

Review of Vital Issues in Christian Science

FOREWORD

Most of us who found Christian Science in our youthful years of the nineteen sixties and seventies devoured the fresh and scholarly biography *Mary Baker Eddy* given to the world by Mr Robert Peelⁱ. Those decades saw the war-battered conservatism of the previous generation overthrown in a fun upsurge of liberalism and freedom. Mr Peel's biography redefined Mrs Eddy's status for our generation in a blaze of academic analysis, and set our view of her for the mature decades of our lives.

This has been repeated for the generation that is succeeding us in the equally substantial biography of Ms Gillian Gillⁱⁱ, which matches better the early twenty-first century enthusiasm for the mature emancipation of woman from the domination of the male.

Both these important works have enjoyed the promotion and protection from criticism given by the well-established doctrine of Authorised Literature, which has pervaded the membership of the Christian Science church since as long ago as 1915, five years after Mrs Eddy's passingⁱⁱⁱ.

Is it not ironic to reflect that this great rebellion of western thought, exemplified by the cobble-throwing Parisian students of 1968, has culminated in an essentially conservative view of Mrs Eddy? The third generation since the sixties, on entering our Sunday Schools, today encounters Mrs Eddy as an exceptionally kind and gifted pioneer of feminism, who founded an exceptionally ambitious Christian religion. The perceptive child will also notice that this religion's adherents are dwindling in both demonstration and number.

The child who makes it to the church will hear read from the desk every month *A Rule for Motives and Acts*^{iv}. This rule imposes a solemn duty on everyone who has gone so far as to join Mrs Eddy's church, The First Church of Christ Scientist in Boston, Massachusetts. This duty must surely extend to resolving two utterly basic questions, which despite the efforts of not just two, but perhaps twenty biographers of Mrs Eddy, and further hundreds of writers on the subject of Christian Science, remain entirely unresolved today.

Both questions are alluded to in a little-noticed Card that Mrs Eddy placed in the *Christian Science Journal* of August 1890^v. The first question is the identity of Mrs Eddy. The second question is the correct handling of malicious animal magnetism. If you look up this reference, which is there for all to see, you will find that Mrs Eddy indicates that they could not be answered for at least "a half century."

Two half centuries have passed.

Does the received view with which we are so familiar, protected as it is by the doctrine of Authorised Literature established only after Mrs Eddy's departure, show us where we find in the Bible and Mrs Eddy's writings the answers to these two vital questions? How can we, more than one century on from Mrs Eddy's Card, be *sure* we are obeying *A Rule for Motives and Acts* in our daily walk, whilst we remain uncertain on these two vital questions?

Should we not be looking further?

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Notes

- i. Peel, *Mary Baker Eddy*, 3 volumes, 1966, 1971, 1977.
- ii. Gill, *Mary Baker Eddy*, 1998.
- iii. Christian Science Foundation, *The Continuity of the Cause of Christian Science*, Part 11 pp 2, 3.
- iv. *Manual of The Mother Church*: Discipline: Guidance of Members Article VIII, A Rule for Motives and Acts Section 1.
- v. *Christian Science Journal* August 1890 Vol. VIII 1890-91 p. 193.