

SPIRITUALITY & HEALING
DEEPTHINK

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE NOT JUST AN ALTERNATIVE

RON BALLARD

JANUARY 2006 / csjournal.com

THESE DAYS PEOPLE everywhere are seeking alternatives to commonly accepted procedures, whether for personal care, business, politics, the environment, or just guidelines for living. In part, they feel an intuitive sense that there has to be something better than what conventional approaches offer—a conviction that another dimension to life has yet to be fully explored. Of course, this conviction is not unique to modern life. Thinkers throughout the ages have always harbored these intuitions and sometimes, to the extent that they acted on them, changed the course of history.

One such thinker, Mary Baker Eddy, who discovered Christian Science, or what she often referred to as the Science of being, held to similar convictions about the nature of life. She wrote in her autobiography: "From my very childhood I was impelled, by a hunger and thirst after divine things,—a desire for something higher and better than matter, and apart from it,—to seek diligently for the knowledge of God as the one great and ever-present relief from human woe" (*Retrospection and Introspection*, p. 31).

Her search touches a chord that resonates within many. Surely there must be something "higher and better than matter, and apart from it." Eventually she found that "something," and spent the rest of her life trying to make her discovery plain to others. In her words, this discovery was "Life in and of Spirit; this Life being the sole reality of existence" (*Miscellaneous Writings 1883–1896*, p. 24).

This Science of being changes the very definition of life from a material to a spiritual perspective. Life is no longer defined in terms of just a lower-case *l*, but in terms of a capital *L*—our life as the expression of divine Life. Life is also understood as divine Spirit, because Life comprises in its being all the characteristics, attributes, and qualities of Spirit. This divine Life expresses all that exists in creation, including individuals, as this divine nature of Life is acknowledged and recognized as supreme. Jesus hinted that such a Life was Spirit centuries ago when he encouraged his followers to worship and understand God "in spirit and in truth" because "God is a Spirit" (John 4:24).

This approach to understanding life/Life, however, is not really an alternative to traditional beliefs, because this perspective does not depend on the

same assumptions about life being materially based. Rather, we can view this perspective as an *alternative*. The World Dictionary defines this word *alternative* as "tending to cause a transformation; [to] restore to health." And truly, seeing Life as divine Spirit does alter the definition of—or how we understand—the substance of our very life. The substance of life that exists entirely in and of Spirit consists of divine ideas that express God's nature—not material objects. The purpose of this alternative is to totally regenerate existence by shifting the assumptions of life as materially based to seeing life as exclusively spiritually based. And the effect of such a change is healing.

Often people think of *healing* as bringing something back to its original state. But what is that original state? When we seek healing, are we attempting to bring back substance or faculty or function to healthy matter? Or does true healing transform the way we see substance, faculty, or function? Concentrating only on bringing back what ails us to a healthy material state, makes us eventually susceptible to the malfunction or deterioration of matter at some future time. To be truly whole, it's important to correct not only the symptom but also the assumption that brought it. Most often that assumption is that the substance of what one is dealing with is matter. We cannot move too quickly in challenging that assumption.

For instance, if one were dealing with failing eyesight the need is not so much correcting some malfunctioning aspect of matter (the iris, optic nerve, or retina), but to gain a spiritual sense of what constitutes *sight*. In the Glossary to *Science and Health*, the definition of *eyes* points to two essential elements of sight: the spiritual essence of sight as *spiritual discernment* and the need to see sight as *mental not material* (see p. 586).

Over the many years of my healing ministry of Christian Science, I have seen a number of healings of compromised sight. These healings have occurred when individuals altered their focus from trying to restore the eyes to a healthy material state and instead embraced the need to truly exercise the essence of *sight* as spiritual discernment. They realized that they needed to begin to see things from a spiritual perspective—in other words, from the perspective of how divine Spirit sees. This faculty of sight or discern-

ment is a mental endowment—it comes from divine Mind. No one has to grope around trying to imagine how God sees existence. Rather, we need to listen, to humbly allow Mind to reveal what we need to see. In this way, we've altered our approach. We've moved from the attempt to improve matter to actually employing the *spiritual* faculty of sight.

This same outlook can sustain any attempt to restore wholeness to the body. For example, if the issue is heart disease, one might embrace the need to let the ideas of Mind circulate in consciousness and dissolve the accumulated errors of a false sense of self—self-righteousness, self-importance, self-will—and replace them with selflessness, humility, and purity. Exercising one's "heart" in this way does not involve a material process, but a mental one. It means exercising the deepest feelings of divine Love and allowing them to embrace everything we see and do.

If the issue is digestive problems, we can move from believing that what we need to do is watch what we eat, to realizing the need to take in or "digest" only the ideas of divine Mind. We may want to practice mental anatomy, which involves our determining the quality of the ideas that come to us. Are they material or spiritual—do they carry the baggage of material assumptions and scenarios, or are they true, spiritual facts gathered from divine intelligence? If we think that we must take on an arduous process—as in "who can think rightly all the time?"—we can remember that we're relying on a mental capacity that is not ours alone. Rather, we're depending on the manifestation of divine Mind to entirely comprise our thought and consciousness. In reality, it takes no more time or effort to think accurately than it does to think inaccurately.

The need to alter thought applies not only to correcting issues concerning the body, but to virtually all elements of human life. A current concern humanity faces right now is how to live compatibly with the environment—actually an age-old issue. We could begin by asking, "What are our fundamental assumptions regarding the environment?" If we see the environment as the aggregate of all of its material elements, then we'll probably encounter challenges with it right away. However, I believe we need to understand the environment more as ideas-and-process rather than as a compilation of material elements.

Divine Spirit created everything, and because of its nature there is nothing in Spirit that could create matter. What it did create were spiritual concepts—the ideas of divine Mind—and these ideas are not stagnant entities. Rather, they are always developing from the nature of their infinite and continuously active source. From these facts it follows that the environment is an aggregate of divine ideas, forever developing. If we believe that our task with the environment is to try to preserve it in its present state, we'll find that a frustrating effort.

Our environment constantly changes and develops, and it is our task to understand its manner of development. Spiritual development is not a matter of moving from immaturity to maturity, or from incompleteness to completeness, or from destruction back to wholeness. Every divine idea that constitutes the environment already includes its innate maturity, completeness, and wholeness. What is developing is the unfolding of its complexity, the various facets of its completeness. As we come to appreciate that process, we won't try to hold it back (which of course is futile) or try to force this spiritually complete idea to take a form we think it should take. Instead, we can learn from it and see in its expression some aspect of the divine.

Christian Science explains that we can discern the spiritual fact or reality lying behind whatever the material senses behold (see *Science and Health*, p. 585). Inevitably, that spiritual fact discloses some aspect of the divine nature. I have seen the practical effect of that kind of discernment when someone I know encountered a fire that was threatening her home. Trapped by the oncoming blaze fanned by the fierce wind, she turned her thought to the environmental elements confronting her: *fire* and *wind*. She recalled that *Science and Health* explains the spiritual significance of those terms—that *fire* symbolizes purification and that *wind* has to do with "the movements of God's spiritual government" (see pp. 586, 597). Given that God is Love itself, and entirely good, nothing in that divine government could allow for destruction, the common expectation concerning the combination of wind and fire.

Keeping these spiritual facts in mind, my friend didn't pray to restore the previously harmonious ma-

terial condition but to realize how Mind governs what it creates—through its nature and character. The result was that the wind reversed and blew the fire back over the area it had previously burned, which spared her home and neighborhood. She hadn't used prayer as an *alternative* to other fire suppression techniques. She used prayer as an *alterative* that lifted her thought away from the impression that she was trapped in matter to the realization that she was living in the divine environment that came solely under God's spiritual government.

For over a century and a quarter most people have viewed Christian Science as basically an alternative, most specifically to other healthcare methods. And for good reason. Christian Scientists over that time have presented compelling proof of the power of prayer and spiritualization of thought to meet all kinds of needs, including healthcare. As Mary Baker Eddy explained, one of the purposes of this Science of being is to apply it to humanity's needs. And certainly we have many opportunities to show how this scientific system of prayer can be applied to virtually every aspect of human experience. But underneath those opportunities lies a greater one, an alterative one—our uniting in the effort to help others gain the freedom and heal-

deepest level of that process—lifting humanity out of the assumptions that it was put into matter “to dress it and to keep it” as it says in the second chapter of Genesis (2:15). Contrary to that description of creation, the first chapter of Genesis teaches that God did not create man as a material entity but as a spiritual one, and that man's/woman's purpose in life is not to dress and keep matter but to be freed from it.

Isn't this true redemption—coming back to the realization of our wholeness and oneness with God? This is not an otherworldly promise. We actually can and do live this promise of completeness here and now at this very point of our present experience. But we need to be alert not to fall into the temptation to see our prayers as trying to dress and keep matter, but instead to realize the fulfillment that comes from moving away, step by step, from the belief that matter constitutes our substance, faculties, or functions. Every effort we make toward scientific healing through prayer moves us beyond the belief that we are gaining a more desirable material life to realizing that our lives are constantly being redefined in Spirit. This is the ultimate advancement—an adventure that knows no boundaries. This powerful system—this Science of being—answers those intuitive feelings that there

The need to alter thought applies not only to correcting issues concerning the body, but to virtually all elements of human life.

ing that come from understanding the great point of Christian Science teaching—that life is in and of Spirit and does not exist in matter.

Some theologians have criticized the practice of Christian Science as being what they call a “success theology.” That criticism implies that the practice of this religion is primarily focused on gaining success and comfort. It also implies that Christian Science practice shies away from the more traditional focus of theology, which is to promote redemption and regeneration. An understanding of the teachings of Christian Science would, of course, reveal that criticism as unfounded. Christian Science practice is, if nothing else, a regenerative process, and it goes to the

must be something else, some greater meaning than life existent in matter. And the practice of this Science launches us to explore our true realm of life—the realm of divine Spirit.

TCSJ

Ron Ballard is a Christian Science practitioner, teacher, and lecturer. He divides his time between Ashland, Oregon, and San Francisco, California.