

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE COMMITTEE ON PUBLICATION:

A STUDY OF GROUP AND PRESS INTERACTION

by

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DISSERTATION

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CHAPTER III

"IN A CHRISTIAN MANNER"

One Pennsylvanian, obviously a man of some strong convictions, had doubts about the "Christian manner" of the Christian Scientists. He rather forthrightly expressed his feelings to newspaper columnist Dr. George W. Crane, III, who had praised the Scientists in a book of his. According to Crane,

I received a bitter criticism from a Pennsylvanian who is a devout man and otherwise a fine citizen, but he said all Christian Scientists were going to Hell permanently. . .¹

Fortunately, unlike this letter writer we need not be concerned about where the Scientists are going "permanently." The question this chapter takes up is not the Christian validity of either Christian Science or of the Committee's particular practice.

Rather we are interested in how the religious teaching influences the Committee in its press relations and communicative role. Specifically, we shall take up the meaning to the Committee on Publication of the Manual provision calling for a "duty . . .

¹Dr. George W. Crane, III, "The Worry Clinic" column, Berkeley (California) Gazette, March 16, 1957. Item #354.

to correct in a Christian manner."¹ As an agency of a Church, the Committee presumably finds its ideological cause and content, motivation and end, in the religion. Just so, the Committee seems to assume that its activities are part of the Christian ministry.

One aspect of this "Christian manner" seems to be the role of prayer in the Committee's work. This role cannot be overlooked, even though such a religious conception-- at least to the extent that it is given a nonempirical orientation--is outside the sociologist's area of competence. It is possible that prayer tends to explain the special élan of the Committee's activities more than any other characteristic. Skillfully conceived letters and studied interviews play their part in the Committee's relational tasks to be sure; but evidently so do prayer and the healing power the Christian Scientists attribute to prayer.

The Handbook, for instance, in a paragraph on "How to Write a Corrective Letter" lists prayer as first of all requirements. Then follow proper analysis of the comment to be corrected and proper information

¹Manual, p. 97:15-17 (Article XXXIII, Section 1).

to answer it.¹

Mrs. Eddy provided a similar emphasis:

Exercise more faith in God and His spiritual means and methods, than in man and his material ways and means, of establishing the Cause of Christian Science. If right yourself, God will confirm His inheritance.²

To ensure the "right yourself"--or, as the Handbook puts it, "spiritual poise, courage, patience, love"³--the Committee turns to Christian prayer, as it understands prayer.⁴

¹ Handbook, p. 27.

² Miscellaneous Writings, p. 152:30-3.

³ Handbook, p. 17.

⁴ Results from prayer are claimed. According to published statements, the Scientists in meeting criticism of the Church turn for ethical reasons exclusively to prayer of an "impersonal" nature--that is to say, he prays for the Church, not for the critic. According to The Christian Science Journal of March 1962 (LXXX, pp. 154-55): "An excellent example of the effect of such impersonal work occurred some years ago, when a prominent evangelist was delivering a series of what were described as 'vicious' attacks on Christian Science. In the midst of the series he suddenly wrote the Committee on Publication for the state where he then was as follows: 'A week ago in _____ I spoke critically of Christian Science. On yesterday afternoon in _____ I was scheduled to do likewise. However, while in prayer during the week, the Lord led me to discontinue speaking on this subject. . . . I feel definitely impressed that it is the will of God that I shall cease and desist from all critical references to Christian Science in my sermons. Of course, I retain my conviction, but I feel led not to speak antagonistically of Christian Science on any future occasion.'"

Available to the Committee on Publication are the services of a special prayer group, the Committee on Business--so named by Mrs. Eddy. The members of this prayer group, working individually, render purely spiritual assistance to departments of The Mother Church. The Committee on Publication, through the Manager in Boston, has recourse to the Business Committee:

If the correction by the Committee on Publication is not promptly published by the periodical in which it is desirable that this correction shall appear, this Committee shall immediately apply for aid to the Committee on Business.¹

Some sources have wrongly pictured the Committee on Business as an agency for exerting business pressure. Dakin, for instance, producing no documentation other than the above bylaw, concluded in his book that the Committee on Business was an agency to bring advertising pressure to bear on newspaper editors. Such a view could hardly be more inaccurate.²

¹Eddy, Manual, p. 98:6-11 (Article XXXIII, section 2).

²Dakin, pp. 393-95; reprinted in Bird and Merwin, pp. 512-514. How Dakin missed the correct identification is hard to understand. The facts were obvious enough to his supporter and fellow critic of the Church, Henry Mussey, who a few months after the appearance of Dakin's volume identified the Business Committee correctly as a prayer group in an article otherwise highly jaundiced. See Henry Raymond Mussey, "The Christian Science Censor," The Nation, COOK (February 5, 1930), p.149.

Many area Committees on Publication out of Boston have counterparts to the Committee on Business to support their activities.

A second aspect of the "Christian manner," as the Committee interprets it, involves the ethics that the Committee observes, as it represents the Church to the critic. These ethics are indicated in both the Committee's policy statements and its workaday practices.

Policy reaches back to the writings of Mrs. Eddy and the general ethical values she set for Christian Scientists. The following excerpts from Mrs. Eddy's writings suggest some values. Also they indicate the sources of opposition as they evidently were in Mrs. Eddy's time and are even today--the older churches, the medical profession, and medically oriented law.

A genuine Christian Scientist loves Protestant and Catholic, D.D. and M.D.,--loves all who love God, good; and he loves his enemies. It will be found that, instead of opposing, such an individual subserves the interests of both medical faculty and Christianity, and they thrive together, learning that Mind-power¹ is good will towards men.²

Love all Christian churches for the gospel's sake; and be exceedingly glad that the churches are united

¹By "Mind-power" is meant God-power, Mind being a synonym for God when capitalized.

²Miscellany , p.4:14-20.

in purpose, if not in method, to close the war between flesh and Spirit, and to fight the good fight till God's will be witnessed and done on earth as in heaven.¹

Great respect is due the motives and philanthropy of the higher class of physicians. We know that if they understood the Science of Mind-healing, and were in possession of the enlarged power it confers to benefit the race physically and spiritually, they would rejoice with us.²

Genuine Christian Scientists are, or should be, the most systematic and law-abiding people on earth, because their religion demands implicit adherence to fixed rules, in the orderly demonstration thereof.³

I enjoin it upon my students to hold no controversy or enmity over doctrines and traditions, or over the misconceptions of Christian Science, but to work, watch, and pray for the amelioration of sin, sickness, and death. . . . let your opponents alone, and use no influence to prevent their legitimate action from their own standpoint of experience, knowing, as you should, that God will well regenerate and separate wisely and finally; whereas you may err in effort, and lose your fruition.⁴

¹ Mary Baker Eddy, Christian Science versus Pantheism (1898, 1926), p. 13:13-17.

² Science and Health, p. 151:8-13.

³ Retrospection and Introspection, p. 87:10-14.

⁴ Mary Baker Eddy, No and Yes (1908, 1936), pp. 8:19-22; 9:8-13.

Behind these sentiments lies the force of Manual rules:

A member of this Church shall not publish, nor cause to be published, an article that is uncharitable or impertinent towards religion, medicine, the courts, or the laws of our land.¹

However despitefully used and misrepresented by the churches or the press, in return employ no violent invective, and do good unto your enemies when the opportunity occurs. A departure from this rule disqualifies a member for office in the Church or on the Board of Lectureship, and renders this member liable to discipline and, possibly, dismissal from The Mother Church.²

These ethical values can to a large extent be traced through to the Committee's working policies and workaday cases. As for policies, the Handbook provides in its definition of "Christian manner":

"In a Christian manner" - This standard, given in the Manual provision by Mrs. Eddy, is the keynote of the corrective work.

Never do we denounce persons; we calmly correct erroneous allegations. Never do we show rancor, heat, or antagonism. Every corrective statement must be temperate, fair, straightforward, clear.

A critic who receives one of our corrective letters should feel he has been touched by the Christ--not assailed by a gladiator. Spiritual poise, courage, patience, love,--these will command respect and reach the thought of the critic and others.³

¹Manual, p. 48:6-10. (Article VIII, Section 26).

²IBID., p. 41:10-18. (Article VIII, Section 3).

³Handbook, p.17 (par.2-2 given in full).

The Handbook expands upon these guidelines at a number of places. It gives lessons on how not to assail as "a gladiator"--to lift the picturesque phrase from the above passage.

Be courteous, fair, honest, friendly--never vituperative, scolding, sarcastic, or suspicious.¹

Never impugn the motives of the critic. We do not judge our critic; we correct his misconceptions.

Don't whip the man who said the wrong thing; attack the error itself and in doing so, try to avoid injuring the man.

Don't embarrass the critic by questioning his character or intellectual or spiritual insights. . . .

Don't write anything about a person you would not be willing to say to his face, across a luncheon table.²

At the risk of appearing tedious, we might cite just one more Handbook policy. This policy acknowledges a need to respect the author's rights whatever the

¹Ibid., p. 28.

²Ibid., p. 29. The Handbook's policy statements can at times seem repetitious and self-evident. This may be because the Handbook was written for representatives around the world who as laymen exhibit (to judge from the correspondence) great diversity among themselves--in a grasp of Christian Science, of democratic ethics, of just common sense. The Manager has commented: "The Handbook is not just a collection of innumerable rules and regulations. Each chapter begins with a discussion of the underlying motives, objectives, the basic approach-- all of which is intended to educate the area Committee on Publication so he can act intelligently on his own. . . ." Man. to author January 15, 1963.

circumstances--even when he turns his back on an offer of assistance.

In dealing with authors we recognize that any author of standing--like any artist or researcher--attaches supreme importance to the integrity of his work, that is, his right to interpret his subject as he sees it. This we respect. But we do ask him to hear our statement and consider thoughtfully our viewpoint. If he is wrong in the facts, we expect him to welcome authentic information. If his interpretation is unfriendly, we ask him to consider additional data. If we cannot remove his prejudices, we can at least command his respect for our methods and win his appreciation of our purposes.¹

In practice the Committee seems to consciously avoid heaping abuse on the critic. The Committee's replies are rarely personal, though its challenge of particular assertions may, of course, raise public doubts about the author. The Committee usually directs its replies at the statement, not the man or his profession or his general achievements--whatever the provocation.

The Manager told one Committee:

Above all, we do not attack the academic standing or integrity of an author or the adequacy of a textbook, but confine our corrective efforts to pointing out specific errors and providing the specific information which corrects them.²

¹Ibid., p. 18.

²Man. to CoP for Tennessee, re The World's Religions, October 20, 1958. Item #320-52.

The Committee's radio and television programs do not attack persons, professions, and denominations. In fact they are usually quite bereft of social criticism, taken in the usual sense. The Manager told another Committee, for instance:

We have been accused by the medical profession of being rough on them in our radio and television programs, and we are doing everything possible to avoid that accusation.¹

A particularly illustrative case occurred several years ago. A writer asked the Manager of the Committees about the book Mrs. Eddy Purloins from Hegel (Boston: A. A. Beauchamp, 1936) by Walter M. Haushalter. This volume asserted that Mrs. Eddy had plagiarized and it provided a reprint of a manuscript that she had allegedly reproduced in Science and Health. The Church has repudiated this manuscript as fraudulent.²

The inquiring writer asked to see the evidence that the Church had to support its claim of fraud. Specifically the writer wished access to the Church's file of correspondence with Haushalter, the book's author, in order to make what he considered a necessary first-hand estimate. The Manager refused his request.

¹Man. to CoP for New York, January 23, 1958, Item #2062.

²The Church has provided its position in the Christian Science Sentinel, XXXIX (April 3, 1937), pp. 611-12; statement was reprinted in The Christian Science Journal, LV (June 1937), pp. 161-62.

A member of the Manager's staff explained in the course of two letters to the writer the reasons for the refusal. Some relevant excerpts from the correspondence are:

our purpose is not to discredit any person or persons but simply to have the fraudulent nature of the manuscript recognized, so we are happy to have any honest investigator arrive at his conclusions on the basis of the internal evidence of the published documents, because we feel that the latter can easily be disproved on the basis of internal evidence alone.¹

Healing, rather than condemnation or self-justification, is always our aim in dealing either with persons or situations. . . . Our earnest aim is to correct injustices and misrepresentations without exposing or denouncing those who may be responsible for them, and to bring healing rather than havoc to these individuals.²

The staff member pointed out that other commentators who had drawn damning pictures of the Church and its founder had come in time to repudiate their views.³

¹Staff member to Charles S. Braden, January 24, 1955. Item #415.

²Staff member to Charles S. Braden, February 21, 1955. Item #415.

³Named as examples were John V. Dittmore and Lyman P. Powell. Dittmore, a deposed director of the Church, worked against the Church for two decades only to recant at the end. See Beasley, The Continuing Spirit, Appendix 5, pp. 376-77. Powell reversed a hostile position he took in 1908 in Christian Science: The Faith and Its Founder (New York: G.P. Putman's Sons) to write in 1930 the friendly biography, Mary Baker Eddy: A Life Size Portrait (New York: Macmillan; now published by The Christian Science Publishing Society, Boston).

He implied that this might again occur. If there were no other way to clear Mrs. Eddy's name, then access might be granted to the correspondence, he said. But as the matter stood, the internal and external evidence that was publicly available was sufficient to do this.¹

The writer could not agree. The available evidence was not sufficient, he maintained, and it was not morally right to fail to discredit where discredit was due. "If in the process of making the truth known," he stated, "some one's reputation should suffer, that is too bad." The deceiver should not be allowed to live a lie. Both the assertions of the Church and the claims of the discoverer of the manuscript "cannot possibly be true."²

The Committee is no more inclined, evidently, to attack and deny the general position of others than to attack an author personally. The Committee seems to prefer to explain the position of Christian Scientists rather than justify or defend this position by drawing unfavorable comparisons

¹The present writer concluded on the basis of the evidence in the subject correspondence, which he has read, that the Committee's arguments are supportable.

²Charles S. Braden to staff member, March 9, 1955. Item #415. The Haushalter claim has been explored by Conrad Henry Moshman, a professor of the history of Christianity and a Baptist, in his Ordeal by Concordance: An Historical Study of a Recent Literary Invention (New York: Longmans Green and Company, 1955). Moshman denies the authenticity of the manuscript and so the charge of plagiarism. Braden in Christian Science Today (pp. 32-35) suspends judgment.

between it and another's view. The Committee persuades the critic that he is wrong in his views on Christian Science, not in his general views on Jesus, sin, prayer, the Bible, and so on.

One Assistant Committee spoke of the need to avoid attempting to justify our position regarding spiritual healing in the religious world, instead of presenting a straight forward explanation of our healing theology, thus putting us on a defensive basis.¹

The assumption throughout seems to be that the commentator whose statement needs correction has erred because misinformed, that if approached he will be open to additional information and ready to look fairly and responsibly at the Committee's side. Ignorance, not malice and ill will, is usually presumed.

The Manager explained to one area Committee:

We avoid assuming that the critic to whom we are writing has a conscious desire to misrepresent or discredit Christian Science. Instead we write in the spirit of trying to help him to understand Christian Science better and to inform him of facts of which he may be ignorant. This attitude is in accord with the Manual provision that our corrections should be made "in a Christian manner."²

A Committee in South Africa put it as follows after a

¹F. Salisbury to Man., January 5, 1961. Item #2024.

²Man. to CoP for Western Australia, re the Rev. F. Elliott, May 9, 1958. Item #1167.

call on a minister who had sharply criticized Christian Science:

I approached him on the basis that he would not have done this unless he felt deeply, and loved people enough to save them from what he considered disaster.¹

A third aspect of the "Christian manner," as the Committee seems to interpret it, is an over-all restraint. Prayer and the values to be exercised in dealing with the critic constitute two aspects and restraint possibly a third, particularly restraint in controversial situations.

Some restraint, for instance, seems indicated in exchanges that the Committee has chosen not to draw out. The Committee has not usually continued private exchanges except where the author showed a genuine interest to have it do so. In general it can be said that the Committee encourages an author or editor to correspond, and it will reply so long as his responses indicate that he is open to additional information and explanation. It avoids, however, exchanges for which it might be accused of "hounding" or "badgering."² No

¹CoP for Transvaal Province to Man., re Otto Verhoef, March 28, 1960. Item #577.

²Interview with Robert Peel, member of the Manager's staff, May 25, 1962.

case of correction could be found where the Committee sent more than one letter to a critic when no reply was received to the first.

Also, the Committee does not usually carry on drawn-out published exchanges. While grappling directly and publicly with a critic's arguments, it evidently does not generally carry on a running public debate.¹ Only one reply goes for publication unless the rebuttal to this one letter introduces a very serious, new misconception. This policy is borne out in the chapters on correction.

On controversy Mrs. Eddy's writings produce the following comments:

Refrain from public controversy; correct the false with the true--then leave the latter to propagate.²

¹The Committee seems to draw an implicit distinction between the drawn-out controversy, which the Committee eschews, and the controversy of the moment, which results from the Committee's public challenge to comment. This distinction may separate the Committee from the criticism sometimes directed at public relations for avoiding controversy--for putting one-sided content to the public at a time and in a manner that will permit the content to go unchallenged. This, the critic observes, leads to standardization of public opinion, not stimulation of it. See Ross, p.95; Kelley, pp. 74, 229. In criticizing on this point, of course, one must be cautious not to suggest that the marketplace of ideas is no more than a boxing arena, that the demagogue who can stir contention with heat contributes more to public enlightenment than the school teacher, say, who enlightens his pupils in an environment mainly free of contention.

²Miscellany, p. 129: 32-2.

Be temperate in thought, word, and deed. Meekness and temperance are the jewels of Love, set in wisdom. Retrain untempered zeal. "Learn to labor and to wait."¹

The Manager explained his policy on controversy in a reply to a letter from "a liberal Protestant." The writer had objected to the way in which a Roman Catholic magazine had presented Christian Science in an article. She said that the article contained "indifferently disguised innuendos and fractional truths."

In his reply the Manager observed:

As you rightly point out, the Christian seeks to allay controversy, and he does this in part by seeking to correct misinformation and misunderstanding before they become widespread and well established. It is with just this Christian purpose that our office supplies to authors and writers accurate information about the teachings and history of Christian Science and takes up with them factual mistakes that they may make.²

The policy in another aspect was put by Spyros P. Berettas, Committee for Greece:

The relations of our church with the other authorities of our country are very harmonious because we never gave any occasion for complaint, respecting always the laws of our country as I counseled the members of our church to avoid any controversy with members of the orthodox church.³

¹Introduction, p. 79:22-24.

²Man. to inquirer, re The Lamp, February 24, 1960. Item #583.

³CoP for Greece to Man., re Ekklesia, November 16, 1959. Item #122.

An area Committee is instructed to stay out of, at least in his official capacity, a debate of issues in his community, unless Christian Science is directly involved. Even on a question where the Church is very much concerned, such as the fluoridation of public water supplies, the Committee does not directly participate, except to supply an official statement if called upon by an editor or public official or to respond if the Church is named and its position misstated.

The Handbook counsels the area Committee:

It is unwise for him to become involved in controversial social or political issues so long as no encroachment upon the religious freedom of Christian Scientists is involved. . . . he does not follow any personal views he may have on political, social, or racial questions . . .¹

The Manager advised a state Committee as follows on one occasion when the press in the Committee's area was giving attention to the subject of euthanasia:

It would . . . be highly inappropriate for a Committee to become embroiled in a debate over a public issue such as this one. . . . a Committee's position is obviously to protect our teachings from public adulteration and legal restriction, not to promote them in an area of public controversy such as this one.²

¹Handbook, p. 44.

²Man. to CoP for Arizona, date unknown. Item #2070.

Farlow referred to the restraint he observed in the Committee work as "forbearance." Noting that his "sole motive" in correcting mistaken press comment about Christian Science was "that justice should prevail,"

Farlow wrote:

I made no effort to effect an untimely introduction of Christian Science in the newspapers or other periodicals, nor to intrude it upon the public in any way.

I held the opinion that the subject should be discussed only where it was welcome

I entertained the opinion that Christian Science would make its way in the world because of its healing efforts, and would be known by its fruits, and that our neighbors would be attracted to it by reason of its good works, and the teaching and preaching were for those who called for it; but I discovered that if misstatements were allowed to remain uncorrected, the tendency was to engender bitterness and crush out toleration.

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No occupation in the world is better calculated to foster patience and forbearance than the task of introducing new ideas.

¹Farlow, "Twenty-Six Years."