

Science and Health and the Church Manual

Jesus: Pentecost: Mary Baker Eddy: Today

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PART I SCIENCE AND HEALTH

Manual: Liberating Rod or Ensnaring Serpent

Before Moses could liberate Israel from Egyptian bondage, he had to be told by God the proper means of accomplishing this deliverance. And this was explained symbolically through the use of the "rod" which he held in his hand. He was shown first of all how the carnal mind would seek to turn his rod into a subtle and ensnaring serpent, and then how the serpent must be turned back into a rod again by reversing it, or taking it by the tail.

What this teaches us spiritually is that never must we refuse obedience to wisdom's lifesaving rod, and therefore (in Christian Science) never must we reject the rod which the woman's man child has in his possession in the 12th chapter of Revelation, with which he is destined to rule mankind.

In the story of Christian Science, the rod corresponds to the disciplinary Manual. The word "manual" is from the root "manus" meaning "hand". Hence a manual is a handbook. Moses, therefore, held his rod in his hand.

Isaiah was later to prophesy: "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots" (Isa 11:1).

Rod, stem, branch, roots! In Mrs. Eddy's founding of the Christian Science church the "rod" (Manual) grew from the parent "stem" (the Mother Church itself); while the "branch" (the democratically self-governed branch church) grew direct from the Mother's "roots" in Principle, and not from the Mother herself. Hence the absolute freedom of spiritual self-government which the Manual bestows on all branch churches, ensuring their immunity and independence from outside organizational control.

"What is that in thine hand?" God asks Moses. Moses answers, "A rod." "Cast it on the ground," God commands. "And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent." Then God tells him: "Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand" (Ex 4).

The story thus teaches us a very great lesson regarding the Christian Science church and its Manual. It tells us that to disobey the Manual, to cast it to the ground, to hold it no longer in the grasp of spiritual power, is for it to assume the appearance of a deceitful serpent instead of a healing, liberating rod. There comes the command, therefore, to handle the serpent tail first - that is, to reverse the evidence of the organic senses, for then there is no longer a serpent to contend with, only the original lifesaving rod.

The need, in other words, is to be faithful and true to the Manual's God-inspired rules and laws. Do not disobey them, do not cast them aside, do not deprive them of their God given vitality and power, Principle commands. For if the church does do this, it will, in Mrs. Eddy's words, be disastrously "fighting against God" (Mis 140:24).

Instead, obey the last By-law first. Take the tail-end of the Manual from the beginning, and thereby obey every one of its rules. For this alone will translate what is otherwise a power-lusting serpent back into the healing staff of God.

The Final By-Law

What then is the imperative final By-law, the tail-end of the Manual, obedience to which includes obedience to every other By-law, and which reverses the subtle intrigues of the serpent in its aim to obliterate Christian Science from the earth?

It reads: "No new Tenet or By-Law shall be adopted, nor any Tenet or By-Law amended or annulled, without the written consent of Mary Baker Eddy, the author of our textbook, SCIENCE AND HEALTH" (Man 105). Clearly this ultimate estoppel includes by implication obedience to all the other estoppel clauses detailed throughout the book.

Compare this last Manual By-law with the equally imperative command found in the final chapter of Revelation, which says: "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev 22:18-19).

In other words, do not amend or annul, do not add to or subtract from, the rules and By-laws of the Church Manual, nor from the instructions in the hook of Revelation, which is the prophecy of the coming of Christian Science to mankind, with its textbook, its church, its Manual, and also its ultimate Science and system, foreshadowed by the city that "lieth foursquare.

Yet, following Mrs. Eddy's departure in 1910 (after which it was impossible to obtain her verbal or written consent regarding the running of the church) actual additions and actual subtractions were made to the text of the Manual.

For instance, in order to entrench more solidly a centralized control over the branches, the Boston authorities added the words "and Branch Churches" to "Present Order of Services in the Mother Church" (Man 120); and also, for several years, they deleted altogether the name of "Rev. Mary Baker Eddy" as "Pastor Emeritus" from the list of Church Officers (p 21). At the same time, the By-laws in general were amended or annulled, in that the estoppel clauses requiring Mrs. Eddy's personal sanction for the election of officers and for certain vital administrative functions, were waived altogether and therefore disobeyed.

Although for many years the church continued to prosper and grow on the strength and impetus of Mrs. Eddy's own demonstration, by the end of the 1930s it entered its period of steady decline to the point at which it finds itself today.

In the corresponding story in the Old Testament, once Moses had acceded to Principle's command, and had restored the rod to his hand by catching the serpent by the tail, this reversal of sense evidence meant that there was no longer a serpent present weaving its subtle webs. And once the same obedience is observed in the case of Christian Science today, there will no longer be a great red dragon claiming to hold the church body in bondage under outgrown "laws of limitation." No longer will a modern Pharisaism seem to "hold Spirit in the grasp of matter"(S & H 28:6) and thereby impede the world-wide advancement of Christian Science. Instead, a staff of deliverance will have reduced the serpent to its native nothingness, and the church, like the children of Israel before it, will be free to accept its divine inheritance and enter its promised land.

The solution lies in fearlessly trusting the divine Principle, God, and in honestly implementing the inspired provisions laid down by Mary Baker Eddy in the course of her founding work.

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