

QUARTERLY UPDATE FROM THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLICATION

“It shall be the duty of the Committee on Publication to correct in a Christian manner impositions on the public in regard to Christian Science, injustices done Mrs. Eddy or members of this Church by the daily press, by periodicals or circulated literature of any sort.” Church Manual, Article XXXIII, Section 2

Message from the Manager of Committees on Publication

Mary Baker Eddy wrote in *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*:

The reputation of Jesus was the very opposite of his character. Why? Because the divine Principle and practice of Jesus were misunderstood. ... His words and works were unknown to the world because above and contrary to the world’s religious sense (53:8–13).

The same could be said of Mrs. Eddy and her discovery of Christian Science. One of the commonly misunderstood aspects of Christian Science that Committees on Publication see portrayed in media and academia is for it to be categorized as a “cult” — with the presumption that its adherents’ practice must be strange or unnatural and that Mrs. Eddy must be a leader that influences, controls, or manipulates followers through human personality. However, a sincere and thoughtful look at Christian Science and Mrs. Eddy’s leadership shows that this label of cult does not apply.

The example below shows how this mischaracterization of Christian Science can be dispelled naturally by prayerfully affirming what we know is true about our church and our Leader. This prayer can inspire us to share with others about the richness of our Christian practice, the democratic way in which our church actually operates, and Mrs. Eddy’s encouragement for students to study the Bible and the textbook of Christian Science, to think and apply these teachings for themselves, and to “follow your Leader only so far as she follows Christ” (*Message for 1901* 34:20–26).

Though not always easy, there is a blessing even in criticisms, and it can be a helpful reminder to each of us that “[t]he time for thinkers has come” (*Science and Health* vii:13), and therefore we can actively reason for ourselves to see the power of God as Life, Truth, and Love made practical in our lives.

Sincerely,
Kevin E. Ness, C.S.B.
Manager, Christian Science Committees on Publication

Fruitage

The Committee office was alerted to a reference to Christian Science as a “cult of Christianity” in an article, “Cults in Australia: All your questions answered,” published in two newspapers in Australia. The author wrote about destructive cults and listed common characteristics they typically possess. The two Committees on Publication in Australia took up this case in prayer and considered a corrective response.

Here is some of the prayerful reasoning shared by one of the Committees:

My prayerful work included a mental treatment confirming the facts about God, Christ Jesus, and Mary Baker Eddy, and acknowledging the wisdom of our Leader ordaining the Bible and the Christian Science textbook as the Pastor of The Mother Church and its branches worldwide. I felt deep gratitude for the unique structure of Church government, protected for all time by the Manual of The Mother Church and in remembering the Magna Charta of Christian Science: "Essentially democratic, its government is administered by the common consent of the governed, ... its law and gospel are according to Christ Jesus; its rules are health, holiness, and immortality, — equal rights and privileges, equality of the sexes, rotation in office." The [prayerful] work came with a growing conviction that the author's mistaken inclusion of Christian Science on the list of Christian cults had no power to do any harm.

Both Committees were inspired to work together on a response to the journalist. Excerpts from their joint message follows:

We think the series on cults is an important one to bring attention to groups that seek to use some form of control over another for their own ends. However, we were surprised to find that you listed Christian Science as a “cult of Christianity.”

In our work as Christian Science Committees on Publication . . . we are available to provide firsthand, accurate information about Christian Science to the public. In this capacity, we would like to offer you a different perspective on Christian Science.

Christian Science is a Christian denomination based on the Bible with an emphasis on the teachings of Jesus Christ. The Golden Rule to, “Treat other people exactly as you would like to be treated by them,” (Matthew 7:12, The New Testament in Modern English by J.B. Phillips) is fundamental to the practice of Christian Science, as it is to many other faith traditions. This selfless practice and model for living excludes any cult-like characteristics.

Contrary to your point about cults “as a closed-off group of loyal followers steered by a manipulative and influential leader,” Christian Scientists serve their communities in a multitude of ways from school teachers and business owners to homemakers and volunteers. They are engaged citizens where their religious faith may inform and support their lives, but in no way is it manipulative, closed off, or controlling. In fact, the Christian Science church’s founder, Mary Baker Eddy, encouraged students of the religion to think for themselves when she wrote that “The time for thinkers has come” (Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures, p. vii). She also asked that church members and others follow her “only so far as she follows Christ.”

Each one of the worldwide branch churches is democratically governed by its own Bylaws. Positions within a church are open to all members, who have equal rights, gender equality and rotation in office. Manipulation, exploitation, or indoctrination are simply not part of the church. There is no charismatic personal preaching in our public services. Our services are conducted by members who have been elected by fellow members to the position of Reader for a specific duration. In fact, there is

nothing secretive about our religious practice, our church services, or how our churches and members serve their communities.

The journalist expressed appreciation and respect for the correspondence and indicated an intent to save the letter as a reference. Other fruitage of this prayerful and practical work included a thoughtful comment from a newcomer attending a Christian Science lecture in the community where the article was published. This individual remarked after the lecture that even though they had heard others discredit Christian Science, they felt what they heard during the lecture “was the truth.”

Inspiration and updates from your Committee on Publication

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

As I continue to grow in my role as Committee on Publication for Connecticut, I have been seeing that the most effective way to correct “impositions on the public in regard to Christian Science, injustices done Mrs. Eddy or members of this Church,” (Manual, Art. XXXIII, Sect. 2) is to pray! I am prioritizing specific prayerful work for our community – the people of Connecticut – knowing that the leavening effect of these prayers will serve to open eyes and kindle receptivity to the Truth. It is such a joy to start each day with this specific work, knowing that each prayer brings with it healing and uplift to our community.

It is a natural outgrowth of these prayers to feel the loving support my office receives from each Connecticut church and society. It brings such joy to hear of the healing work being done in each of your communities and in the state at large. I applaud and support the effort of those of you who are working to bolster and protect the practice of Christian Science in this state! There is strength in coming together to discuss practical ways to support the Cause of Christian Science, fellow Christian Scientists, and our communities. I have found that this type of practical Christianity lifts thought and leads to healing.

During the last few months, I participated in another All-Committee Zoom meeting where I was able to join with my colleagues from across the country and the world. The Committee on Publication Family is so embracing and warm and I have learned so much from our meetings together. At this meeting, we were able to think together about how best to address some of the common impositions in public thought about Christian Science seen in this work. We dug deep to answer prayerfully how to guard against negative reactions to impositions, feeling the weight of responsibility for the corrective work, guarding against the trap of personalizing evil, and extinguishing discouragement. Keeping firmly in thought that impositions and injustices provide corrective opportunities and that the Truth can and will dismantle every form of error, I am learning how to remain centered on Divine Love which guides us as we respond to each specific case.

I invite each of you to join us in being alert to and prayerfully addressing these impositions when they crop up in your experience. In taking up this work, these words from Mary Baker Eddy bring much guidance: “The increasing necessity for relying on God to defend us against the subtler forms of evil, turns us more unreservedly to Him for help, and thus becomes a means of grace. If one lives rightly, every effort to hurt one will only help that one; for God will give the ability to overcome whatever tends to impede progress.” (Misc. p. 115)

With deep affection for all of you,

Kristina Schwarz