory advanced by Friedrich Anton Mesmer (1733-1815) according to which an unseen magnetic force is said to surround a person and when "transferred" properly, has the ability to heal people (his ideas concerning the magnetic field and hypnotism came to be known as "Mesmerism"). Calling his healing treatments "Science of the Christ," Quimby gained a following and published several works. He first used the term "Christian Science" in 1863.Quimby died in 1866. Just one month later, Eddy claimed to have received a metaphysical healing after falling on ice and being three days from death (though the doctor who treated her reported that she was not even listed in critical condition). Her claim to miraculous healing led to her to begin teaching and writing about spiritual healing for others. In 1875 Eddy published her first edition of *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. She was charged with plagiarism of Quimby's work in the media (*New York Times*, July 10, 1904). In 1879 Eddy founded the Church of Christ Scientist in Boston, which in 1892 under a restructuring program was renamed the Mother Church, the First Church of Christ Scientist. Eddy remained the head of the church until her death in 1910, though she had become virtually a recluse and had not even been present for the dedication of the church in 1895. Control of the church since Eddy's death has been in the hands of a Board of Trustees. Between 1880 and 1930 Christian Science grew considerably. At the time of Eddy's death, there were one million members. After 1930, however, the membership began to dwindle. It is one of the few religious bodies in America that has been on a steady decline throughout most of the twentieth century.

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[1] http://www.tfccs.com/worldwidedirectory/

[2] See http://web.archive.org/web/20060907005952/http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/relmove/

Texts: *The Bible; Science and Health With Key to the Scriptures* and *Manual of the Mother Church* by Mary Baker Eddy. Publications include *The Christian Science Monitor (1875)* and *The Christian Science Journal.* The church has reprinted many of Eddy's other writings as well.

Beliefs and Practices:[3]

- Eddy claimed that her whole purpose for writing and establishing Christian Science was to reinstate primitive Christianity and its emphasis upon healing.
- Basic to Quimby, who influenced Eddy in almost all of her thought, is that matter is illusory. Only the mental and/or the spiritual is real. Therefore, disease or sickness is only possible in a person if they believe that it is not real in the first place. Death itself is illusory because it pertains strictly to the physical body—which is also not real, of course.
- God is "All-in-all. God is good. God is Mind. God, Spirit, being all, nothing is matter. Life, God, omnipotent good, deny death, evil, sin, disease – Disease, sin, evil, death, deny good, omnipotent God, Life."[4]
- Jesus Christ is an historical figure, but not the God-man of historic Christianity. He was human: "He was the highest corporeal concept of the divine idea."[5] He possessed the "Christ-principle." The disciples of Jesus only thought he was dead, though he had not died. Jesus' blood did not atone for the sins of the world. It could not, for it was merely human blood and had no connection to what is real–the Christ principle.[6]
- The Holy Spirit is Divine Science itself. The Holy Spirit is Divine Principle, Life, Truth, Love, all substance, intelligence.[7]
- Humanity is called the compound idea of the image and love of God. Human beings are not physical, but spiritual beings.[8]
- Sin and evil do not exist. They are an illusion.[9]
- Salvation is already ours.[10] People embrace salvation when they come to know that sin, sickness, and death are not real.
- Since Christian Science believes that matter does not exist, it cannot accept the Lutheran understanding of the sacraments according to which the material (combined with God's Word) is a means through which grace is conveyed. Though Christian Scientists celebrate the "sacraments" of "baptism" and "communion" twice yearly, they exclude the material elements of water , bread, and wine. In Baptism, a person is "submerged in Spirit."
- Heaven is "Harmony" or "the reign of spirit."[11]
- Christian Science worship usually includes the reading of an excerpt from Eddy and commentary. Weekly meetings include testimonies from members who claim to have been healed.
- Persons who are sick are not forced to refuse medical treatment.

A Lutheran Response

It is the unanimous testimony of the Holy Scriptures that God made all things, declaring of all that He had created "Behold it is very good" (Genesis 1). In the words of Martin Luther, "I believe that God has made

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[3]See Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cult* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1997 Revised and Updated Edition), 259-62 for a useful summary of Christian Science teaching.
[4]Eddy, *Science and Health*, 113.
[5] *Ibid.*, 589.
[6]Eddy, *Science and Health*, 25.
[7]*Ibid.*, 113, 115.
[8]Martin, 262.
[9]Eddy, *Science and Health*, 584.
[10]Martin, 261.
[11]Eddy, *Science and Health*, 587.

me and all creatures…and also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have" (Explanation of First Article of the Apostles' Creed). Moreover, the Scriptures clearly distinguish God's good creation from sin, which indeed has entered into the world and corrupted all that God has made. Sin is not an illusion, but actually "entered into the world through one man" (Rom. 5:12) and its force and tyranny truly are experienced by human beings. Nowhere does the Bible say that the human body or flesh is in substance evil. Rather, it is sin that has entered into and brought total corruption to the body that is evil (Romans 7:17).

Lutherans reject the gnostic idea that one can distinguish the historical person Jesus and a so-called "Christ principle." The God-man who bled physically and died upon the cross, and was raised physically to life *is* the Christ, the One anointed by the Father to redeem the world from sin, death, and the power of the devil (Acts 4:26; 10:38). Salvation is given only to those whose faith is in Christ Jesus (Acts 4:12). Expressly in response to early gnostic tendencies, the biblical writers declare that Jesus Christ "has come in the flesh" (1 John 4:2) and that His physical blood cleanses us from sin (1 Jn 1:7).

In response to Christian Science views of "healing," Lutherans respond by insisting that nowhere in the Scriptures is it taught that healing occurs through some denial that an illness or a disease exists. Such a theory is itself illusory. Lutherans believe that God does heal the sick today through means, that is, through gifts of medicine and medical technology, which are good gifts from Him.

For Further Reading

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Hoekema, Anthony. *The Four Major Cults*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1963.
Peel, Robert. *Health and Medicine in the Christian Science Tradition*. New York: Crossroad, 1988.
Simmons, John K. "Christian Science in American Culture" in *America's Alternative Religions*, Timothy Miller, ed. Albany: SUNY Press, 1995 (61-69).
Stark, Rodney. "The Rise and Fall of Christian Science." *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 13 (May 1998): 189-214.

Links and Websites

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www.marybakereddy.org