Mary Baker Eddy, born 1821
Review: The Truth About Christian Science


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The author, James H. Snowden, studied at Washington and Jefferson College and graduated first in his class in 1875, going on to the Western Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania. He then went on to pastor at several different Presbyterian churches in Pennsylvania and wrote ten books in addition to *The Truth About Christian Science*, all of which deal in religious matters and having such titles as *The Attractions of Ministry*, and *The Coming of the Lord: Will it Be Premillennial?* In Snowden’s book, *The Truth About Christian Science*, he divides the book into eleven sections, most of which deal with a different aspect of the Christian Science faith. Snowden provides a brief introduction, followed by the climate in America that lent itself to the creation of a group such as the Church of Christ, Scientist, and then begins to get to the meat of his book. He starts off with an overview of the life of Mary Baker Eddy and her inspiration for starting her movement. Snowden then goes on to dissect her seminal book, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. After this he simply outlines the basic and the more intricate beliefs of Christian Science and why it is appealing to some people. Finally he sums up the book by writing on
the truths that exist within the movement. Snowden wrote this book to explain his personal views about Christian Science and to provide an overview of its beliefs in a way that can be understood by the common layperson. Overall Snowden does an excellent job of providing the beliefs of this faith and follows the idea that Miss Eddy “has the right before all others to speak for herself and should be heard at every step and point” (Snowden, 6). Although very old, this book is a good start for anyone, scholar or otherwise, looking to find out more about the beginnings of Christian Science, which is Snowden’s goal, as he states when he writes, “It is the purpose of the author of this book to ascertain and state, as accurately and impartially and fairly as he can, the facts as to the founder and the faith of Christian Science” (Snowden, 1).

Snowden begins his book with a summary of Mary Baker Eddy’s life and the cultural aspects that lent themselves to the formation of her new religious group. He cites, primarily, the influences of the Shakers, such as the reference to God as “Mother-Father,” and the teachings of a mental healer, Phineas P. Quimby. As mental healing plays a fundamental role in Christian Science doctrine, it makes sense that she had this influence. Although the author obviously disagrees with her views on religion, he writes that, “Whatever view may be taken of her character and teaching and work, it must be admitted that she was one of the most remarkable women of her day” (Snowden, 57).

After he thoroughly examines Miss Eddy’s life, Snowden takes a look into the book that is on par with the Bible in the Christian Science tradition, Science and Health with Key to Scriptures. This section of the book is split into
two sections, the making of the book, and the contents of the book. In the first section Snowden does an interesting thing: he does a side-by-side comparison of Phineas Quimby’s Science and Man and Miss Eddy’s Science and Health, showing how the two are virtually identical in nature. The “contents of the book” section is slightly longer, owing to the difficulty of a condensed summary, this being by Snowden’s own admission. Snowden notes in regards to the content of the book that, “She rarely quotes it, but often there is no remotest connection between her ‘science’ and her scripture ‘proof’” (Snowden 106). His summary of the “contents of the book” is an excellent segue for the reader into the next section of the book, which is Christian Science teaching.

The formation of most lies begins with an element of truth, and that is the premise that Snowden takes in this section, citing the Christian roots of the Christian Science movement to explain why people were drawn to it. This section is very well laid out and begins with the fundamental denials of Christian Science, which are matter, sickness, pain and pleasure, sin, and death. Christian Science as a whole denies that these things exist at all, which helps to set them apart from many other sects of “Christianity”. He then goes on to list and give a brief explanation of their doctrines. As he concludes with this he moves on to give information on the church itself, as opposed to its origins and beliefs.

The section on the church is fairly straightforward and outlines the structural aspects of the religion, such as how a typical service is conducted, how membership is granted, and so on. Mind healing is also addressed, and Snowden obtains the opinions of a medical doctor which is summed up in this quote,
“These are not testimonies, but testimonials; every advertisement of a new quack medicine publishes the like of them…What is the good of proclaiming that Christian Science heals diseases which get well of themselves” (Snowden 240).

Finally Snowden goes on to give his views on why Christian Science is appealing to some people and gives the truths that are evident within the sect, both of which deal with the idea of fundamental truths within Christian Science. Essentially, Snowden asserts that people are drawn to Christian Science because it has, at its root, many principles of truth which can be found within the original doctrine of Christianity. He also shows how Christian Science is responsible for bringing to light many truths that mainstream Christians have forgotten. While Snowden’s bias as a non-Christian Scientist is evident, he does do a good job of letting Miss Eddy speak for herself through her writings. Also, he might be faulted in that he does most of his fact gathering from writings and outside opinions as opposed to actual interviews or finding people who claim to have been healed through Christian Science themselves. This book is good for anyone looking to learn more about Christian Science, as it is a very informative and well laid out look at the group. The sources that Snowden used can be found at the beginning of the book in his works consulted pages. These sources come primarily from psychological publications, religious commentaries, and historical books relating exclusively to the Church of Christ, Scientist. All of this information was combined to form a very good book that, although containing a strong bias, introduced Mary Baker Eddy and the Church of Christ, Scientist in such a way as to remain useful to scholars of today.