

Christian Science and its View of Suffering

Some letters to the editor in the *Chronicle* have been about world conflict and religion. One writer quoted with approval a paragraph from Mary Baker Eddy's *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. "The writer propounded the view that we should support love for God and man wherever it is found, in Christians, Muslims, Jews, and the rest (TC 29 October). A person who quotes Mrs Eddy favourably can only be captive to her ideology. Did we understand what led the writer to say these things?"

Christian Science, or Church of Christ, Scientist, is a cult founded by Mrs Mary Baker Glover Patters on Eddy in 1879 with the aim of "restoring the healing power of original Christianity." The book *Science and Health* mentioned above sets out her doctrines. Mrs Eddy denied the fundamental teachings of orthodox Christianity, including the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the vicarious atonement of Christ. That alone explains the openness to other faiths that the letter to the editor advocated.

Mrs Baker's followers consider her as their in errant teacher and leader. Almost all members of Christian churches who have studied Mrs Eddy's religious system believe that her writings are "so confused that there must have been serious psychological maladjustments in her personal life" (F E Mayer, *The Religious Bodies of America*, page 526).

In 1862 Mrs Eddy met Phineas P Quimby of Portland, Maine, who held that sickness was caused by wrong thinking. He claimed that his use of "Christ's method of healing" had brought about marvellous cures. Some people think that Mrs Eddy copied Quimby's method or adapted it for her own purposes. She herself claimed that she did not discover Christian Science until after Quimby died in 1866, when she fell on ice and injured herself to such an extent that recovery seemed impossible. She claimed that she turned accidentally to Matthew 9:2, "When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralysed man, 'Son, have courage! Your sins are forgiven. '", She claimed that by right thinking she had been able to heal herself. She held that it is a scientific certainty that everything is caused by Mind. She published *Science and Health* in 1875 and organised the Church of Christ (Scientist) at Boston in 1879. In 1881 she opened the Massachusetts Metaphysical College, where, for 12 lessons in healing, she charged a fee of \$300. She amassed a fortune estimated at over 2 million dollars.

She held superstitious fears throughout her life, and was afraid of "animal magnetism." She attributed the death of her third husband to "mental arsenic poisoning administered from a distance by one of her enemies" (F E Mayer, page 526).

Mrs Eddy claimed that her doctrine came from the Bible. In fact, she considered the Bible a dark book, which could not be understood without "the key of David" (a reference to Rv 3:7). She supplied this "key to the Scriptures" in the appendix to her *Science and Health*. She gave a metaphysical or spiritual interpretation of what she calls "material" terms that the Bible uses. She claimed that her definition of "spiritual meaning" was the originally intended meaning of the terms in the Bible. Although she claimed that the Bible has many mistakes, she said that her book contained the pure truth.

The purpose of Christian Science is to teach people to cast off the idea that they are subject to limitations, and to believe that they are divine thoughts. She held that whatever exists is only a reflection of God, and in fact is really God. She held that only what God thinks really exists. All things, even human beings, are Mind, and there is no room for matter.

In God, she held, the only trinity is Life, Truth, and Love. In her glossary "Christ" is no more than Truth, the divine manifestation of God to destroy error, and the Divine Idea to heal human beings. She sharply distinguished Jesus from Christ. She said that Jesus is the human person who presented the Divine Idea more than anyone else has done. She denied that Jesus is God. She described the Holy Spirit as "Divine Science", and "the Christian Science system of healing. She held that, because human beings were made in God's likeness, human beings are as perfect in a degree as God Himself. She dismissed the reality of sickness, sin, and death by saying that, though they are unreal, they seem real. Her method of getting rid of sin did not come by repentance and forgiveness, but freeing oneself from the idea that sin is real. Sin and suffering, she held, will fall at the feet of everlasting Love. Consequently, she held, human beings have no need of atonement for sin. She held that it would have been impossible for God to vent His wrath on His Son.

We can, therefore, understand what the writer to the *Chronicle* meant in trying to discuss suffering in the world. Mrs Eddy thought that all discord in the world results from human beings' false notion that they exist separately from the Divine Mind. For when a human being imagines that he is an individual personality with a material body, he elevates himself to the stature of a creator. He has forgotten that Divine Mind is the only Principle, and human beings are merely the eternal reflection of it.

Strictly speaking, Christian Scientists do not teach bodily healing from sickness. There is no room for prayer healing in their system. Mrs Eddy denied that prayer was effective. For Christian Scientists, healing consists in demonstrating the principle that there is no matter, but that everything is Divine Mind. Accidents and diseases are no more than the mistaken mental belief that human beings are subject to the power of sickness. The remedy for them is for a person to unite his mind with the Divine Mind. Mrs Eddy explained the fact that Christian Scientists still die by saying that up to now no Christian Scientists have mastered the Science that death is simply the error of mortal mind. Mrs Eddy held that if a person cannot rid his mind of an error, he may hold a less serious error instead. Christian Scientists take no measures to avoid a cold by shutting out a draft, and take no precautionary measures such as vaccination and quarantines. However, Christian Scientists use home remedies, medical care, and, obviously, ring the undertaker when someone dies.

How should we evaluate this? What must one say about a religious system that cannot claim to have made even one person perfect by its own terms? If a person seriously holds that material things do not exist, surely all he needs to do is have someone hit him, very hard, with a hammer! Sadly, Christian Science denies the heart of the Christian faith, that sin, God's wrath, and death are real. It denies that Jesus' vicarious atonement has solved these awful enemies. Most adherents of Christian Science have been attracted to it because they thought it would offer healing from sickness. We can only say, "How foolish can you get?" They are by their own principles also incapable of showing sympathy to sick and suffering people. They talk about love, but are unable of showing compassion. They merely deny the reality of suffering. When the writer said, "Religion represents the improving (yet imperfect) understanding of God which this and previous ages have held", surely they would have to include themselves in that assessment, in view of the fact that they continue to become sick and to die.

Rather, Jesus Christ, the final Revelation of God, has banished death and has brought light and immortality to light through the Gospel. Without His atonement, through His death and resurrection instead of sinful, mortal people, they are not qualified to discuss the problem of suffering, discord, and death in the world at all.