

# New Views for New Times

## A Talk by Ron Ballard for the Annual Meeting of Arden Wood August 5, 2001

Some time ago I looked through a collection of paintings and sketches by artists who in their day were trying to envision what the future would be like. Remarkably, many of them were not far off from what actually happened. Envisioning the future has been a favorite pastime of thinkers of all ages; it has also been a necessity. There are few endeavors in human experience that doesn't require us to have some view of the future. Anything that requires planning requires envisioning where we are going. Selecting a school, planning a career, developing a family, running a business, serving on a committee, providing for retirement all require a vision of what's ahead. Lack of vision involves disappointment and defeat; the wisdom of the Proverbs (29:18) puts it succinctly: "where there is no vision, the people perish."

The question becomes, "what are we envisioning?" That is, what are our assumptions about the future? Mostly when people look into the future they project certain assumptions based on the past. If conditions continue at such and such a rate, then we shall experience certain results. Much of the envisioning by the artists I was looking at simply projected certain assumptions into the future, albeit highly stylized. If you look at the future of communications you will see a time that communication is almost entirely wireless, maybe even without communication devices (which is to say entirely mental). If you look at the future of travel you will find a time that vehicles move entirely by airflow, using no fossil fuel and maybe not using vehicles at all (which is to say molecular transportation). In the realm of health care you will find less intrusive methods perhaps without chemicals whatsoever (perhaps my mental means alone). In short the future holds a time when matter becomes less tangible and more relative (which is to say, determined by thought). Even today there are arguments regarding the nature of matter and how mental a concept it is; it certainly is not the "stuff" that we once thought it was.

Over a century ago one woman was coming to the conclusion that what we call matter is best understood as a mental phenomenon not a physical one. She came to this conclusion not out of theory but out of experience and experimentation. Battling consistent health issues throughout her life, she longed to find a more effective healing system than was available at the time. Being a thinker with a strong religious background, she wondered how the healings she read about in the Scriptures actually took place. It was not enough for her to categorize those healings as miracles, (which is to say events outside the domain of "reasonable" explanation). She felt throughout her life that the healing agent is divine, is a God that cared too much to allow for discord and mayhem in its creation. But that conviction was only the foundation stone of her search. When she saw remarkable healing

take place, structural transformation, organic restoration, cell reconstruction, she realized that the common assumptions that are held about substance are fundamentally incorrect.

Mary Baker Eddy, the discoverer of Christian Science, is, arguably, the most prolific spiritual healer of modern times. Her record as a healer includes healing a man of severe bodily distortion, in one treatment, a boy with clubfeet who never had walked, in one treatment, a man with a cancerous growth on his face, in one treatment. There have been hundreds of healings verified by multiple testimony of this woman's ability as a healer. And in the early phases of her career, the question always lingered: how to explain this kind of healing, what was the science behind it. When you see healing of such magnitude take place, one must draw certain conclusions. Beyond the dominant conviction that God is the healing power in such cases lie the insights into the nature of substance itself. She saw that when the patient's belief structure changes the very evidence in their experience changes. And I say, "in their experience" because her healing work was not confined to the body but touched virtually every aspect of human experience. Businesses, finances, relationships, moral deficiencies, spiritual wrestling, identity questions experienced the healing effects of this woman's efforts. She soon recognized the importance of the quality of one's thinking to one's entire experience.

In her landmark book on healing, **Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures**, she notes (pg. 248): "We are all sculptors, working at various forms, moulding and chiseling thought." In the words that follow she observes that we all hold certain models in thought and outline these models in our experience. If these models are nothing more than the commonly accepted matter-based ones, then we may find a limiting of our experience and an adopting into our experience of the inevitable conclusions of such models. "To remedy this," she says, "we must first turn our gaze in the right direction, and then walk that way. We must form perfect models in thought and look at them continually, or we shall never carve them out in grand and noble lives." Let's take a closer look at those words as we think about envisioning the future.

### **Turn our gaze in the right direction**

Looking in the right direction may require that we test our assumptions about the nature of experience. With all the fascination about the newer forms of the future and what we might expect, we might want to ask ourselves whether the assumption about those forms is still firmly in the grasp of matter-based thinking or whether it is beginning to embrace the implications of Spirit. Spirit-based thinking starts from the premise that all substance is actually idea, expressing the nature of a divine Source. Perhaps the biggest implication of Spirit is its infinite nature, which is to say unlimited, without boundaries, which brings a willingness to think outside the matter box. When we are working on a challenge of any nature (relational, bodily, financial, ethical) do we think outside the box of matter-based thinking about the possibilities? Matter-based thinking is, by nature, limited thinking, always starting from the premise of what has been done, what is allowable, what is

acceptable. That kind of thinking puts a restriction about what the possible outcome can be. Have you ever worked with someone who constantly tells you why something cannot be done because it's been tried and it didn't work? How about working with someone who listens to your idea and then says, "let's find a way to make it work?" Who would you rather work with? Spirit-based thinking works from the premise that there is a way for every valid idea to work.

First we need to turn our gaze in the right direction, the direction of Spirit-based thinking and not matter-based thinking if we are going to move beyond the realm of the conventional. A man I knew a number of years ago was new to his exploration of the Science of spiritual healing. Being of advanced years, he was having some trouble with his teeth, and one day one of them shattered. He pondered what he was going to do with the fragment that still was in his gum. He decided that he would put to the test these new ideas about Spirit-based living and thinking, and found this passage in *Science and Health* (pg. 486): "Substance is that which is eternal and incapable of discord and decay." He reasoned that if his real substance is eternal, nothing of substance could ever be lost, suffer discord or decay. He reasoned that therefore the real substance of his being had never been affected by this experience of shattering his tooth, that whatever made up the substance of his life was still untouched, despite the picture that was facing him. Soon the fragment loosened and fell out, and despite his age, a new tooth began to grow in its place. In addition over the next weeks all the cavities that he had filled, some decades old, began to push out and were filled with new enamel. Eventually he had no discernable dental problems. This was not a result frankly that he even imagined, but his willingness to at least turn his gaze to the realm of Spirit opened up totally new possibilities.

### **And then walk that way**

Some times after turning in the right direction the greater challenge comes in living the implications of one's new thinking patterns. In the current vernacular we need to walk the walk, not just talk the talk. A family I knew had a daughter whom was born with a severe facial distortion. Her parents being students of Christian Science prayed about this situation for a number of years with no discernable results. One day in discussing this situation, her parents realized that despite their efforts to accomplish this healing, they were actually seeing their daughter as needing healing and therefore beginning from the matter-based thinking of accepting the reality of the problem. They agreed from that moment on they would stop thinking of their daughter as having a facial distortion, and starting thinking and seeing her as expressing the "face of God." That term "face of God" is not meant to mean any physical appearance or visage, especially since God is Spirit and incorporeal (that is, without material form). The term "face of God" in the Bible means God's presence, and they took instruction from this passage in *Science and Health* (pg. 477) which explains how Jesus was able to accomplish the healing work that he did: "In this perfect man the Saviour saw God's own likeness, and this correct view of man healed the sick." They determined to see in their daughter only God's likeness, that is the qualities of

thought and character that express God's nature. Soon they just stopped noticing the defect. One night at the dinner table the girl's mother reached over and touched her husband's arm and motioned to their daughter. There was no disfigurement evident on her face. In this healing the parents of this girl had to turn their gaze in the right direction and then let their actions support that decision, in other words, they had to "walk that way."

Walking that way, is a step beyond theory. Frequently, people will tell me that they know the words and grasp the ideas intellectually but that something else is needed. Often the something else is the need to "walk that way," to let their thoughts and actions reflect their grasp on the spiritual idea. That may mean we need to evaluate how well we're doing in actually living the ideas we profess to know. This couple had to accept the idea that their daughter was expressing the presence of God and then make sure that they were living the implications of that idea, that they were acting in accord with their convictions in not accepting, repeating, or seeing anything but the face of God. When we turn our gaze in the right direction we've taken only the first step. The next big step is making sure that we are living consistently with our convictions. If we are going to envision a future that becomes a reality we must make sure that our lives live our models.

### **Form perfect models in thought**

Whether we realize it or not our entire experience expresses the models we hold. Most frequently those models are formed in childhood, or by education, or by the common consent of one's times. How we raise our families is frequently just how our parents raised us, how we develop our careers may be the models of how family members developed theirs, how we run our businesses could be a reflection on how society generally believes businesses are best run. I cannot think of any endeavor in human experience that is not largely formed by models of thought. Even our health and what we expect of our bodies comes from those models most dominant in the health care industry. We either consciously live our own models of thought or other models live us. There is no neutral ground. That being the case, so what?

Well, Mary Baker Eddy's observation about model living pretty much says it all when it comes to living matter models (S&H pg. 248): "Have you accepted the mortal model? Are you reproducing it?...The result is that you are liable to follow those lower patterns, limit your lifework, and adopt into your experience the angular outline and deformity of matter models." The arresting feeling about these words comes from the fact that their author is speaking from the force of her experience. This woman was constantly encouraged by friends and family to give up her "silly" notions about healing, to live a more subdued life, not to be so contentious with society's norms, and to live the role of "true womanhood" (which meant essentially staying at home and being subservient to her husband). There was hardly a time in her life that Mary Baker Eddy was not encouraged to limit her lifework. Even as founder of the most rapid growing religious movement of her day, she was

challenged in her role as leader and thought to be better served confining her efforts to theology rather than to the business of running a church.

But these were mere indignities to Mrs. Eddy and had little to do with what she was really trying to accomplish. Her life was not really about trying to establish herself in the political or social structure of time or history. She encouraged on her age a totally new model; one based on the reality of Spirit and the futility of matter. One sees this woman's passion in her role as healer, healer of bodies and of humanity's limited thought patterns. If it is true as she surmised of Jesus (S&H pg. 259) that he was trying to lift mortals higher "than their poor thought models would allow," then she certainly followed in his footsteps in this effort. One will find in her writings a higher model of virtually every human endeavor, with the promise that if followed it will ensure greater success and progress: education, morality, business, government, family affairs, church, health, aging, the list is endless. When consulted by patients or pupils regarding human endeavor, I frequently ask if they have found the spiritual model for their efforts. I was encouraged to do that many years ago in my healing practice by a friend that had a very long career as a healer.

Living only several blocks from here, she had been a resident of San Francisco for many decades, was instructed in Christian Science by one of the early pioneers of Christian Science (a pupil of Mrs. Eddy's), and was at the time I knew her in her 100's. She had the constitution of a woman forty years younger, had no deterioration of her faculties or mobility, and most importantly was mentally progressing. I would frequently have dinner with her, sometimes meeting her downtown where she maintained an office three days a week. She told me that when she reached middle age she began to notice a change in her experience, so she started researching in Mrs. Eddy's writings the model of maturing. What she found was extraordinary she said. Rather than the common model of aging that included diminished capacity she found one that encouraged expectancy of development. There is quite a body of teaching in **Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures** regarding this subject, but several passages will give you the gist:

*Even Shakespeare's poetry pictures age as infancy, as helplessness and decadence, instead of assigning to man the everlasting grandeur and immortality of development, power, and prestige. (pg. 244)*

*Time-tables of birth and death are so many conspiracies against manhood and womanhood. Except for the error of measuring and limiting all that is good and beautiful, man would enjoy more than threescore years and ten and still maintain his vigor, freshness, and promise. Man, governed by immortal Mind, is always beautiful and grand. Each succeeding year unfolds wisdom, beauty, and holiness.*

*Life is eternal. We should find this out, and begin the demonstration thereof. Life and goodness are immortal. Let us then shape our views of existence into loveliness, freshness, and continuity, rather than into age and blight. (p. 246)*

So what is the model of maturing here? As one goes along experience should show development, power, prestige, wisdom, beauty, holiness, freshness, loveliness, and continuity. That model is certainly different than the matter-based model of age and blight. This Spirit model begins with the understanding that God created us at the point of maturity not growing into it. God's creation is neither young nor old; it simply expresses the infinite nature of its divine Source. We need to find a way to walk that talk. It begins with changing our models, our expectations of maturing. We need to expect the immortality of development and prestige, of freshness and beauty. We could put away our quest for eternal youth and begin our living of eternal being. We can stop limiting ourselves and what we are capable of at any stage of experience. Aging is often thought to be a problem of the old. Actually the problems of aging are significant at any stage of mortal experience. There is never a point in mortal experience that the problems (and joys) of living are not evident and often overwhelming. Ironically we often wish for other times in our lives rather than living the reality of the eternal now (youth yearns to be older, age pines for the carefree days of yesteryear). What we can begin doing is putting aside the premise that the condition of matter determines and constructs our lives; we can prove that it is not matter but Spirit that determines the activity and opportunity of our lives.

Some years ago a child was born into a family that practiced Christian Science. It was determined shortly after birth that the child had no pituitary gland and the prognosis was terminal. This gland was held to be absolutely crucial for the child's development and growth. The parents of this child immediately upon hearing of the prognosis turned to the ideas in **Science and Health** to guide them in their thinking about their child's growth. They found this passage:

*In proportion as matter loses to human sense all entity as man, in that proportion does man become its master. He enters into a diviner sense of the facts, and comprehends the theology of Jesus as demonstrated in healing the sick, raising the dead, and walking over the wave. All these deeds manifested Jesus' control over the belief that matter is substance, that it can be the arbiter of life or the constructor of any form of existence. (pg. 369)*

They determined from this passage that it was not the presence of matter but the presence of Spirit, God that determines development and that one does not have to depend on the condition of matter for proper functioning to take place in one's life. The child survived, grew normally, and is today a strapping young adult with no medical complications.

I knew a woman who developed cataracts in her eyes at an advanced age and gradually lost her sight. Unwilling to put up with this situation she, too, turned to her study of Christian Science for an answer and found this passage: "Sight, hearing, all the spiritual senses of man, are eternal. They cannot be lost. Their reality and immortality are in Spirit and understanding, not in matter – hence their permanence. (S&H pg. 486)

"Mind alone possesses all faculties, perception, and comprehension. Therefore mental endowments are not at the mercy of organization and decomposition...." (pg. 488) From this she reasoned that her faculties did not exist or perform according to the condition of matter but according to the activity of divine Spirit, Mind. She recognized that her sight was a mental endowment, not an endowment of matter and that the divine Mind, God was expressing in her its own activity of sight, never deprived of the light of Truth. Now, this woman knew a little about the condition of cataracts and realized that it had to do with a crystallizing of the lens in her eyes which obscured the light. She recognized that this obscuring of the light had more mental significance than physical. So she began to be diligent about any thought that would try to obscure the light of Truth in her thinking. She soon recognized how much criticism was dominating her thinking and resolved to challenge it anytime that it appeared. Her sight began to improve, as well as her disposition, I might add. It was not long before her sight was restored. What is interesting about this situation is that her sight was restored before the cataracts disappeared (which they did eventually), perhaps showing that she really grasped that her faculties were a product of Spirit, never dependent on the apparent condition of matter.

The Bible speaks in several places of a future that is new with the old passing away. What it means is that there is a condition of life to be explored that is not in the least dependent on matter and all the materially based assumptions that accompany it. This new condition of being does not come with one cataclysmic moment or insight. It comes as we resolve to bring every facet of our experience into the obedience of Spirit – that is as we begin to test our models and assumptions and move them into the realm of spiritual thinking. As we do so we shall find whatever we have touched with this spiritual understanding to be transformed and healed. It does not take special powers to move into the newness of being; in fact most of you have already experienced it in some degree at some time. We experience it in our lives because it already fully exists and waits to be discovered and proved. If we do not get sidetracked and keep thought focused, we shall experience this new vision; we shall have a new future. No matter where you are in life, your future is full of opportunity.

I closed one of my lectures about Mary Baker Eddy with an experience of hers that I love: the story of young George Norton, the boy I mentioned earlier who was born with clubfeet. In the summertime George was brought to the beach by his mother to enjoy the warmth of the summer sun. She sat him on a blanket to watch the other children play in the surf. One day as she left George alone to prepare the buckboard for going home, a woman walked

up to George and asked him why he was not playing with the other children. He pulled back the blanket to show her his crippled feet. This woman, Mary Baker Glover, as she was then called, told him to stand. Young George protested but Mary insisted and helped him up on his feet. He took several wobbly steps. When George's mother returned her son was nowhere to be found. She looked down by the water's edge and saw her son walking hand in hand with that stranger. You can imagine her wonder. But imagine, if you will, what was running through George's mind, a young boy who never had romped with other children. Can't you imagine that a whole new future awaited him, one so totally different than he had come to expect? The possibilities to George must have seemed endless, infinite. He caught, perhaps, for just a moment the sense of life, in and of Spirit, and not in matter. And look what he could now do. What about you, this afternoon, with this what will you do now?

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