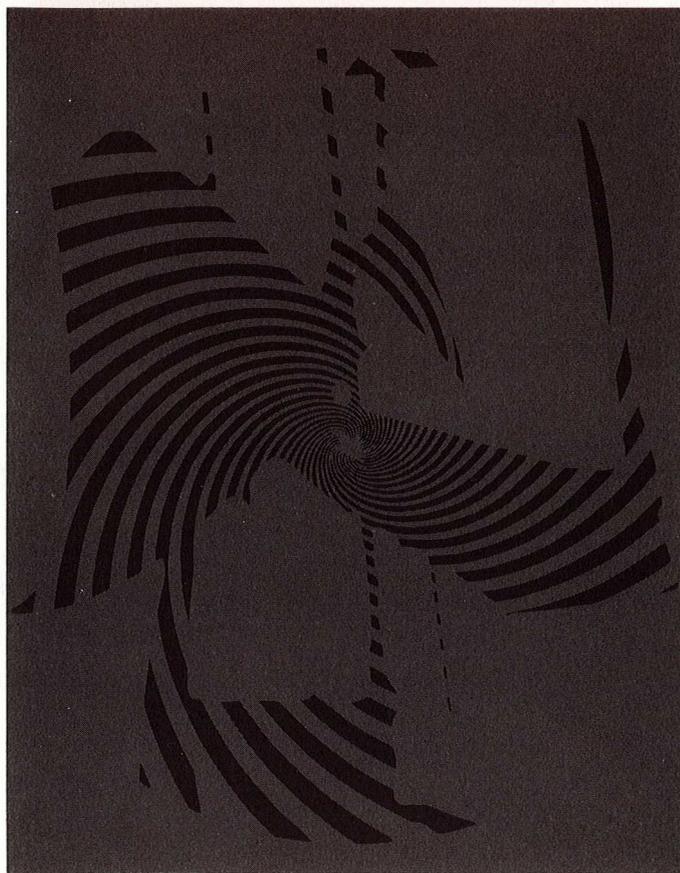


ECUMENICAL PAPERS
CONTRIBUTIONS TO INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

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ECUMENICAL PAPERS

Contributions
to Interfaith Dialogue

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PUBLISHING SOCIETY
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Preface

The papers gathered together here explore a handful of significant theological topics from the standpoint of Christian Science. They were prepared for special occasions on which these topics were being discussed by representatives of several Protestant churches, including the Church of Christ, Scientist.

As a consequence of this *ad hoc* purpose, the papers are not to be taken as systematic or exhaustive presentations of a theological position. Instead, they are modest attempts to share with fellow Christians a few of the insights of Christian Science in relation to questions of mutual concern. It is hoped that they will have interest and value for a larger circle of readers.

The Church's Redemptive Mission

For centuries the Church preached otherworldliness. Heaven lay beyond the grave. Christian resignation demanded the acceptance of the inevitability of natural evil and social injustice in this imperfect world. Disasters were characterized as acts of God. Salvation had little to do with the healing of mortal ills. The Church's redemptive mission was generally seen in sacramental rather than humanitarian terms.

The eighteenth-century Enlightenment changed all that. Man as a rational animal was hailed as capable of building heaven on earth. God became an unnecessary hypothesis. Where He was retained as an object of faith, His transcendence gradually gave way to His immanence in the laws of physical nature and the energies of the human mind.

The end result of this influence on Christian faith may be today's secular Christianity — religion without God, religion as social ethics, religion as human solidarity. In such a situation the Church's redemptive mission becomes the Church's reformatory mission. Its concept of healing becomes largely a concept of social surgery, its ultimate ideal barely distinguishable from that of the scientific humanist and the secular humanitarian.

There is no denying the great gains that have been made in bringing Christianity down to earth, so to speak. The mysticism that turns its back on human needs has little support in the New Testament. "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"¹ "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me."²

Yet from the point of view of Christian Science the question arises whether the revolution goes nearly deep enough, whether the social gospel is an adequate remedy for a discredited pietism, whether man can be reconciled to man without a much more profound reconciliation to the God revealed through Christ. Is the thisworldliness of today's popular Christianity anything more than the obverse of yesterday's otherworldliness — a shifting from the supernatural to the natural pole, when what is really needed is a renewed incarnation of the divine in the human?

As long ago as 1875 when the book now known as *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* was first published, its author, Mary Baker Eddy, rejected not only the hell-fire pietism of the popular religion of her day but also the bland optimism of the activist faith that was rapidly replacing it. Human life, as she saw it, could at any moment turn into nightmare so long as its material basis went unchallenged. Later, in a single phrase, she anticipated the grimmest features of the century

about to unfold when she wrote of material existence as a ghastly farce.³

When she started *The Christian Science Monitor* in 1908, Mrs. Eddy gave evidence of her conviction of the urgent need for Christian influence to be felt in the areas of politics, economics, and social values. But deeper even than this, according to her teaching, lay the need for a spiritual revolution in men's concept of the very universe they live in.

Behind all our fumbling, belated efforts to achieve racial justice, for instance, lies the irresistible divine fact (as Christian Science explains it) that men in their true, essential being are neither black matter nor white matter but are spiritual — made in the image and likeness of a God who is Spirit and Mind and Truth — and are therefore at one with each other as they are at one with God. This metaphysical fact, when understood in all its depth, has tremendous healing power in the human situation. Like the Copernican revolution, which may at first have seemed to have little bearing on the daily facts of men's lives but which completely transformed their relation to the physical universe, so profound a spiritual revolution in our view of man undercuts the age-old foundations of racism.

Looking at the more immediate scene, we see that society today has thousands of instrumentalities for social action and reform. Committed Christians form the very lifeblood of many

of these organizations and activities, without which the whole machinery of our modern world might well break down into hopeless chaos. The Church's direct and indirect influence in the direction of human decency can hardly be doubted. Yet the hard-bitten radical's criticism of much well-meaning religious idealism has plenty of facts to support it.

For surely the increasing magnitude of the problems confronting humanity far outstrips the capacity of even the most liberally motivated society to cope with them within present frames of reference. If the Church remains committed to purely humanist and humanitarian solutions, it may find itself eventually committed by the logic of events to "scientific" programs (in the control of population growth, for instance) that will make Orwell's 1984 look, by comparison, like 1904.

This is where we need to ask: Is it enough to believe that God has endowed men with the self-sufficiency to solve their problems through the exercise of reason, human ingenuity, and goodwill — even if augmented by heroic self-sacrifice? Is this the meaning of the life of Jesus of Nazareth?

Christian Scientists think not. They are humanist enough to believe in the necessity for reason, ingenuity, goodwill, and self-sacrifice in human affairs. They support the enlightened social reformer's goals and, as individual citizens, they may support in varying degree his methods. But they are con-

vinced that a far more radical power is necessary to save the individual and society from ultimate disintegration — a wholly spiritual power, originating in a source not to be defined in terms of a spatiotemporal universe and a material man. This power they call the Christ.

In *Science and Health* Mrs. Eddy writes, "The divinity of the Christ was made manifest in the humanity of Jesus."⁴ But the humanity of Jesus did not exhaust the Christ, as Christian Scientists understand it. That same Christ-power they see as inexhaustibly present, to be manifested in healing the world's ills just as directly as when Jesus was on earth — and just as radically.

There was nothing otherworldly about his healing of a leper or a cripple, no mere promising of relief beyond the grave; but neither were his methods the methods of scientific humanism, operating within an acceptance of the inexorable rule of physical law. His premise was different in *kind* from the premise of meliorative human systems to which spirit is no more than an evolutionary development of matter.

To Jesus, Spirit was clearly primal substance, the causative Principle of being. It was available to men through direct apprehension, not merely through the cultivation of secondary human skills. Metaphorically speaking, this Christ-power bore somewhat the same relation to medical skills that atomic power bears to

horsepower. Furthermore, Jesus promised it to all his followers, not as a miraculous dispensation but as the natural outcome of their understanding of the divine realities he had lived forth in their midst. In the account of his healing of the palsied man in Matthew 9, we read, "But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men."⁵

To the Christian Scientist this is the significance of the spiritual healing of physical disease today. It is a single instance of a divine power that cuts across the generally accepted categories of human power in a revolutionary way. As such, it offers a striking challenge to the Christian and to the Church to bring that same spiritual power to bear on all the individual and social problems of the world. The Saviour's healing of the leper and the cripple was not irrelevant to the larger needs of a leprous and crippled society. In demonstrating the power of God — a God whom the New Testament describes as Love itself — to transform and reshape the individual human being, he was demonstrating the power of that same divine Love to transform and reshape society.

"Ye are the salt of the earth," he said to his followers, "but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?"⁶ If the Church allows itself to become only one more welfare or reform organization among many, then it stands to lose its unique power and

may well end up committed to a program of stifling social coercion rather than of liberating social redemption — to the ethics of the ant-heap rather than of the Kingdom.

Surely the Church has a continuing commitment to awaken in its members that blazing sense of spiritual power, reality, and love which *heals*. And does this not properly begin with the healing of the Christian's own alienation from his divine source? Individual redemption remains a vital wellspring of genuine social therapy.

¹ 1 John 4:20; ² Matt. 25:45; ³ *Science and Health*, p. 272; ⁴ *ibid.*, p. 25; ⁵ Matt. 9:8; ⁶ Matt. 5:13.

The Resurrection of Jesus¹

Today the resurrection of Jesus Christ is widely discounted. Many sincere and thoughtful people, including theologians and natural scientists, regard the story as wholly false, as harmful superstition. Others accord it value only as myth or metaphor. Still others accept its truth but explain it as the return of a ghost or spirit or as a subjective experience by Jesus' followers.

Christian Scientists accept the resurrection of Jesus in its most literal meaning, as including resurrection of Jesus' physical body, the same physical body that had been crucified. They regard this to be the plain meaning of the Gospel record. They understand the resurrection in this sense to have been historically at the center of the Gospel message from earliest times. They regard it as of key importance today.

As a first step, it will be helpful to consider the nature of life. Life, as Christian Scientists understand it, is fundamental. It is not by-product or end-product. Life is substance, original, self-existent, self-sustaining.

So understood, Life is God, Spirit, the divine Principle of existence. Life is not dependent on something other than itself for existence or a medium external to itself and unlike itself for expression.

Life expresses itself in living. Its expression is in individual spiritual identities, in spiritual man and spiritual universe. That the universe exists in Life is a more accurate statement than that Life exists in the universe.

Life, as so understood, does not enter existence by birth nor leave it by death. It does not come or go. It is eternal. And the individual living identities, created by Life, God, coexist with Him, indestructible and inviolable.

And Life is complete, perfect. It does not become quantitatively more or less, qualitatively better or worse. Yet Life is always new, always unfolding in fresh ways within the infinitude of its own completeness, its own perfection.

These statements are not philosophical abstractions. As we see them, they are spiritual facts, demonstrable in present human experience to the extent that the individual yields his thinking and living to the Christ. Centuries ago these changeless truths of Life were made flesh in the career of Jesus. Today they are again being made flesh in Christian healing.

We understand Christ Jesus to be a figure in actual history, born in the year of a Roman imperial census, crucified when Pontius Pilate was Roman procurator of Judea. Jesus permitted men to condemn him, crucify him, and lay his body in a sepulcher. Then with this same body he reappeared to companion with his disciples, comforting and giving instructions for the future.

The records in the four Gospels and in the book of Acts may differ in detail; but their tenor is, we feel, clear. The stone was rolled from the tomb's entrance, and the body was gone. The risen Jesus walked and talked and ate, using mouth, hands, feet. He provided the physical evidence of identity asked by Thomas. Between resurrection and ascension he had unique control over this physique, but it was no apparition; it was human flesh and bone. Resurrection may properly be used as a metaphor to designate individual awakening from an earthly material sense of existence to a higher spiritual sense of living. But the resurrection of Jesus was not a metaphor or a myth or a mere psychic experience of his disciples. It was a physical event, concrete in time and place, dated and localized.

It may be hard to fit such an event into today's secular outlook which bases its hypotheses and reasoning upon measurements by the physical senses or by their instrumental extensions. An increasing number of Christians, influenced perhaps by the intellectual climate of this secular world view, have concluded that the risen Lord had no human corporeal presence. They correctly recognize the precedence of revelation, or faith, over the evidence of history, yet they may underrate the necessity that understanding faith must manifest itself in history, fully and plainly.

In various fashions the demythologizers regard the resurrection appear-

ances as having occurred solely within the hearts and minds of the disciples; they claim that if the disciples did see an outlined figure, this was a projection of their own inner experience conforming to the current state of thought, prepared to see visions of angels, demons, or spirits. Students of the New Testament who accept this view feel that they find the textual and other Scriptural evidence that proves them right.

The Christian Scientist in his study of the Bible brings to scholarship a very different spiritual experience and insight, and he makes a different assessment of the Biblical record. We gratefully avail ourselves of the useful inventions and technological achievements of the natural sciences. We honor qualities promoted by study of these sciences, dedication, integrity, perseverance, precision. But we challenge the conclusions of natural scientists when these extend into areas outside the competence of natural science or when they discount evidence merely because their limited instrumentation is inadequate to test it. Similarly, we challenge theological conclusions directly or indirectly influenced by such pseudoscientific attitudes in the natural scientist.

Consider now the Gospel record. Jesus' resurrection did not occur in isolation. It was the natural climax of what preceded it. The conception of Jesus had not followed accepted human modes, although at the time of the virgin birth only Mary and Joseph knew

this. In his ministry Jesus cured mental and emotional disorders, he healed organic and deteriorative diseases, he revived a newly dead child, a young man being carried out to burial, Lazarus four days dead. Only then did he himself, after exhibiting the usual physical evidences of death and being laid in a tomb, emerge on the third day, as the Gospels record, with an active human body. Step by step he had demonstrated the spiritual authority of the Christ over a physical sense of life. His own resurrection was the logical crown to this progressive demonstration.

But did this progressive demonstration of spiritual power, in fact, take place? Those who deny Jesus' physical resurrection usually accept his casting out of devils as comparable to the work of modern psychiatrists, working sometimes with religious counselors. But in general they reject or suspend judgment on healings of organic conditions and restorations of the dead. If they accept them, it is with reservations; they explain them as perhaps on a level with those rare inexplicable cases of spontaneous recovery which now and then puzzle the medical profession.

Christian Scientists, on the other hand, are satisfied that they have good grounds for accepting in full the healing record of Jesus. For us it is an integral part of the founding of basic Christianity. Furthermore, in our own experience we have seen the Christ exercising

its authority over physical conditions. We have seen mental and emotional disorders cured; many of us have seen serious organic diseases healed. Some have seen beloved relatives and friends restored to health and vigor after medical opinion has adjudged death to be imminent or even already present. We are not acquainted with this healing work just by hearsay. We bear witness to that "which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life."²

Such healings are not just rare inexplicable phenomena. Christian Scientists agree in modesty and humility that they have much to learn and far to go in making their demonstration of spiritual healing uniformly effective. But many individuals and families gladly testify that they have found the power of Christ sufficient to meet their health needs through long lives and successive generations. Such certainly do not find the healing record of Jesus and his physical resurrection hard to accept.

The contemporary world is seeing a notable increase in longevity. Many experts agree that there is no apparent biological necessity for aging and death. Some natural scientists feel there are good grounds for hope that, within a not-too-distant future, healthy physical life will be prolonged indefinitely, accompanied by greatly enhanced intellectual powers and more acute aesthetic sensibilities.

We welcome this increasing longevity and the waning fear of death; but we do not regard indefinite prolongation of physical and temporal life, however enriched, to be humanity's final destiny. This may or may not be a step along the road; but humanity's final destiny is, as we see it, a complete mastery and laying aside of the whole limiting concept of life in matter. It is the demonstration of Life as God and of Life's individual expression as spiritual and eternal, not subject to birth, to passage through time, or to death.

So, for us, the resurrection of Jesus with a physical body provides supreme and unique evidence that the individual manifestation of divine Life, self-recognized and self-identified as such, cannot be driven from the human scene by even the most concentrated and determined physical attack upon it. His subsequent ascension points to humanity's further and final achievement, its rising above the whole space-time continuum.

Paul put this question to King Agrippa: "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?"³ Christian Scientists do not find such a thing incredible. In the light of what they have glimpsed in regard to ever-present divine Life and of their own experiences of Christ-healing, they readily accept the Gospel record of Jesus' resurrection in what they understand to be its full and plain meaning. His reappearance

was not that of a spirit; nor was it a subjective experience by his disciples; nor is it myth or metaphor. Jesus reappeared with a physical body, the same physical body which the Romans handed over to his friends after they were satisfied he was dead.

Of Jesus' immediate disciples Mrs. Eddy writes:

His resurrection was also their resurrection. It helped them to raise themselves and others from spiritual dulness and blind belief in God into the perception of infinite possibilities.⁴

This can be true of his followers today. Unqualified acceptance of the Gospel record of Jesus' physical resurrection and the conviction of indestructible divine Life that flows from this acceptance are of incalculable moral and spiritual value. They establish for the Christian the victory of life over death, of spirit over flesh, of love over hate, of good over evil. And they enable him to share in this victory.

¹ This paper is adapted from an article "Why should it be thought a thing incredible?" published in *The Christian Science Journal*, April, 1965; ² 1 John 1:1; ³ Acts 26:8; ⁴ *Science and Health*, p. 34.

The Phenomenon of Conversion

The words conversion and convert are not often used by Christian Scientists. But the concepts of repentance and of a decisive turning away from sin to God and to His Christ are central to their understanding of Christian experience.

Conversion, on these terms, is not so much a single act as a continuing process. Inasmuch as sin is built into the very structure of the mortal and material sense of life, the individual is not rescued from sin at a single leap. His first conscious turning from the carnal mind, which Paul describes as "enmity against God,"¹ to what the same writer calls "the mind of Christ"² may indeed be a crucial step, giving his whole life a new direction. But the total abandonment of sin (in its broadest sense) requires a repeated and progressive putting off of "the old man"³ and putting on of the new.

In New Testament Greek the word used for sin means a "missing of the mark" and repentance a "change of thinking," or thinking from a fresh standpoint. While there is more to sin than the intellectualized Greek concept of missing the mark, the phrase has value at deeper levels. Mortals, thinking of themselves as organisms evolved

from matter and as governed in the last analysis by the laws of physics and chemistry, certainly and inevitably do miss the mark. On these terms the grown man is only a more sophisticated version of the self-centered little bundle of blind appetites which appears at birth. However hard he strives to realize the religious and moral ideals that have developed through history, he is held prisoner in the end by the matrix of matter. Death and dissolution are his predestined terminus.

This is a total missing of the mark if we are to accept the Saviour's words, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."⁴ In fact, mortal existence at every point makes a mockery of his words. Mortals, by their very nature, are condemned to imperfection, yet Jesus commanded, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."⁵ Such a command requires a radical change of thinking, or repentance. It requires a rescue, a rebirth, an awakening to a new selfhood. And inasmuch as mortality has not the power to change, to wake, to save itself, it requires a Saviour.

The Christ, or Saviour, as Christian Scientists understand it, is the Truth which found its perfect illustration or embodiment in the life of Jesus of Nazareth but which has also been evident in varying measure in spiritually-minded individuals through the ages. While Christian Scientists consider it essential to recognize the historic

incarnation of the Christ in Jesus and to acknowledge the unique position of Jesus in history, they do not consider conversion to be merely a matter of blind faith in the person of Jesus.

When astronomers abandoned the Ptolemaic system, it was not because of a blind faith in Copernicus. A basic change in mental attitude took place. So, at a far deeper level, a profound revolution of thought takes place in Christian conversion. To be grasped by the Christ — the power that lifted Jesus from the grave — is to be raised out of darkness and error to a new understanding of God. It is to experience in one's own life something of the Christ-spirit and the Christ-power.

Paul wrote, "I die daily,"⁶ — dying to sin, waking to a new life in Christ. Mrs. Eddy writes in *Science and Health*:

Waking to Christ's demand, mortals experience suffering. This causes them, even as drowning men, to make vigorous efforts to save themselves; and through Christ's precious love these efforts are crowned with success.⁷

Conversion is obviously a continuing as well as a transforming process. "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."⁸ Both understanding of Truth and obedience to Truth are necessary for a conversion of thought and purpose to the full Christian life. It cannot be achieved through mere emotion or through moral discipline alone. It involves the birth, in thought and deed,

of the "new man," created in the spiritual image and likeness of God.

This man is necessarily sinless, free from the earthward drag of materiality and mortality, free from the selfward pull of finite personality. He is perfect even as his Father in heaven — the divine Principle of his being — is perfect. He is on the "mark" which has been set for him by his creator. It may be illustrated by that culminating moment of the Gospel record when, having already overcome death, Jesus dropped the last vestiges of material limitation and moved beyond physical perception — though remaining, to spiritual perception, supremely alive.

This moment of "ascension" is not regarded by Christian Scientists as a shooting off into outer space or an absorption into a Platonic cloudland of ideal values. On the contrary, it is the achievement of the maximum of individual being, identity, substantiality, reality. It is the full identification of the individual with what he really is and always has been in the eyes of God. It is the aim of human striving and the essential reality behind existential appearances.

As Christian Scientists see it, the realization of this ideal does not mean that the old man *becomes* the new. Rather, the new (or real) man displaces the old (or false). In the words of Jesus to Nicodemus:

That which is born of the flesh is flesh;
and that which is born of the Spirit

is spirit. . . . Ye must be born again. . . .
No man hath ascended up to heaven,
but he that came down from heaven,
even the Son of man which is in
heaven.⁹

Again, stress should be put on the gradualness of the process by which the human being awakes to the fullness of his real being "in heaven" — in the consciousness of reality bestowed by God. Mrs. Eddy writes:

The new birth is not the work of a moment. It begins with moments, and goes on with years; moments of surrender to God, of childlike trust and joyful adoption of good; moments of self-abnegation, self-consecration, heaven-born hope, and spiritual love. . . .

What a faith-lighted thought is this! that mortals can lay off the "old man," until man is found to be the image of the infinite good that we name God, and the fulness of the stature of man in Christ appears.¹⁰

A recent writer on the psychology of religion, G. Stephens Spinks, defines conversion in generalized terms as "the achievement of a new and unified personality as the result of a reorientation of the psyche to some new ideal or purpose," and he continues:

It is often assumed that all such events are sudden and dramatic irruptions into the ordinary level of consciousness, but this fails to allow for the slow and concealed processes of the unconscious whose climaxes may appear as sudden decisions but are really the long-prepared-for results of unconscious "incubation."¹¹

Conversion as a specifically Christian phenomenon obviously involves a reorientation to the Christ. The classic example is the conversion of Paul. His experience on the road to Damascus may be explained by the psychological description just quoted, but that experience was clearly just the single most decisive moment in a conversion of life and thought which began unconsciously earlier and continued consciously through his whole subsequent career. Later he wrote:

For we know in part. . . . But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. . . . Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.¹²

The conversion experience cannot stop short of the full realization of the perfect, spiritual nature of the man made in God's image and likeness.

Christian Science emphasizes the hereness and nowness of this condition and the importance of healing in bringing it to light. This is repeatedly illustrated in a compilation of representative testimony entitled *A Century of Christian Science Healing*. In a final chapter of comment the following point is made:

The real meaning of even the most remarkable bodily healing is not in the observed physical change but in what it indicates about the unseen structure of reality. . . . The real

change, as Christian Scientists understand it, is from material-mindedness to spiritual-mindedness, from self-centered to God-centered thinking.¹³

This might stand as our summing up of conversion.

¹ Rom. 8:7; ² I Cor. 2:16; ³ Eph. 4:22; ⁴ John 11:26; ⁵ Matt. 5:48; ⁶ I Cor. 15:31; ⁷ *Science and Health*, p. 22; ⁸ John 8:31, 32; ⁹ John 3:6, 7, 13; ¹⁰ *Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 15; ¹¹ *Psychology and Religion*, Beacon Press, 1963, p. 110; ¹² I Cor. 13:9, 10; Eph. 4:13; ¹³ *A Century of Christian Science Healing*, The Christian Science Publishing Society, 1966, p. 238.

Baptism and Christian Experience

The following is an informal summary of the views expressed by the Christian Scientist participants in a dialogue on this subject, rather than a position paper written in advance.

Baptism is an inner experience, not an outward event. It is a spiritual purification of thought, character, and will, resulting in transformation of mind and body, and is a continuing process.

When John baptized in Jordan unto repentance and the remission of sins, he said: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire."¹ Does this not imply that it is the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost which characterizes the Christ?

Every Christian has experienced some measure of these three aspects of baptism: (1) that of repentance, humility, and renewal of purpose — the first step in Christian progress; (2) the sometimes painful relinquishment of cherished desires or viewpoints, the unselfing of motive, which is indeed a purification as by fire; (3) the larger sense of baptism into the Holy Spirit, as at Pentecost, when men understood each other's meaning and each heard the

message of Christly love in his own familiar tongue.

Each of these three aspects of baptism takes place in one's inmost thought and spirit and cannot be administered from without. As Christian Scientists understand it, if one has the substance of which the outer baptism is the loved symbol, the symbol becomes unnecessary.

When Jesus, at the beginning of his ministry, came to John for baptism, he said, "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."² When he later asked James and John if they were able to be baptized with the baptism with which he himself was baptized, is it not clear that he here referred to the baptism of tribulation and of exaltation, of fire and of the Spirit? In sending out the twelve disciples, and later the seventy, the Master's detailed charge and instruction included no reference to baptism as such. In Matthew 10 he spoke rather of preaching the gospel, of healing the sick, cleansing the lepers, raising the dead, casting out demons.

The Master's constant ministry was that of spiritual purification, evidenced in healing of mind and body. The regeneration of thought through the healing influence of the Christ-spirit is the true baptism. If a man is materially-minded and his mentality is made up of hate, lust, greed, and the like, his experience will reflect this. If his consciousness is spiritually transformed by humility, integrity, and love for his

fellowmen, his experience will show the change.

To the Christian Scientist, the spiritual is real and substantial. In healing, the Word is made flesh in experience. No theory or symbol is sufficient. Only by actual life and demonstration can spiritual baptism and spiritual communion be shown forth as regeneration and healing.

The absolute Christian goal is perfection, the basis of prayer and progress. Baptism is the process, the way, the gradual entering into a new life as a member of the body of Christ.

The baptismal experience, through which the spiritual reaches the human and the human is transformed by the spiritual, is the very point of healing. In this sense, the true sacraments of baptism and healing are one.

In *Science and Health* Mrs. Eddy writes:

Our baptism is a purification from all error. Our church is built on the divine Principle, Love. We can unite with this church only as we are new-born of Spirit, as we reach the Life which is Truth and the Truth which is Life by bringing forth the fruits of Love, — casting out error and healing the sick. Our Eucharist is spiritual communion with the one God. Our bread, "which cometh down from heaven," is Truth. Our cup is the cross. Our wine the inspiration of Love, the draught our Master drank and commended to his followers.³

¹ Matt. 3:11; ² Matt. 3:15; ³ *Science and Health*, p. 35.

Who Is God?

The first book of Kings records how the Syrians were once defeated by the Israelites on high ground. Obviously, the Syrians concluded, the gods of Israel were gods of the hills; so they would try their fortune again, this time on the plains. Another failure resulted. Israel's God was God both of hills and valleys.¹

In general a Christian Scientist's first meaningful encounter with God has taken place in some valley. He is likely to recall a moment of moral anguish, of physical extremity, of bitter grief or overwhelming disappointment. In this situation he has come face to face with God; he has glimpsed God and his own relationship to God in a new light.

Then he has felt God's power lay hold of his experience. A moral imperative has become clear; a long-standing disease has vanished; new hope, new purposefulness have lifted him from the pit. His life-journey still stretches before him, but it has new direction, new motivation.

God, as we understand Him, is God of both valleys and hills. He cares for us intimately in the traffic of everyday living and He is also "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity,

whose name is Holy."² He is both transcendent and immanent. We worship Him with reverence and humility, as the God "whose name is Holy," but we also encounter Him in the home or street, the office or the factory, confidently face to face, as His beloved sons and daughters.

Faced with the wonder and majesty of God, human thought must acknowledge in all humility its own inadequacy to grasp the fullness of divinity. But it has before it the experiences of the patriarchs and prophets as recorded in Hebrew Scripture, most particularly the life of Christ Jesus as recorded in the Gospels, and finally the workings of the Holy Spirit in all periods. We recognize that in these God has been continuously revealing Himself to mankind and that He has accompanied this self-revelation with acts of saving, redeeming, and healing power which have still further defined His nature. It would be immodest for any of us to claim that we personally know all the answers concerning God; but equally we should feel it the reverse of humility to reject or underestimate any part of God's revelation of Himself, given to humanity down the long millennia of history.

Christian Scientists acknowledge the paramouncy of the Bible in leading humanity to that knowledge of God and of His creation which is eternal Life. Paul Tillich describes the Bible as a record both of the divine self-manifestation and of the way in which human beings have received it. We,

too, find in the Bible God's revelation of Himself, as received and responded to by men. We therefore look first to the Bible — and especially to the Gospel record of the words and works of Jesus — to define for us the identity and nature of God.

The opening verse of Genesis puts God at the very beginning of all things (*in principio*); it acknowledges Him as creator. To Abraham He revealed Himself through Melchizedek as "the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth."³ Moses recognized Him in Exodus as I AM. Leviticus speaks of "the mind of the Lord."⁴ Deuteronomy says of God, "He is thy life."⁵ The Psalms see Him as shepherd and as the great Physician, "who healeth all thy diseases."⁶ First Isaiah recognizes in God all three branches of government: "The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king."⁷ Second Isaiah calls Him "the God of truth."⁸

In the New Testament, Christ Jesus says that God is Spirit and good. But the name for God most frequently on his lips is Father; and this Father appraises Jesus as "my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."⁹ John writes simply: "God is love."¹⁰

Two definitions of God familiar to Christian Scientists are these, given in *Science and Health*:

God is incorporeal, divine, supreme, infinite Mind, Spirit, Soul, Principle, Life, Truth, Love.¹¹

GOD. The great I AM; the all-knowing, all-seeing, all-acting, all-wise, all-lov-

ing, and eternal; Principle; Mind; Soul; Spirit; Life; Truth; Love; all substance; intelligence.¹²

Mrs. Eddy also writes: "Love, the divine Principle, is the Father and Mother of the universe, including man."¹³

These answers to the question "Who is God?" satisfy our reason and our spiritual insights. We feel, too, that they meet the pragmatic test, to which Jesus appealed when the Baptist's disciples came to inquire whether he was the expected one. We feel that in some degree, however imperfectly, however incompletely, we are enabled through this understanding of God's nature to do some of those works which Jesus said his followers would do — to find our prayers answered in terms of spiritual and moral enlightenment, physical healing, and increased effectiveness as individuals and as citizens.

Four of our terms for God may perhaps usefully be commented on: Mind, Mother, Soul, and Principle.

The use of Mind by theologians as a term for God is not unusual. The Bible has countless references to God's wisdom and knowledge. It is hard to imagine the creator of all purposeful being as without intelligence, as not being all that the name *Mind* implies. In traditional theological discourse the characterization of God as Mind is often allied with the "argument from design." Christian Science, recognizing the entropy, fortuity, and disaster inherent in the material universe, turns

rather to the universe of enduring spiritual values for the evidence of Mind's design.

Motherhood, as an aspect of the divine nature, is discussed by Dr. F. W. Dillstone, a theological writer with pastoral and teaching experience in the Episcopal Church. In his book *The Christian Faith* he notes that Christian doctrine has virtually excluded "the mother-figure from its total imagery of family relationships as applied to God." Then he remarks:

Adoption of the masculine appellation led in some aspects of the Hebrew religion . . . to an extreme concentration on masculine qualities. But this was not the case in the Old Testament taken as a whole and certainly not in the New Testament. Fatherhood includes qualities of mercy and forgiveness, tenderness and gentleness, care and sustenance, concern for safety and comfort and renewal of life.¹⁴

This writer concludes that fatherhood provides an adequate image for the relationship of God to His creation, but he fully recognizes what we may call the feminine qualities in the divine nature.

We feel that specific recognition of God as Mother as well as Father is important. The divine name Mother emphasizes how completely man has his true origin in God. In his eternal nature man is wholly the offspring of heaven, calling no man on earth his father and no woman on earth his mother.

Soul in ordinary thought is closely connected with human identity and

individuality. To employ it as a name for God may suggest a pantheistic containment of God within His creation or, alternatively, a swallowing up of all identity and individuality in some single Oversoul. The recognition of God as Soul has for us the opposite connotation. It points to Him as the continuing source and sustainer of identity and individuality; it makes these more definite and distinct; it ensures them a survival and continuity beyond the finite limits of the space-time continuum.

Christians agree that God is Love. But if Christianity is to be recognized as a practical, systematic, demonstrable way of life, then surely the God who is Love can be identified also as Principle. The name Principle does not subtract from the divine nature as Father, Love, Life, the I AM: it includes all these. And it indicates God as the origin of all things — "In the beginning God . . .", "*In principio deus . . .*". It also points to His government of the universe not as a benevolent despot, but by universal law maintaining universal order. This law is infinitely warm, adaptable, intelligent. It is the law of divine Life and Love, perfectly adjusting itself with tenderness and wisdom alike to the wheeling of galaxies and to the sparrow's fall.

To conceive of God as Principle does not mean the total denial to Him of personal being. God is certainly not a finite human person on a superhuman scale; no Christian would think of the

infinite as person in that sense. C. S. Lewis writes of God:

He must not be thought of as a featureless generality. . . . He is the most concrete thing there is, the most individual. . . . Body and personality as we know them are the real negatives — they are what is left of positive being when it is sufficiently diluted to appear in temporal or finite forms.¹⁵

Dr. Robert F. Evans in his book *Making Sense of the Creeds* makes this point:

Metaphorical language is the indispensable verbal medium by which we approach the finally ineffable yet commanding mystery of God and his love.¹⁶

This is true at one level, but in a more profound sense the names we give to human thoughts and objects are but types and shadows of the spiritual. Mr. Lewis, further discussing God's nature, writes:

He is unspeakable not by being indefinite, but by being too definite for the unavoidable vagueness of language. . . . Our physical and psychic energies are mere metaphors of the real Life which is God. Divine Sonship is, so to speak, the solid of which biological sonship is merely a diagrammatic representation on the flat.¹⁷

We feel that "personal" is too limited an epithet for God, unless we call Him infinite Person. As infinite Person and divine Principle, God lives and loves with the fullest intensity, caring inti-

mately for His whole creation, with every identity precious in His sight.

For its most complete example of the divine nature humanity turns to the life of Christ Jesus. Here God has revealed Himself as completely as it is possible for the infinite and eternal to reveal itself in a single human life-span. In Jesus the Word, or Christ, was made flesh; its saving presence and power appeared in the world as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."¹⁸ Jesus was tempted as other men are, yet he was without sin. At every point in his earthly career, from his conception by the power of the Holy Spirit to his ascension with the promise that the power of the Holy Spirit would come upon his followers, customary material modes were set aside. He faced up to the evil in the world, but he cast it out; to the suffering in the world, but he healed it; to death, but he overcame it. The kingdom of heaven, which he proclaimed, had come not to perpetuate the world's evil either as a direct or indirect instrument of the divine purposes, but to expose and destroy it.

Untouched by sin, complete master over material conditions, Jesus defined God, as fully as possible in terms of a human life, and said: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."¹⁹ In his living he exercised without limit the power of Spirit and the power of good; he thus defined God as Spirit and as good. And he commanded his followers to do likewise. He set them

the goal, as we see it, of presenting to the world the same definition of an immaculate God that he had himself presented. "Be ye therefore perfect," he said, "even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."²⁰ We feel that in this unqualified perfection of God lies humanity's firm assurance of salvation.

A message written by Mrs. Eddy in 1901 offers this counsel:

As Christian Scientists you seek to define God to your own consciousness by feeling and applying the nature and practical possibilities of divine Love.²¹

Christian Scientists study daily to gain a closer acquaintanceship with God, as He has revealed Himself in the Bible. And they aim to let this maturing acquaintanceship with divine Love direct in ever growing degree their daily living and their response to the saving and healing power of God.

Men will continue their search to know and define God. But their search can be successful only as they recognize that in a deeper sense God through His Christ is searching for them. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that the Father seeketh true worshippers to worship him.²² To his disciples he said: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you."²³ And the Christians at Philippi were counseled: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."²⁴ In John's

words, "We love him, because he first loved us."²⁵

As Christians, we can open our hearts and minds to the divine grace by our thoughts and actions, by our prayers and our searching of the Scriptures. But ultimately it is God who discloses to each individual the full definition of Himself. It is the Father, who in individual encounter with each one of His sons and daughters, whether on hilltop or in valley, gives us in saving and in healing the final answer to this question "Who is God?" Then it is for us by our living to show how much or how little we have understood Him.

¹ I Kings 20; ² Isa. 57:15; ³ Gen. 14:19; ⁴ Lev. 24:12; ⁵ Deut. 30:20; ⁶ Ps. 103:3; ⁷ Isa. 33:22; ⁸ Isa. 65:16; ⁹ Matt. 3:17; ¹⁰ I John 4:16; ¹¹ *Science and Health*, p. 465; ¹² *ibid.*, p. 587; ¹³ *ibid.*, p. 256; ¹⁴ *The Christian Faith*, J. B. Lippincott Co., 1964, pp. 44, 45; ¹⁵ *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*, Macmillan Co., 1947, pp. 93, 94; ¹⁶ *Making Sense of the Creeds*, Association Press, 1964, p. 19; ¹⁷ *Miracles*, p. 93; ¹⁸ John 1:29; ¹⁹ John 14:9; ²⁰ Matt. 5:48; ²¹ *Message to The Mother Church for 1901*, p. 1; ²² John 4:23; ²³ John 15:16; ²⁴ Phil. 2:12, 13; ²⁵ I John 4:19.

Sin and Grace

It was unthinkable, Henry Adams wrote after his sister, racked with suffering, had died of tetanus, "that any personal deity could find pleasure or profit in torturing a poor woman, by accident, with a fiendish cruelty known to man only in perverted and insane temperaments."¹ Yet millions of Christians have believed traditionally in just such a God.

Cruelty, waste, indifference, and pain are inherent in the very structure and texture of the natural world. Much of this cannot easily be attributed to human wickedness. It is "natural" evil, in the common phrase, and the Christian apologist has usually explained it as the condition of man's creatureliness. In this explanation the agonies and accidents of material existence are held to be the necessary matrix of its blessings and possibilities.

But why create such a universe in the first place? Could not a perfect God create a perfectly good universe, as in the great vision of Genesis 1, where the flawless creation metaphorically presented for contemplation bears little resemblance to nature as we encounter it through the physical senses, with its ceaseless, savage struggle for existence? From a perfectly good creator would one not expect a world of limitless goodness?

"Ah, but . . ." says traditional apologetics, "that would be tame, ignoble,

leaving man incapable of real development through pitting himself against his environment."

Really? Is God tame and ignoble because He is the very Principle of good? Does supreme goodness, supreme Love, lack the power of intelligent self-development? Must God, in Manichaeian fashion, have an opposite in order to be really God? Must the joy of pure being rest on a base of blind, appetitive thrust and mutual destruction?

If not, then why must it be assumed that the answer is different in the case of man? "What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?"² Are we then to believe that God has deliberately arranged a natural order which over the centuries has brought into existence countless deformed and imbecile children, children destined to suffer hideous pain, to die of famine and accident, to be slaughtered in war or burned alive in holocaust, to have their lives distorted by inherited criminal tendencies and vicious social systems? Are these the children of a loving heavenly Father?

There is no logical necessity for creating man subject to the gigantic injustice of the natural order and the drag of animal instincts. Faced with this fact, Christian apologists (like pre-Christian Job) have tended to take refuge in the inscrutable mystery of the divine purpose.

Is there, then, a rational explanation of moral evil, or sin?

If God makes men capable of sin, it would seem reasonable that he must take responsibility for their sinning. "Oh, no!" shocked tradition replies. "Free will, and all that." But if He knew from the outset that His hapless creatures would choose to sin, and if He *still* chose to create them, how can He escape ultimate responsibility? "Because," the answer goes, "permissiveness is the necessary precondition of freedom of will. Because without freedom to sin, man would be the mere slave or puppet of God's will."

There is a curious assumption in this: that human dignity demands the right to become the opposite of what one really is. But is God free to sin? Is Truth free to falsify? Is light free to be darkness? Is good free to be evil? If we say no to these questions, do we then pity God and consider Him to be a slave to His own goodness?

True freedom is freedom to fulfill one's highest possibilities. The sinner is the slave, not the man made in God's image who acts spontaneously but inevitably from his God-bestowed nature. The physical organism determined by chancy genes and contingent circumstance is the puppet — though not of God's will (unless one chooses to make God responsible for the worst as well as the best of human behavior). If the man of God's creating is identified with the puppet-mortal evolved from primal matter, free will becomes logically untenable and sin becomes, as in modern scientism, mere sickness and maladjust-

ment, to be healed by social reconditioning rather than by spiritual rebirth.

This leads to the secular point of view that natural and moral evil are essentially one, capable of progressive amelioration through human ingenuity but, in the last analysis, built into the limitations of the material universe. Once again it remains an unfathomable mystery why God, as traditional Christianity maintains, should have created such a universe in the first place. Creation, seen in these terms, may well be considered synonymous with the "fall."

A generation with a distaste for unfathomable mysteries rebels, naturally enough, against being held guilty of the sin of being born estranged and wayward. Is even the proffer of grace through Jesus Christ, as traditionally interpreted, a reasonable recompense for a congenital estrangement so great that millions of people seem incapable of accepting that grace? Or, as some today suggest, is the real message of Jesus: "You're on your own now in a pretty ghastly universe, but here's the way to salvage something noble from it"?

A wholly different answer is possible, an answer which suggests that the drama of redemption is misunderstood if the drama of creation is misread. It identifies the message of Jesus with the vision of Genesis 1: man sinless, guiltless, the crowning glory of a perfectly good creation. This is the man glimpsed through the earthly life of the Saviour, culminating in his resurrection and

ascension beyond all the limitations of a mortal and material sense of existence. God's grace, so understood, is not His forgiveness of men's innate sinfulness but His revelation of man's innate goodness. Christ's saving work, so understood, is the awakening of humanity from the nightmare of materiality to the present and eternal perfection of God's spiritual creation.

What this basically involves is putting off the old man for the new — the man determined by genes for the man revealed through Christ — not by changing one into the other but by exchanging appearance for reality, the outward for the inward, the humanly plausible for the divinely certain. And what this does is to bring radical healing to the present imperfect sense of existence. As the inner structure of reality comes to light, the illegitimacy of the merciless claims of evil is progressively demonstrated.

Such a process does not "explain" evil, in the sense of justifying it, but step by step wipes it out — as Jesus wiped out sin, sorrow, pain, death, all the limits implied by the word "matter." Seen in this perspective, ontology relates directly to ethics, including social ethics. "The belief of life in matter sins at every step," writes Mrs. Eddy.³ Merely to rearrange the material factors in a given situation through social programming — valid and important though this may often be as an expression of intelligent Christian concern — is to leave the basic need untouched.

To the dispossessed who need food, housing, opportunity, human dignity, as well as to the privileged who must learn how to relate the ethics of the good Samaritan to the broad social imperatives of today, the primary demand of Jesus still applies: "Ye must be born again."⁴

In I John we read:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.⁵

In the same epistle we read:

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.⁶

Here is paradox *par excellence*. Viewed through the dismal lens of unregenerate human experience, man is obviously a sinner; seen with the penetrating vision of spiritual insight, he is found to be the sinless child of God. Santayana has written that love is penetrating but that it penetrates to possibilities rather than to facts. Divine Love, however, penetrates to the possibility as the fact; that is, the good which may appear humanly to be mere possibility is already existent fact in the divine order of being. For God to see is to actualize, and for a man to accept himself as God sees him is to be born again. Then instead of trying to find a legitimate origin for the claims of evil he is in a position to reject them as wholly spurious, fraudulent, and alien

to God's purpose for the universe and man.

Jesus made plain that evil is best regarded as a lie, and Paul wrote:

Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.⁷

What this implies is a different *starting point* for thought and action. Instead of starting with a sinning, fallen mortal subject to all the contingencies of material existence, one starts with the spiritual man made in God's image, reflecting God's purpose and power.

This also means starting with a different universe. The Christian who makes Spirit rather than matter the locus of reality need not flinch from the kind of challenge set forth by Bertrand Russell in a now classic statement:

That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the ends they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; . . . that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins — all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are . . . nearly certain. . . . Brief and powerless is man's life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to

good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way. . . .⁸

This picture of cosmic doom suggests a view of reality seen through a distorting lens. The lens in this case is the acceptance of matter as ultimate substance; everything else in the statement follows logically from that premise. Yet the resurrection and ascension of Jesus slash clear across such reasoning — not merely as events in history but as revelations of reality. Even his day-by-day healings constitute evidence of a different *kind* of substance, a different *kind* of power. To classify love, intelligence, joy, courage, humility, inspiration as accidental by-products of fleeting electrochemical impulses and neuromuscular reactions is impossible for one who has experienced in his own body the regenerative power of Spirit.

To the disciples who found his sayings "hard" Jesus declared, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing."⁹ Certainly the commitment to Spirit and its immortal creation as the sole reality of being is hard for the human mind; but in proportion as we yield to the divine logic of this position and come to grips with its demands on our humanity, we find it life-giving, life-preserving, life-transforming.

This makes for realism about the human scene rather than for wishful thinking. Matter is recognized as a mental outlook which by its nature corrupts

our view of man. In *Science and Health*, Mrs. Eddy writes:

Mortals are not fallen children of God. They never had a perfect state of being, which may subsequently be regained. They were, from the beginning of mortal history, "conceived in sin and brought forth in iniquity." . . . Learn this, O mortal, and earnestly seek the spiritual status of man, which is outside of all material selfhood.¹⁰

Such a demand calls for regeneration rather than mere rearrangement, for putting off the old man rather than idealizing him, but at the same time it involves a practical transformation of mortal existence, not a mere retreat into otherworldliness. The fact that God's man is here *now*, for the proving, demands action, healing, change.

"Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind," wrote Paul, "that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."¹¹ Surely this is the fundamental Christian answer to the problem of evil, an answer leading step by step to the end implicit in our true beginning: "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."¹²

¹ *The Education of Henry Adams*, Book League of America, 1928, p. 289; ² Matt. 7:9; ³ *Science and Health*, p. 542; ⁴ John 3:7; ⁵ I John 1:8; ⁶ I John 3:9; ⁷ Col. 3:9, 10; ⁸ *Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell*, Ed. Robert E. Egner, Lester E. Denonn: Simon & Schuster, Inc., pp. 67, 72; ⁹ John 6:63; ¹⁰ *Science and Health*, p. 476; ¹¹ Rom. 12:2; ¹² II Cor. 3:18.