

THE HEALING CLAIMS OF CHRISTIAN SCIENCE

Christian Science is an American cult based on the claims of Mary Baker Eddy that she could give the real teachings of Christianity. She ended up claiming that there is no matter or sin and that sickness like them is an illusion. You pray to the God of love and that cures all ills and raises the dead. Going to the doctor is a sin. The Bible and Eddy's book, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* are considered to be the word of God. In practice though the Bible is an accessory with all the teachings coming from her book.

This is an examination of its healing claims from a Catholic viewpoint. We are using the work, *What is the 'Christian Science' Religion* by Fr Rumble of Radio Replies a series of defences of the Catholic faith. We are simply quoting it from now on.

13. Do you deny that mental healing is a science?

No. For, within certain limits, there is a science of mental healing. Every psychiatrist knows that. But Mrs. Eddy went far beyond the defined limits of reliable mental healing, and positively rejected science. Science depends on the reality of phenomena which Mrs. Eddy declares to be unreal and non-existent. For her, since they suppose matter which is unreal, anatomy and physiology are absurd. She regards all medical and surgical science, not only as worthless, but as positively evil. She denies the validity of the established laws of science, and her teachings are both unreasonable and dangerous. In her so-called science, there are no breakages, no dislocations, no disease or sickness. Her theories of the unreality of matter would mean that a non-existent thermometer would register a non-existent temperature in a non-existent body! And over-credulous adherents of Christian Science, rather than invoke the aid of medical science, have needlessly exposed their relatives and friends to suffering, even to death. There is not a genuine scientist in the world who would not brand her system of "Christian Science" as the very embodiment of the unscientific.

21. It must be remembered that the doctrine claims to be efficacious only as a religious science.

The fact remains that very many of Mrs. Eddy's pupils set out to practise the art of mental healing as taught by her, yet without teaching her religious doctrines at all; and they got on just as well without those doctrines, effecting many cures. There is no evidence that those who retain her metaphysical and religious principles do any better than the hundreds of other faith-healers who are neither Christian Scientists, nor have any knowledge of Mrs. Eddy's supposed revelation. And the results obtained by Christian Science practitioners can all be explained by the natural psychology of mental healing and suggestion, without the religious setting in which she embedded the process.

38. In all things we are taught to rely on prayer.

Christian Science does not allow recourse to prayer in the true sense of the word. True prayer supposes a person to whom the prayer is addressed, and relies upon the assistance of the one to whom appeal is made. But Mrs. Eddy denies that God is personal. She declares that He "is not influenced by man." (*Science and Health*, p. 7.) "The mere habit," she writes, "of pleading with the divine mind as one pleads with a human being perpetuates the belief in God as humanly circumscribed." (*Science and Health*, p. 2.) The efficacy of prayer she attributes to its effect on the human mind, making it act more powerfully on the body, "Petitions bring to mortals only the results of the mortals own faith." (*Science and Health*, p. 11.) "The beneficial effect of prayer for the sick is on the human mind . . . it is one belief casting out another." (*Science and Health*, p. 12.) Such a self-centred process of auto-suggestion is not prayer in the Christian sense of the word at all.

39. By faith and prayer Christian Science gives the power to heal the sick and all manner of diseases. Jesus meant all His followers to have this power.

If Christ meant all His followers to have this power, all would have it. For Christ, being God, could undoubtedly accomplish His designs. But not all His followers have the power to heal diseases at will. And the fact that they lack the power is evidence enough that such was not His intention. Any explanation which does not fit in with the facts must be rejected. But, in reality, there is not a text in the Bible which implies that all followers of Christ would have the power of healing. Christ came to save men from the effects of sin, and to induce and help them to live holy lives. He did not come to bestow upon all men the power of miracles. Holiness does not consist in doing startling things, or in escaping the cross of suffering.

40. Jesus Himself relied on mental-healing by natural powers.

That is really nonsense. Can you imagine the mental exertions of the dead body of Lazarus to think itself alive again?

Before raising Lazarus from the dead Christ lifted His eyes and said, "Father, I give You thanks that You have heard me. And I know that You hear me always; but because of the people who stand about have I said it, that they may believe that You have sent me." (Jn., 11:41-42.) Those words prove that He was relying upon a Divine power beyond all the created natural forces of this universe.

41. Medicine was in vogue before Christ came. But we Christian Scientists know that Christ ushered in a new dispensation.

Christ ushered in a new dispensation, but not of medicine. He did not come to establish a substitute for a medical clinic. He came to call sinners to repentance, that they might secure forgiveness for their sins, overcome their - faults, and serve Him in a life of virtue. In their bodily ills, He still expected people to make use of the services of medical men. "They that are in health," He said, "need not a physician, but they that are ill." (Matt. 9:12.) The ill need the help of the doctor, and Christ never dreamed of advising people otherwise.

42. Christ gave us the religion we need, and we need a religion of healing.

We do not. We need the religion of Christ. The poor, lacking wealth, and the sick, lacking health, have always existed, and always will exist, according to Christ. It is true that He healed some people, in order to prove His divine mission. But by no means did He heal all whom He knew to be sick. Had He done so, there would not have been a single sick person left in the whole world. The same Christ in heaven now knows all the sickness on earth, and by one act of His will He could heal all. He does not do so. No sickness could occur unless God were to permit it. Yet God does permit it. If Christ healed the sick, it was not merely to get rid of the sickness, but to prove His revelation; and that having been proved sufficiently, the real need for miracles ceases.

43. How can Catholic priests claim the same powers as the Apostles if they cannot heal the sick?

The spiritual powers given to the Apostles were to be permanent, and it is a much greater thing to restore the life of grace to a sinful soul than to heal the body from temporal illness. To heal the body is merely to put off a little longer the death which must come sooner or later. But to forgive sin is to secure the soul's eternal salvation. It is true that Christ gave to the Apostles the power both to forgive sin and to heal the body. The power to forgive sin was essential to the mission of the Church, and it has passed on to all succeeding Priests of the New Law. But the power of healing miraculously was not meant to be transmitted automatically.

44. Do you deny that the early Christians practised healing?

Yes. Healing never was a "practice" amongst Christians, as Christian Scientists understand the word. I do not deny that the power of miraculous healing was given by God to various individuals in the early Church. But those who received this gift never thought for a moment that they were exerting their own inherent and natural powers. God wrought signs through given Christians in order to secure the rapid growth and establishment of the infant Church. These signs appealed to onlookers in a special way, serving as a motive of credibility. But once the Church was solidly established, the need of such extraordinary manifestations ceased. People are not meant to become Christians for temporal benefits, but for their eternal welfare.

45. Where in the Bible does it say that the gift of healing was not given to all?

Writing to the Corinthians, St. Paul describes the diversities of gifts bestowed by God upon different individuals in the early Church. "To one, indeed," he says, "by the Spirit, is given the word of wisdom; and to another the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit. To another, faith in the same Spirit; to another the grace of healing in one Spirit; to another, the working of miracles; to another, prophecy; to another the discerning of spirits; to another, diverse kinds of tongues; to another, interpretation of speeches." (1 Cor., 12:8-10.) The healing of which St. Paul spoke was not an art to be learned, but a supernatural gift. Not all received it; and each one who did receive it, had to be given it directly by God.

46. Christ Himself said that such signs would follow those who believe in Him.

The signs He mentioned did follow those who believed in Him, being manifested now through this individual, now through that. But the gift of healing was not granted to the individuals who received it merely for the sake of restoring health. It was given as one way to prove the divine mission of the Church. Thus St. Paul says of the gift of tongues (and the same applies to other extraordinary gifts) that it was "for a sign, not to believers, but to unbelievers." (1 Cor., 14:22.) It is going far beyond anything contained in the Bible to suggest that such signs were meant to follow all believers through all the ages, so that they should be a permanent feature in the lives of all who profess the Christian religion. Moreover, once more, the facts of history exclude such an interpretation.

47. St. James, 5:15, says, "The prayer of faith will heal the sick man."

Those words occur in the midst of a passage describing the Sacrament of Extreme Unction or Last Anointing. Immediately prior to them, St. James declares that the priests of the Church should anoint the sick with oil in the name of the Lord. And he adds that, if the sick man be in sin, his sins will be forgiven him. There is no reference to an infallible and ever-ready panacea for all temporal ills. The idea of holding out the recovery of bodily health as a kind of bribe to attract recruits is utterly foreign to the religion of Christ who said, "If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." (Matt., 16:24.) Christian Science, with its impression that Christ came to the world primarily to heal the sick, labours under a complete misconception of the nature of His life-work on behalf of humanity. Jesus came to teach us to avoid sin and all - evil and to practise virtue in the midst of the trials of this life. And he died on the Cross to expiate our sins, and to make a heavenly and eternal destiny possible to us as a result of our efforts to serve Him.

48. Authenticated cures of organic troubles have been performed with the aid of Christian Science teachings.

Authenticated by whom? Christian Science has not produced a single satisfactory case of a cure of organic disease, where the organic derangement has been established beforehand by competent diagnosis, and the fact of the cure similarly established. What truly scientific evidence for the mental healing of organic diseases sufficient to convince medical experts has Christian Science produced? Another thing to remember is this. According to the teachings of Mrs. Eddy, there is no such thing as an organic disease. Christian Science cannot claim to have cured what it declares never to have existed. To say that man's body is unreal, and that he is "incapable of sin, sickness, and death," is to admit that the cure is as unreal as the imagined disease. Christian Science cannot claim, on its own principles, to have cured any organic troubles. At most it can claim to have enabled a man not to think himself subject to afflictions he had wrongly imagined to be his lot.

49. You, of course, refuse to believe this possible.

I do not say that there are no illnesses which can be cured by mental-healing. I do say that the mental-healing employed need not be associated with Christian Science. Practitioners of mental healing, who have never subscribed to Mrs. Eddy's religious theories, have secured equally good results. We all admit the great influence of the mind over the body. Mental anxiety, worry, and depression, can cause a breakdown of physical health and result in many nervous disorders. In such cases restoration of mental peace results in improved bodily health. But by no thought processes on the part of the patient will a broken leg suddenly cease to be broken, or a cancerous growth disappear overnight. Nor can Christian Science show one properly authenticated case of this nature.

50. Your idea that Christian Science cures are based upon the influence of mind over matter show a complete ignorance of Christian Science principles.

I do not think so. Mrs. Eddy writes, "You say a boil is painful; but that is impossible, for matter without mind is not painful. The boil simply manifests, through inflammation and swelling, a belief in pain, and this belief is called a boil. Now administer mentally to your patient a high attenuation of truth, and it will soon cure the boil." (Science and Health, p. 153.) In that passage she obviously appeals to the influence of mind over matter. A Christian Scientist might say that the administering of truth was bringing the influence of the Divine Mind upon mortal mind; and that the cure was due, granted its occurrence, to the Divine Mind persuading the human mind that the boil did not exist. But no sensible person could accept that, any more than all the other contradictory statements in which Mrs. Eddy asserts that man has "no separate mind from God"; then that "the human mind is opposed to God"; then that "the human mind is a myth."

51. It is strange that a Catholic should doubt the cures claimed by Christian Science, for so many similar cures have been effected at Lourdes.

There is no room for doubt that many miraculous cures have taken place at Lourdes. But there is every reason to doubt the explanation of those cures which would be given by a Christian Scientist, despite his admission that they did occur. Nor does the admission by Christian Scientists that miracles have happened at Lourdes impose on Catholics any duty to admit that the cures claimed by Christian Science are also authentic miracles. It is a fallacy to argue that Lourdes is proof that miracles are possible, therefore Christian Science is able to produce them also.

52. Because you have no faith in Christian Science, you deny the cures it effects. If you had no faith in the Catholic religion, you would probably deny the cures at Lourdes also.

It is possible that, if I were not a Catholic, I would deny the reality of the cures at Lourdes. But if I did so, it would not be because the cures have not happened. It would be either because I had not bothered studying the evidence, or because prejudice had warped my judgement concerning the evidence. If I knew all the facts, and were quite impartial, I would have to admit the cures whether I was a Catholic or not. Prejudice is the greatest obstacle in most cases. Everybody has heard of Dr. Alexis Carrel, at one time Director of the Rockefeller Medical Institute in America, and author of the widely circulated book, "Man the Unknown." His remarkable exploits in scientific research have brought him world-wide fame. But few people know what led to his becoming Director of the Rockefeller Institute. In 1902 Dr. Alexis Carrel was a member of the Medical Faculty of the University of Lyons, in France.

In that year he advised that a child, Marie Bailly, should be taken to Lourdes. She was seriously ill from tuberculosis of the lungs and peritoneum. Other doctors, and Dr. Carrel himself, had employed all the resources of medicine and surgery in vain, in their efforts to benefit her. At Lourdes, she was definitely and completely cured. The other members of the Medical Faculty at Lyons University, who were anti-clericals, attacked Dr. Carrel both for sending the child to Lourdes, and for admitting the cure. Dr. Carrel, who was not himself a practising Catholic at the time, had at least the courage to face the facts. "Lourdes," he said, "has succeeded in three or four days where we all failed; there is something which approaches the category of the miraculous." And he added, "Please note carefully that I neither explain nor discuss. I content myself with stating the facts." But he was contending with an invincible prejudice. One of the principal Members of the Faculty said to him, "It is needless to insist, sir, that with such views as those you can never be accepted as a Member of our Faculty." "In that case," replied Carrel, "I must go elsewhere. I believe that there are places where I shall be more cordially received." He did as he had said, left Lyons and went to America, where it was not long before he became famous. Had it not been for the blind prejudice of his fellow Members of the Lyons Medical Faculty, Dr. Carrel would not in all probability have gone to America, there to undertake the remarkable work which has made his name known all over the world.

53. The cures at Lourdes, as in Christian Science, depend on the faith and understanding of the individual.

Firstly, I deny that any general comparison can be made between the cures at Lourdes, and those claimed by Christian Science. There are cures at Lourdes which could be due to purely natural psychological factors, and which mental suggestion could produce, as in Christian Science, or in any other method of faith-healing. But it is to be noted that the Medical Bureau at Lourdes will not accept as miraculous any cure that could be due to such factors. No cure that could possibly be wrought by Christian Science methods would be registered as miraculous at Lourdes. But there are other cures at Lourdes which could not possibly be due to any subjective persuasion on the part of the patient - as, for example, the instant healing of a broken leg, or the instant disappearance of a cancerous growth. Such cures can be cured by the direct influence of God only; and they alone are accepted as miracles.

54. If the individual had the faith and understanding the cure would happen, whether the patient were a Catholic or a Christian Scientist.

In that case, you could not argue that its results prove the truth of Christian Science! But the miracles at Lourdes are not caused by the faith and understanding of the person cured. If that were so, all with equal faith and understanding should be equally cured. But they are not. In His inscrutable wisdom God often grants a cure where we would least expect it, leaving others with far greater faith and understanding to continue to bear the cross of suffering. Yvonne Aumaitre, a little girl under two years of age, was placed in the waters at Lourdes, and was instantly cured of a double club foot. The outcome was not due to her faith and understanding. You may say that it was due to the faith of her parents. That would not be the faith and understanding of the person cured. But granting that the cure of the child was the reward of the faith of her parents, their faith did not cause the cure. At most it was a condition required of them by God for the granting of the cure. The mental state of the parents did not mend that double club foot. It was due to the direct intervention of God. With all the faith in the world, no Catholic can accomplish such things at will. Nor can any Christian Scientist.

55. Christ said, "By their fruits you all shall know them." Christian Science is justified by its results.

One who keeps in mind all the results of Christian Science cannot but reject it. It has resulted in untold unnecessary suffering. People have continued suffering pain and misery, calling upon the doctor in despair at the end, although the doctor could have relieved them in the very beginning, and checked the progress of the disease. In many cases, because the doctor has been called too late, or not at all, Christian Science has resulted in death. It would result logically in the destruction of society. It can live only in the midst of those who do not accept it. As long as others apply their principles, such as the continuance of preventive scientific measures, vaccination, the draining of cities, the non-adulteration of food, the training of doctors, surgeons, and nurses, a community will continue to live. But legislation on Christian Science principles would have disease raging unchecked, and soon very few citizens to profess the doctrines of Mrs. Eddy.

As regards virtue, we must admit that Christian Science discourages bodily vices, and encourages temperance. But of humility it knows nothing, for its whole purpose is to try to realize that one is really sinless; and the only "confession" at its services is one, not of failure, but of triumph and success. Compassion and pity are also necessarily lessened by one's mental contempt for those who are really suffering, and are believed to have given way to an unreal weakness of mind, complaining of what does not exist at all. It is hard to respect what you are thoroughly convinced is a sham, after all.