'Standing Porter at the Door of Thought':
The Social Order of the Christian Science Church

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Paper presented in the American Studies section of the Western Social Science Association annual conference, Reno, Nevada, April 20, 2001.

Abstract

The Church of Christ, Scientist, is a unique organization to study in the context of institutional social order. The church is a 21st century religious movement that is bound to an unchangeable theology and intractable management structure developed by its 19th century founder. The church is a worldly business entity whose leadership manipulates assets, personnel, media and information while striving for "rectitude and spiritual understanding" (Eddy, 1906, p. 403). Christian Science is a way of life which systemizes the personality of its charismatic founder while denying the reality of all things physical and personal. Examining the seemingly contradictory social order of Christian Science helps explain recent crises and predict future challenges for its shrinking population of believers.

"Stand porter at the door of thought. Admitting only such conclusions as you wish realized in bodily results, you will control yourself harmoniously." (Eddy, 1906, p. 391)

Introduction

The Church of Christ, Scientist, better known as the Christian Science Church, is a worldwide religious organization established in 1879 by Mary Baker Eddy to "reinstate primitive Christianity and its lost element of healing" (Eddy, 1936, p. 17). The church was founded as part of Mrs. Eddy's quest to present to the world biblical truths she credited for saving her life. In 1866, Mrs. Eddy fell on an icy sidewalk near her home in Lynn, Mass. and was "taken up in an insensible condition" with injuries "including spasms and intense suffering" (As related in Thomas, 1994, p. 114). Today, Christian Scientists celebrate this incident as the birth of their church - the moment when Mrs. Eddy assumed the identity of its religious leader (Gill, 1998) and went on to reveal the truths hidden in the Bible that Scientists say result in perfect health and eternal life. These truths are expounded in the denominational textbook, Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures, first published in 1875.

Mrs. Eddy established The Mother Church, the First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston, Mass., and fostered growth of branch churches worldwide. The Christian Science Publishing Society, a variety of broadcast operations and the Christian Science Monitor newspaper also became part of the denominational structure.

When she died in 1910, Mrs. Eddy left church management in the hands of a Board of Directors which she legally bound to follow her 138-page Manual of the Mother Church. In the book, she refers to herself by name, or by her title of Pastor Emeritus 132 times, and forbids changes in Christian Science theology, church doctrine, or management without her personal approval (Eddy, 1936). Humorist Mark Twain suggested that Mrs. Eddy's requirements offered Christian Scientists no more say in the management of their church than audience members would have in the management of a theater (Twain, 1907), and certainly many Scientists also take this view. Since the beginning of the movement, members have complained about their inability to revise doctrine, engage in debate, or openly publish literature not approved by the church.

For more than a hundred years, church leadership kept most of these grievances out of the public spotlight by methodically acquiring as much historical documentation as possible about the movement (Silberger,

1980), restricting access to this collection (Gill, 1998), and threatening malcontents with excommunication or legal action as they voice opposition to The Mother Church (Beals, 2000; Fraser, 1999). These strategies, together with an army of local observers feeding "vital intelligence" back to Boston (Brenneman, 1990, p. 69) kept most dissent private. But, beginning in the 1980s, as membership continued to drop and scholars increasingly identified Christian Science as "a graying, dwindling religion" (Brenneman, 1990, p. 77), several events developed publicly to threaten the institutional social order of the church.

A financial and management crisis almost bankrupted The Mother Church (Fraser, 1999) and forced the sale of church broadcast units at a huge financial loss. In order to qualify for a huge financial gift, the church authorized publication of a biography which deifies Mrs. Eddy and is seen by many Scientists as "blasphemous" (Fraser, 1999, p. 371). Church leadership was named in a spate of lawsuits accusing The Mother Church of responsibility in connection with the deaths of children who died while under Christian Science prayer treatment. Numerous break-away groups surfaced to openly challenge the authority of The Mother Church, its interpretation of Christian Science theology, and leadership's control of written work about the faith.

As these controversies developed, church leadership found it could no longer fall back on the old strategy of "quiet attempts to silence opposition" (Kramer, 2000, p. 100). The international news media focused voluminous attention on the church's troubles, and Christian Science dissenters found numerous opportunities to unite and share their complaints through traditional media and via the World Wide Web.

All of these events greatly threaten a the institutional social order of a religion whose theology demands that adherents be in "an almost constant state of denial" to actions and events of the physical world (Kramer, 2000). The Christian Science belief system results from Mrs. Eddy's puritan upbringing; it was crafted by her for those who "wished to cling to cherished values and ideals in a rapidly changing America" of the 19th century (Thomas, 1994, p. 295).

Christian Science sustains with immortal proof the impossibility of any material sense, and defines these so-called senses as mortal beliefs, the testimony of which cannot be true either of man or of his Maker. (Eddy, 1906, p. 488, italics in the original)

Mrs. Eddy's desire "to quite literally institutionalize her personality" in her church (Brenneman, 1990, p. 43) has left this belief system intact and operational in a 21st century world. As a result, her church is faced today with innumerable threats Mrs. Eddy did not foresee or prepare followers to address. The church needs to stabilize its financial footing, re-energize its organizational structure, add new members, and stem the tide of branch church closings. But because the church's social order cannot be changed to adapt to expectations of the contemporary world, and because threats to its social order are growing in number and complexity, it is difficult to imagine how The Church of Christ, Scientist, can address the worldly concerns which must be mastered for it to survive.

One could easily suspect that we may soon witness the demise of a church and a religious system which was a prominent part of American life for several generations. For that reason, the social order of Christian Science is an appropriate subject for study, perhaps more so now than at any time during its history.

Social Order

The need to believe in an ethereal being or God is "a part of our nature, built into our neuronal mainframe" as human beings, writes Shermer (2000, p. 47). As human beings, we want to believe in a power greater than ourselves, and, at the same time, we want to share this religious experience with others who believe as we do. The sharing of the experience allows us to integrate spirituality into our personal and professional lives in a variety of meaningful ways (Schneiders, 1989).

Typically, the shared experience takes place within the organizational structure commonly referred to as the church. Within this structure, followers develop their spiritual beliefs in accordance with the church's theological norms (Neck & Millman, 1994). Followers align their values with the organization, to reflect "emotional investment" in its structure (Dehler & Welsh, 1994, p. 22). Finally, the followers submit to and participate in "relationship-based organizing" (Sass, 2000, p. 201) which connects participants, their values, and activities in socially meaningful and supportive ways. The end result is an organization which interprets the world and its relationships for followers and the general public (Appelrouth, 1999).

As a result of the presence of value alignment, personal spirituality development, social organizing activity, and the interpretive role of the church, any religious group organized within such a structure could logically be examined in the context of social order. The search for social order is, essentially, the

search for "sameness" as we endeavor to make predictions about how people of similar faith will act, independently and together in the social environment (See Gudykunst & Kim, 1992, p. 24). A socially ordered environment is a trusting environment (Postrel, 1998) where people manifest attitudes and behaviors which are uniform, consistent and repetitive (Couch, 1996; Elster, 1989). The actions of people in a socially ordered environment and will be sustained through division of labor, construction of trust and solidarity, a regulation of power, and a legitimization of social activity (Eisenstadt, 1992).

Our study of the social order of Christian Science will focus on the denominational leadership symbolized by the organizational structure known as The Mother Church, the First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston. The study will focus on the social order church leadership has demonstrated through establishment and maintenance of a relationship with the faithful and the general public.

The study begins with an examination of the division of labor, to see who works to communicate beliefs of the First Church of Christ, Scientist to followers and the general public. This is an important aspect of the study of any organization, because work is "the fundamental value of social order" (Olivia Augusto, 1998, Abstract) and communicating theology and practice is a fundamental task of any church.

Next, the study examines methods used by Mother Church leadership to create trust and solidarity among the faithful. Research has demonstrated that trust is developed in the socially ordered environment when people are responsible for the actions they take, and select leaders who assume responsibility appropriately (Silvert, 1998). Religious organizations must be perceived as trustworthy if they are to survive, and this church is no exception.

An assessment is made of the regulation of power within the Church of Christ, Scientist, and applied toward its followers. Power is accomplished through actions of people and is supported by rules and their exceptions which maintain "the regularity of social life" (Edgerton, 1985, p. 255). Power can be expressed through rhetorical appeal to support rules and exceptions (Lee & Ungar, 1989). Power also is expressed through an unspoken "grammar of institutions" whereby institutions encourage the regularity of human action that takes place within them (Crawford & Ostrom, 1995). A religious group needs to express power sufficient to be a socially ordered entity, but through that statement should not appear excessively controlling or manipulative.

Finally, the study addresses the means through which the Mother Church legitimizes Christian Science practice as a part of human social activity - both inside and outside the church organization. Past researchers have shown that human social activity is legitimized a variety of different ways, including through artistic display (Mortensen, 1997), aesthetic design (Harris, 1995), presentations of stories (Gronbeck, 1997), recreation (Brown, 1997), and through socialization skills cultivated by television programs (Bitenc, 1998). While it would be easy to characterize Christian Science simply as a religious belief which is "a pragmatic interpretation of Christian revelation" (Gottschalk, 1973, p. 275), it is much more than that. Christian Science embodies a completely different belief system and world view from society's accepted norm, and its faithful are admonished to follow "without addition or deviation" (Kramer, 2000, p. 24). For that reason, it is important to analyze the way church leadership presents this non-traditional social order in a traditional world environment.

The social order of the First Church of Christ, Scientist, is being threatened in many ways by recent internal and external developments. The research will conclude with a brief discussion of these challenges, as well as recognition of recent positive and supportive developments.

Division of Labor

There is no excellence without labor; and the time to work, is now. Only by persistent, unremitting, straight-forward toil; by turning neither to the right nor to the left, seeking no other pursuit or pleasure than that which cometh from God, can you win and wear the crown of the faithful. (Eddy, 1924, p. 340, italics in the original).

Mrs. Eddy and the Manual

When Christian Science burst on the scene at the close of the Civil War, the attractiveness of Mrs. Eddy's philosophy allowed her to quickly build the nation's fastest-growing religious movement (Gill, 1998). Many of the most prominent Americans, including socialites, politicians, and entertainers, were among the faithful.

Still, Mrs. Eddy was not universally admired during her lifetime. She was frequently involved in disputes with followers, and usually accused them of carrying out mental attacks against her or her church (Fraser, 1999). Those who opposed Mrs. Eddy usually left the fold or were excommunicated because Mrs. Eddy

did not tolerate insubordination. Until the end of her life she struggled with dissent among Scientists (Fraser, 1999).

Nevertheless, as its followers grew in number, the Church of Christ, Scientist, grew in organizational structure and complexity and Mrs. Eddy grew in stature. Thronged by admirers and showered with gifts, she "enjoyed the power she possessed and felt she was honestly entitled to it" (Silberger, 1980, p. 213)

"Students are constantly telling me how they felt the mental impression this year to make me no present, and when they overcame it they were strengthened and blessed." (Mrs. Eddy, as quoted in Cather & Milmine, 1983, p. 317)

Focused and determined, strong in organizational skill and with "a genius for fund-raising" (Gill, 1998, p. 469), Mrs. Eddy spent little time socializing and in fact was often "inaccessible to anyone except members of her household and her selected church officials" (Gill, 1998, p. 350). She was constantly at work, writing and revising the Manual of the Mother Church. As a result, Mary Baker Eddy's displayed personality and work ethic is, now and forever, the model for Christian Scientists.

Laborers in the field

Mrs. Eddy felt that an appropriate follower of Christian Science "gives little time to society manners or matters, and benefits society by his example and usefulness" (Eddy, 1900, p. 2). This philosophy is reflected by a church organization which has no paid clergy and no church-sanctioned social functions or charitable causes.

The order and content of Christian Science church services are dictated by the Manual. Sunday services are conducted by lay 'readers' who read selections from the Bible and Science and Health. Selections are chosen by The Mother Church based on a revolving set of topics selected by Mrs. Eddy. All citations read are identical in all branch churches each Sunday, and no elaboration or extemporaneous speaking is authorized. The Manual establishes specific time limits for music, and allows only a piano or organ accompaniment. Audience members remain silent except during hymns and reader-led audible prayer. Presumably because of the sedate nature of the services, Christian Scientists are discouraged from bringing children to church. Children are welcomed at Sunday School, which has classes for youth

through age 20. Wednesday evening meetings include selected readings followed by healing testimonials offered by audience members.

Each Christian Science church will employ a clerk, a treasurer, and occasionally will have service positions for others. Outside the church, Mrs. Eddy allowed for a small number of 'professional' Christian Scientists who are indirectly employed in specific service occupations.

Christian Science teachers are Board-approved educators who give class instruction sessions annually to the most devout followers, who must already have secured Mother Church and branch church membership. Christian Science lecturers are Board-approved spokespersons who are paid by The Mother Church to travel the world and speak publicly about the religion and its benefits. It is usually expected that each branch church will host at least one lecture annually; often these gatherings are held in other public accommodations to boost attendance. Lecturers never debate about Christian Science, as per the Manual.

Christian Science practitioners are full- or part-time professionals who have participated in class instruction from a teacher and offer prayer healing services for a fee as an alternative to medical care. Practitioners are not allowed to diagnose illnesses, offer medication, or provide any type of physical comfort. When an ailing Christian Scientist needs additional care, a Christian Science nurse may be called in to bathe the patient, dress wounds, or assist in making the sufferer more comfortable, as long as no medications are being used. Seriously ill Christian Scientists are welcomed to rest and pray at private Christian Science nursing home facilities.

Trustees, Directors, and Publishers

Mrs. Eddy created her Manual to be both detailed and vague in the way it addresses management of the Mother Church and propagation of Christian Science theology. With great detail, it affirms establishment of The Board of Trustees, which legally holds and manages Mother Church property. It allows for The Board of Directors of The Mother Church, a five-member self-nominating panel assigned to transact the denomination's business and verify that "the officers of this Church perform the functions of their offices promptly and well" (Eddy, 1936, p. 28). Finally, the Manual authorizes The Christian Science Publishing Society, which is held responsible "on a strictly Christian basis, for the promotion of the interests of Christian Science" (Eddy, 1936, p. 79). Amid this detail, the Manual makes no allowances for the growth

and development of leadership within the organizational structure over time. It has been suggested that Mrs. Eddy created no such "visionary role" for leadership because she "reserved that role for herself" (Fraser, 1999, p. 375).

The Trustees are among the most neglected of the leadership groups in the Manual, despite being charged with management of some of America's most valuable urban real estate. Mentioned by name in the Manual only eight times, Trustees receive no directive from Mrs. Eddy on how to manage the Mother Church property and develop the denomination's financial portfolio.

Mrs. Eddy made few stipulations in the Manual about how the Board should act, despite establishing the Board as the primary organizational and doctrinal authority for the Church of Christ, Scientist. The Board "assumed the role of her successor" upon Mrs. Eddy's death (Beals, 2000, p. 9) because it had to; Mrs. Eddy's Manual makes no provisions for personal leadership of the church after her demise. It makes no provision for regular reporting of Board actions to the membership. Thus, the Board's actions are unseen; its reports are made only in summary at the church's annual meeting each June.

The Christian Science Publishing Society probably has the most impact on the movement in terms of labor performed. Most obvious is the publication of the Christian Science Monitor newspaper and the church's many exclusively religious publications(1). Less obvious but tremendously more influential is the work that the Publishing Society carries out in the field. The Society's Committees on Publication (COPs) work locally to promote Christian Science, defend it from attack, censor critical commentary, gather information for the Mother Church, and raise funds to support legal battles. There are 52 COPs in the U.S. and more than a hundred overseas, and at least one member of each branch church participates.

As directed by Mrs. Eddy, COPs exert prior restraint pressure on publications which plan to publish or broadcast critical media content. COPs work through the Publishing Society's Committee on Business, which "uses advertiser 'muscle' to intimidate editors and publishers" (Brenneman, 1990, p. 73).

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. . . Furthermore, the Committee on Publication shall read the last proof sheet of such an article and see that it is published according to copy; he shall

circulate in large quantities the papers containing such an article, sending a copy to the Clerk of the Church. (Eddy, 1936, p. 97, italics in the original)

COPs also help raise money from the faithful to fund legal battles by parents whose children have died while under Christian Science prayer treatment - an increasingly large task, since there have been dozens of such cases in recent years (Kramer, 2000; DesAutels, Battin & May, 1999; Brenneman, 1990). Because of this and other work that goes on behind the scenes, COPs are seen as "the most powerful figures in the church in many respects" (Brenneman, 1990, p. 69).

Construction of Trust and Solidarity

If we trust matter, we distrust Spirit (Eddy, 1936, p. 234).

Throughout the history of the movement, there have been concerns that "quick, effective, convincing activist-converts might lead the Church off into new directions of their own contriving; even, perhaps that they might move her Church right out from under Mrs. Eddy" (Silberger, 1980, p. 186). For that reason, the Board enforces trust and solidarity of the faithful through a variety of individual and collective tests of loyalty. All are in keeping with the organization's style of quiet, behind-the-scenes manipulation.

Individual tests of loyalty

A primary test of loyalty among individual Christian Scientists is church membership. Scientists who confess their faith and secure written recommendations from other members may join a branch church at age 12, following an oral interview and an affirmative vote of the membership. Branch church members may also join The Mother Church, provided they secure similar endorsement and are approved by a vote of the Board.

While it is somewhat difficult to get into the membership, it is very easy to get out. The Manual painstakingly lists 83 different requirements and prohibitions for members. Requirements include daily prayer and study of the Bible and Science and Health, payment of an annual tax to the church, and purchase of subscriptions to church periodicals. Scientists are prohibited from engaging in public debate on Christian Science, lecturing or writing about religious practice without Board approval, or engaging in "mental malpractice" (Eddy, 1936, p. 52).

Through indirect admonishments in the Manual and elsewhere in her writings, Mrs. Eddy makes it clear that her followers must have "radical reliance" (1936, p. 167) on the religion's theological truths. All serious Scientists are expected to know, as Kramer makes clear, they "must follow Mrs. Eddy's teachings without addition or deviation" (Kramer, 2000, p. 24).

Collective tests of loyalty

One of the most important events in the developmental history of the Church of Christ, Scientist, took place between 1919 and 1921. What Scientists call The Great Litigation was a power struggle between the Board of Directors and the Trustees. Because the Board was not given specific power-sharing directives in the Manual, the Board attempted to gain organizational power by forcing the Publishing Society to acknowledge Board authority in greater ways.

As part of its strategy, the Board carried out a collective test of member loyalty by asking Christian Scientists to cancel their subscriptions to church publications (Kramer, 2000). Church members who refused were quickly branded as disloyal to the cause. In some cases, they were shunned by other church members. After the Massachusetts Supreme Court ended the dispute by ruling in favor of the Board, the Board mailed a questionnaire to Christian Science Journal-listed practitioners, requiring that they disclose whether or not they were loyal to the board during the years of legal turmoil. Practitioners identified as loyal to the Board were allowed to renew their professional listings.

During the upheavals at the Mother Church in the 1980s and 90s, a time characterized by Fraser as "a massive institutional nervous breakdown" (1999, p. 394), church leadership conducted further collective tests of loyalty. The church was ""[i]n desperate need of money" (Kramer, 2000, p. 31) as a result of the leveraging of pension funds to establish a radio and television broadcast network. The network failed, its equipment was sold at a tremendous financial loss (Nieber, 2000), and church leadership ended up defending itself against a lawsuit filed by members who claimed $450 million was "recklessly and wrongfully" spent in the endeavor. As a consequence of the lawsuit, some critical Mother Church staff were fired and others excommunicated (Fraser, 1999). The church clerk "personally contacted those suspected by the Board of subversive activities and officially rebuked them for not being supportive" (Fraser, 1999, p. 374).

In recent years, the Board's general legal counsel has attempted to enforce solidarity among the ranks by preventing unauthorized publication of Christian Science teachings. The Board's counsel carries out what Beals calls "Boston's untiring effort to control the members through depriving them of the deeper teachings that enabled them to better understand and demonstrate Christian Science" (2000, p. 11).

A regulation of power

> Church laws which are obeyed without mutiny are God's laws (Eddy, 1924, p. 203).

The authorized writings of Mary Baker Eddy contain more than 800 references to the term 'power.' Most of the references relate to spiritual power, that which comes directly from God and needs no assistance from ". . .[d]rugs, inert matter. . . [h]ygiene, manipulation, and mesmerism" (Eddy, 1924, p. 3). In the Church of Christ, Scientist, the overt application of, or subjection to, worldly power is considered "despotic" (Eddy, 1924, p. 48) because worldly power necessarily involves the material elements Mrs. Eddy railed against. Of course, Scientists do deal with earthly power. But when they do, power is addressed through a rhetorical strategy Kramer calls "the absolute in the relative" (2000, p. 186). Christian Scientists talk about worldly power without assigning 'true' reality to that power.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Mrs. Eddy's "scientific statement of being" which is repeated at the close of every service, printed on the wall of most churches, and urged as a memorization verse for Christian Scientist children from their earliest years: "There is no life, truth, intelligence, nor substance in matter. All is infinite Mind and its infinite manifestation, for God is All-in-all. Spirit is immortal Truth; matter is mortal error. Spirit is the real and eternal; matter is the unreal and temporal. Spirit is God, and man is His image and likeness. Therefore man is not material; he is spiritual" (Eddy, 1936, p. 468).

As a result of the theological strategy which denies reality to worldly power that appears real, "[a] Christian Scientist lives in an almost constant state of denial as he or she filters out the material elements of the world and replaces them with spiritual interpretations," Kramer observes (2000, p. 104).

Authorized and unauthorized literature

It is the position of church leadership that only works published by The Christian Science Publishing Society should be marketed to represent Christian Science. The leadership bases its authority claim on an

a written request made to the church by Mrs. Eddy in the final year of her life. In response to inquiries about other publications, Mrs. Eddy wrote: "I recommend nothing but what is published or sold by The Christian Science Publishing Society" (Eddy, 1924, p. 354). Upon Mrs. Eddy's death, the Board of Directors legally acquired all copyright protections for her published and unpublished works. Those works which the leadership wished to remain in circulation were offered for sale in Christian Science Reading Rooms. The other works were deposited in the inaccessible archives of The Mother Church. The leadership staunchly defends its prior restraint protections, helped in great measure by a legal extension of copyright which was shepherded to approval during the Nixon administration by Christian Scientist H.R. (Bob) Haldeman.

Those who oppose leadership's policy argue that the recommendation of April, 1909, was not a blanket indictment of outside works, but instead resulted from specific incidents in which Mrs. Eddy's name was used to promote sales of outside publications. This argument is further supported by a July, 1891 admonishment by Mrs. Eddy. Published on a card which was inserted into issues of the Christian Science Journal, it reads: "I consider my students as capable, individually, of selecting their own reading material and circulating it, as a committee would be which is chosen for this purpose" (Eddy, as quoted in Beals, 2000, p. 9). But because this card was inserted into the magazines and not published in text, it has been lost from many collections and many Scientists are said to be unaware of its existence.

Together with the Board's prior restraint policy which promotes authorized literature, an active campaign of censorship of unauthorized literature helps assure that publication of Christian Science theology remains "closely guarded" (Gill, 1998, p. 558). The effort of the leadership is polite, but firm (Swanson, 1997) and is based on a simple fact: Christian Science teachings cannot be expressed in any detail without quoting Mrs. Eddy. Since the Board of Directors owns and houses all her published and unpublished works, rigidly restricts access and defends its copyright ownership, writers who wish to quote Mrs. Eddy without the Board's approval must do so illegally and at their own risk.

Those who are so bold, and whose efforts come to the attention of the Board, are usually warned by the General Counsel for the Board of Directors that they are at risk for immediate legal action should their work progress to publication. Some authors who have gone to press have been released from Publishing Society authorized literature writing assignments and forced to remove their professional listings from the Journal. Others have been excommunicated (Beals, 2000).(2)

Influence on news media

In keeping with Mrs. Eddy's "standard of acceptability" (Silberger, 1980, p. 232) the powerful Committees on Publication intervenes to keep news coverage about Christian Science informative, uplifting and positive. The COPs monitor the news media and react to provide denials or corrections when news coverage warrants. The COPs work pro-actively to keep unpleasant information out of the media when possible. In an instance cited by Brenneman (1990), a COP member working with a practitioner successfully persuaded a newspaper reporter covering a sexual abuse case not to report that the accused was a Christian Science Sunday School teacher. The male defendant had been arrested and charged with sexually abusing and photographing young children. Thanks to the persuasive effort on the part of church officials, the newspaper stories did not mention the suspect's religion or church involvement.

Legitimization of social activity

> Take away wealth, fame, and social organizations, which weigh not one jot in the balance of God, and we get clearer views of Principle (Eddy, 1936, p. 239).

The Manual's guidelines prohibit the Church of Christ, Scientist, from having any of the social activities which are a traditional part of American protestant church life. No parties are held. No meals are served. There are no prayer groups, sewing circles, or youth activities. There are no baptisms, weddings, or funerals. With the exception of the occasional business assembly or committee meeting, Scientists do not gather at their churches other than for worship. What social activity does exist for Christian Scientists is outside the church structure and is focused through, and constrained by, the interrelationships of the religion's textbook and stories of physical healing.

The textbook

All individual and group activity of Christian Scientists is regulated by the tenets of Science and Health. Published initially in 1875 and revised dozens of times during Mrs. Eddy's lifetime, its final edition went to press in 1906. Science and Health serves as Mrs. Eddy's legitimizing guide for living, offering instruction for Scientists on what to think, and why to think it. Those who study the book daily typically

take great pains to memorize its passages and usually refer to the book in conversation simply as "the textbook."

As with the rest of Mrs. Eddy's writings, the textbook is both detailed and vague in wording and intent. Comprised of more than 700 pages, the book deliberately lays out Mrs. Eddy's thoughts on prayer, marriage, medicine, and "mental malpractice" - "the injurious action of one mortal mind controlling another from wrong motives" (1906, p. 451). It ends with a glossary of terms, a "Key to the Scriptures" interpreting biblical passages according to Christian Science theology, and dozens of testimonies from 19th century students healed of gout, rheumatism, consumption, and other maladies of the time period.

Though detailed in subject, the book focuses more on the 'why' than the 'how to' of Christian Science practice. A 14-page chapter on marriage, for example, includes no discussion of dispute resolution, family planning, household finances, or sex. To be specific about such topics would be contrary to Mrs. Eddy's philosophy of denying physical circumstances to portray "the absolute in the relative" (Kramer, 2000, p. 186).

Testimonies of healing

It is not uncommon for people of any religious background who claim to have been healed by prayer to talk about their experiences (Dossey, 1993). But the experiences of Christian Scientists are unique because the religion's primary focus as an entity is physical healing. In fact, Mrs. Eddy makes healing conditional for "any sincere seeker of Truth" (1906, p. x).

Testimonies of Christian Science healing are published in the periodicals, spoken privately among Scientists, and voiced publicly in Wednesday testimony meetings. Testimonies provide confirmation for Scientists that vanquished diseases and illnesses were "unreal" to begin with (Eddy, 1924, p. 12) and that even the thought of discord cannot exist in a reality where "God is All-in-all" (Eddy, 1936, p. 468).

Testimonies are almost always "anecdotal" in nature (DesAutels, Battin, & May, 1999, p. 3), frame the healing as a 'challenge overcome,' and cite the event as evidence of the believer's spiritual authority over a material reality that seemed to be but was not. Testimonies do not detail medical diagnosis, symptoms, or suffering because to do so would be to admit facts of a discordant reality vehemently denied by Christian Science theology. Scientists do not testify about any healing with resulted from a combination of prayer

with medical methods because Mrs. Eddy declared that in most situations "[t]he hypotheses of mortals are antagonistic to Science and cannot mix with it. (Eddy, 1936, p. 182).(3) To Christian Scientists, testimonies of healing allow the sharing of their deliverance from "a dominant medical paradigm" which when unchecked can allow followers "to catch society's fear and concern" about disease and, by association, create its reality (DesAutels, Battin, & May, 1999, p. 45).

Typically, the devout Christian Scientist personally identifies with the healing that brought him or her to the fold of the faithful, and will re-tell the story regularly to other Scientists and to non-believers. Consistent with Mrs. Eddy's own testimony of healing from 1866, the testimony of modern-day believers is a conversion experience which almost always follows the same pattern: An instantaneous or almost instantaneous healing of a disease, illness, or injury rendered 'incurable' by traditional medical experts, as the result of the initially doubtful victim's reading of all or part of Science and Health (See Kramer, 2000; Fraser, 1999).

As a result, socializing among Christian Scientists is regulated by- and through testimonies of healing, and has its own positive and uplifting rhetoric. An illness or diseases is a 'suggestion,' a 'challenge,' or at the very worst, a 'problem' which comes from 'moral mind.' The Christian Scientist does not call attention to a condition, or refer to it by name. When the condition is successfully healed, a 'demonstration' has taken place. Failure is not acknowledged. A healing delayed is only evidence that the believer has not yet 'worked things out.' A Christian Scientist who dies as a result of a medical complication 'had a problem he/she could not overcome.' When Christian Scientists encounter other people who do not share their rhetorical strategy for addressing and mitigating the effects of illness, disease, and accident, the attitude taken toward the non-believer typically is "loving condescension" (Kramer, 2000, p. 190)

Conclusion

The future of The Church of Christ, Scientist, seems tremendously limited by its theological and organizational structure. The church came into being at the turn of the last century. Its philosophy, teachings, and the constitution of its worship services were created to meet the needs of a slower-paced, rhetoric-based, horse and buggy society which no longer exists. The institutional social order created and sustained by Mrs. Eddy's Manual has not changed and for the most part, cannot change to keep pace with a post-modern interactive multi-media world.

Furthermore, a primary value of Christian Science - physical healing - has been displaced somewhat through the advance of medical science and technology. Many of the medical maladies for which there was no treatment option other than Christian Science in the 1870s - polio and tuberculosis, for example - have been eradicated from society, or are quickly and easily treated upon diagnosis.

Working within the structure of the Manual, church leadership has been able to take some positive initiatives, but each initiative is shadowed by potential negative implications. In the late 1990s, church periodicals were redesigned and made more contemporary. At the same time, the Publishing Society began an unprecedented marketing and public relations campaign. Church leadership began participating in secular and ecumenical religious conferences, and reports of the proceedings were carried in the Journal and other church periodicals. The Publishing Society published Science and Health on the World Wide Web, and wrapped it in a new contemporary cover for sale in popular bookstores. Radio commercials for the book focused on its help for sufferers of stress and downplayed its association with the church. While reports indicated that annual sales had exceeded 100,000 copies (Kramer, 2000; Fraser, 1999), critics charged that the marketing campaign was designed to divert attention from the theology of Christian Science and package the religion as a "self help" philosophy (Kramer, 2000, p. 202).

But at the same time, church leadership was forced to legally defend itself in several U.S. states for complicity in the deaths of children who died while under prayer healing treatment of Christian Science practitioners. Though the church won most of the lawsuits, the actions further harmed the public reputation of the church (DesAutels, Battin, & May, 1999) and resulted in the establishment of at least one public interest group specifically aimed at opposing Christian Science treatment (Kramer, 2000).

An extensive renovation is taking place within the 14-acre Mother Church complex in Boston. The project includes a $25 million museum, approved for construction by the Board to house some of Mrs. Eddy's writings and artifacts (Nieber, 2000) which had never before been publicly available (Gill, 1998). But at the same time, office space within the complex that the church is unable to fill has been rented out to secular groups. As a result of a continuing difficulty finding working-age job applicants within the faith, Mother Church leadership has begun hiring non-Christian Scientists to fill staff positions in Boston (Kramer, 2000).

While church membership remains secret, at least two percent of branch churches close each year, and one estimate suggests fewer than 600,000 Mother Church members remained at the end of the 1990s

(Fraser, 1999). As branch churches close, assets revert to the Mother Church - which, essentially, feeds off the demise of its faithful.

In summary, if we accept Sass's compelling argument that "the spirituality of an organization cannot be easily separated from the spirituality of its members" (Sass, 2000, p. 200) we must accept that Christian Science is in a grievous situation as an institutional entity. The church seems structurally ill-prepared to deal with the worldly demands of the 21st century - demands that members must have met if they are to unite with the organization, call it their own, and develop their own spirituality according to its tenets.

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1. The Christian Science Monitor has a well-deserved reputation for journalistic accuracy and fairness, and it has earned many prestigious journalistic honors. Throughout its history, staff and management have not considered the Monitor to be a religious publication (See Canham, 1958), even though most staff are Mother Church members and church membership is still generally used as a consideration for employment. Nevertheless, disputes have arisen in the past among Monitor journalists in regard to editorial content and perceived conflicts with Christian Science theology. In the final years of the church's foray into broadcast journalism, two radio reporters were dismissed over a medical story judged to be inconsistent with church theology and a television anchorman was released from his contractual obligation after protesting that the church was manipulating content for theological gain (See Fraser, 1999).

2. In recent years there has been a proliferation of World Wide Web sites hosted by break-away groups at differing levels of allegiance to the Mother Church. These WWW sites commonly offer Mrs. Eddy's lesson sermons from the early 1900s (based on early editions of Science and Health), on which copyright protection has expired.

3. Nevertheless, even Mrs. Eddy recognized that some medical conditions would not expediently be dealt with through prayer. "Until the advancing age admits the efficacy and supremacy of Mind," she wrote, "it is better for Christian Scientists to leave surgery and the adjustment of broken bones and dislocations to the fingers of a surgeon, while the mental healer confines himself chiefly to mental reconstruction and to the prevention of inflammation" (1936, p. 401).