

Commitment to a Spiritual Premise

Charles W. Ferris

A Talk to Cedar Ridge September 13, 1997

I'd like to begin with a compliment to each one of you. The compliment is because you study Christian Science. You may feel you don't need a compliment for this. But anyone who studies Christian Science has taken definite, commendable steps. The major step is putting your trust in God, Spirit, rather than material evidence. You've challenged material evidence as not being true. You've looked to spiritual sense to tell you what is true. That requires faith. It requires courage. You have strengthened your spiritual sense through study and through prayer. All of this requires energy and determination. It requires discipline. As Christian Scientists, you've exercised all of these.

You might think, "Why do I need a compliment for studying Christian Science? Christian Science has helped me solve my problems. It answers my health needs. It resolves problems in relationships. It shows me how to pray about my financial needs."

Yes, this is true. But you've been willing to challenge the premises of conventional material thinking. You've accepted a spiritual premise as the basis of your life. Your motive has been unselfish. You've wanted to honor God as the source of all that you are and do. You've also included all mankind in starting from a spiritual rather than a material premise.

Now, what do we mean when we speak of starting from a spiritual rather than a material premise? Let's take the question of healing as an example. The spiritual premise is that you are an individual consciousness expressing health and perfection. If there's a problem with the body, you see it as a

misconception of the perfect idea created by God. You heal by correcting the misconception.

The material premise says that the body is a physical organism subject to a variety of ills. Material approaches to healing perpetuate the belief in the materiality of the body and its vulnerability. True freedom is found only in lifting thought above this incorrect view of the body.

Can we really deny that the body is material? Yes, we can. Even according to human reasoning, all we know about the body is what we think. The material sensations, the material appearance, all are mental perceptions. For instance, when you're asleep at night, you're not aware of your body. Where has it gone? As far as you're concerned, the material body doesn't exist. When you wake up, the body appears to return. This illustrates, in a small way, how, even humanly our experience of our body is a mental one.

But, as a Christian Scientist, you don't stop with merely identifying the body as a mental concept. There's no safety in that. Too many suggestions can come in and fasten themselves to a materially mental image of body.

Instead, you go to the spiritual premise for your thought about your body. Does this mean you ignore the material body? No. You recognize that your present concept of body is serving a useful purpose at this point. You might call it our present vehicle for showing forth our understanding of God. Maybe that sounds strange. How can a material body show forth our understanding of God? Consider this: if you smile, doesn't this indicate affection, warmth, and joy? Isn't this an indication of God who is Love and Soul? You take care the body. You keep it clean, appropriately dressed and groomed. Isn't this showing forth the care that God would have for His creation -- to keep it orderly and pure? Think of all the things the body does in performing useful tasks -- cleaning, repairing, talking, writing, driving, listening, seeing, tasting. These all sound pretty material. But are they? As a Christian Scientist, you

see every action as originating in divine Mind and empowered by divine Mind. You take the same attitude Jesus did when he said, "I can of mine own self do nothing." He knew that everything he did had to originate in God. There's no other source. Matter can't think. What we see as the material activity of the body, then, is the effect of divine Mind. But we're perceiving it in a very limited way. As a Christian Scientist, you know this material view is not the ultimate reality. It's only hinting at the vast usefulness and grace and skill that you're capable of as the expression of divine Mind. When you view the activity of the body from a spiritual premise, you make your present concept of body more effective, and you give value to everything you do. Everything that Mind conceives is important and wonderful. There's nothing mundane or boring or tedious in the intelligent actions of Mind. Each of you is giving evidence of this. You're brightening your own life and you're brightening the lives of people around you because you see sparkle and discovery in all your God-provided activities.

When you look at the body from a spiritual premise, you're performing an important service in another way. That's the service you perform in the area of health. In our society today doctors are regarded very highly. Mrs. Eddy speaks of her own regard for the medical profession. She says, "Great respect is due the motives and philanthropy of the higher class of physicians." But later in the paragraph she speaks of "... the awful and oppressive bondage now enforced by false theories, from which multitudes would gladly escape." (S&H 151:8)

Did you ever think of yourself as a doctor or physician? You are, you know. As a Christian Scientist, you're treating disease continually. Every time you affirm the truth you're correcting the false belief of disease. Mrs. Eddy even uses the phrase, "mental physician" in speaking of the Christian Science healer. She says, "Once let the mental physician believe in the reality of matter, and he is liable to admit also the reality of all discordant conditions,

and this hinders his destroying them.” (S&H 368:32) She expected us as mental physicians to be destroying all discordant conditions. She also speaks of how the medical doctor’s belief affects the patient. She concludes, “Hence the importance that doctors be Christian Scientists.” (S&H 198:27) That means healing only through the pure influence of the Christ.

Jesus commanded us to be healers. He said: “Heal the sick; raise the dead; cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.” Mrs. Eddy has this command imprinted on the outside cover of all her writings. As Christian Scientists you are responding to this command. Who else in all the world’s billions of people is denying the reality of disease and understanding the reasoning and truth behind this denial? You are doing this constantly. Who among all the billions are constantly challenging the reality of death by knowing that man lives now as the representative of Life, God, not in matter, not in a time frame, but in eternal, spiritual awareness? At this point we may be working toward this achievement. But, as Christian Scientists, we have a truthful, spiritual premise to work from.

Who else among the world’s billions is cleansing the lepers as Jesus instructed -- that is, cleansing consciousness of all that is impure, sinful, and ungodlike? And doing so on the basis that Jesus taught: by seeing that there is just one divine Mind and by seeing that the only valid ideas are the ideas from that Mind? Who else among the world’s billions is casting out demons on the basis of handling animal magnetism as Christian Science instructs us? Animal magnetism is error’s claim to be and do something. It is nothing. Yet, think of all the negative influences that get poured into human thought through the media, through television, and through the flow of ordinary mortal thoughts and material education!

How do we cast out these demons? Is it by deciding we’re not going to listen to the negative things that are floating around? That’s one approach.

It's better than not making *any* effort to control what we allow into our thought. But is that really demolishing the demons? Jesus told a parable about an evil spirit that departed from a man. The evil spirit wandered about and then returned and found the place swept and garnished. So he took seven more evil spirits and brought them in. Why did this happen? Wasn't it because the empty space was not filled with something that would repel the entrance of the evil spirit? What is that "something" that repels error? Isn't it the facts of truth? Here are some facts. For the demons that call themselves reports of death, we have the fact of Life as eternal and spiritual. For the demons of reports of disease, we have the fact of man as incorporeal, vigorous, and whole. For the reports of crime, violence, sensuality, sorrow, we have man expressing the wholesome attributes of God. Will thinking these truths make a difference? Yes, it will, because the thinking is backed up by spiritual sense and by the understanding that God has given to each one of us. As active, thinking Christian Scientists you are fulfilling an indispensable role in our world today.

Now let me talk of something else related to your starting from a spiritual premise. What I want to speak of now will help to keep our demonstration of good from being reversed. Some years ago there was a member of The Christian Science Board of Directors by the name of Francis Lyster Jandron. Some of you may remember that name. He spoke at a meeting of the employees of The Mother Church. He asked them to make three pledges. These were the pledges: I will not criticize. I will not complain. I will not be lazy. He had them repeat these pledges out loud. What I'd like to do now is take these three pledges and examine them in the light of the commitment you have made in your lives to operate from a spiritual premise.

Why is it valuable not to criticize? Well, it helps us get along better with others. Nobody enjoys disapproval. What does the Golden Rule say: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. In other words, "How would I

like others to see my shortcomings or mistakes?" Show a little patience, a little understanding and support? But there's a deeper metaphysical point here. If you or I criticize someone, we could ask ourselves, "What is my motive? Why am I criticizing? Am I interested in bringing a healing influence to the situation? Or is there perhaps a *little, tiny* effort to lift myself by lowering someone else?" This is the material view. What happens when we operate from a spiritual premise? Don't we have a different view? Don't we see God as the source of each individual? What effect does this have? Doesn't it mean I'll see myself as expressing God fully, too? Why would I want to leave that spiritual identification of myself and accept a mortal selfhood that I think is better than someone else or inferior to someone else? Criticism is a mortal view of man and is actually a detraction from God. I don't want to be in the position of thinking that God could fail to put forth a perfect expression of Himself.

Are we saying here that we should ignore the faults and short-comings of others? Sometimes that's not a bad idea. After all, the correction is the responsibility of the other person. But when you're operating from a spiritual premise, you won't be disturbed if others fall short of what you think is the ideal. Instead you'll have confidence that God is enlightening that other person and forming them according to God's wisdom. With this approach, you'll often see how you can resolve problems in a non-critical way that is helpful to everyone.

The Psalmist had a beautiful prayer for counteracting criticism: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, Oh Lord, my strength and my redeemer." (Ps 19:14) I especially like the final word in his prayer: redeemer. God is our redeemer. To redeem is to get something back by putting something else in its place. You pay a ransom to get a hostage back. At the pawn shop you redeem your guitar by paying back the loan. God redeems us by putting His nature in place of our mortal

faults or shortcomings. We redeem each other by doing the same -- putting God's expression in place of criticism. That heals.

Now the second pledge: I will not complain. Why is it valuable to avoid complaining? Isn't it because we want to focus on solutions and not on problems? When Colleen asked me to come and speak at Cedar Ridge, a residential facility, the first thing I thought of was a Bible verse from the 90th Psalm: "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations." (Psalm 90:1) I also thought of Paul's speech to the Athenians where he was describing God and said, "For in Him we live, and move, and have our being." (Acts 17:28) If we start from a spiritual premise, we'll see that we don't live in a material habitation of wood and stone and metal plumbing fixtures. We live in God, in divine Spirit, and Love, and Mind. In this habitation, every idea reflects harmony and beauty and usefulness. This is the fact, now and always. Our material senses would try to contradict this fact and say there are repairs to be made, conditions to be adjusted. How do we deal with this claim? We have two choices. We can allow the material needs to disturb us, frustrate us. Or we can decide that nothing will rob us of our peace. The argument might be made, "Well, if I don't complain, nothing gets done." Is this true? What is communication? Is it an interchange of thoughts between mortals? That's what it looks like. But does this kind of communication guarantee understanding and cooperation? Our textbook gives a better description of communication, "The intercommunication is always from God to His idea man." (S&H 284:31) God communicates to you and to me the right idea of what we call our home, our environment, our activities, and our living conditions. Even though these seem to be material, they're actually spiritual and divine. Our spiritual sense reveals this to us and gives us an intelligent basis for correcting whatever needs to be corrected on the human scene.

Earlier I said we may not think of ourselves as physicians. In the same way we may not think of ourselves as nurses. But we are. And our main

patient is ourselves. So what kind of nurse do we want to be for ourselves? Mrs. Eddy describes the kind of nurse we *don't* want to be! She says, "An ill-tempered, complaining, or deceitful person should not be a nurse." Oooh, I don't think I want to care for myself that way! A much nicer description follows: "The nurse should be cheerful, orderly, punctual, patient, full of faith, receptive to Truth and Love." (S&H 395:9) I feel better already! We dwell in the quality of our thoughts. A hymn describes the quality we want, "Gratitude is riches, complaint is poverty." (CS Hymnal 249) We look for the good and then we can replace complaint with the riches of gratitude.

The third pledge the employees made was, "I will not be lazy." What's the value of this pledge? The opposite of lazy is active, being productive, getting things done. Are we talking about human busyness here? It can include keeping busy. But when we're operating from a spiritual premise, we'll see that all real activity is meaningful. It expresses Life with a capital L. Does this mean to cut out leisure or recreation? I hope not! These things give balance to our lives. They're a way to express the qualities of Soul: joy, skill, fun, camaraderie, refreshment.

How do we determine the best use of our time? I'm sure there are many ways to approach this question, but here are three tests you can use. First, am I increasing my understanding of Christian Science? This may involve giving sufficient time to study. Study isn't just reading. I found myself working with the Lesson recently, and after a section or two, I asked myself, "What did I get out of that?" I didn't know. I had read, but I hadn't been thinking about the meaning. You might call it "lazy reading." So I went back and asked myself after each point, "What did that mean to me? What was the message there?" Sometimes I make notes to be sure I'm getting the message. I often look at other Bible translations to get fresh insights.

Active study can include prayer for oneself: "How can I reflect more of the divine qualities? What false beliefs do I need to overcome? Am I seeing my unity with God more clearly?" Of course, quiet prayer and study aren't the only way to increase our spiritual understanding. Our goal is prayer without ceasing. That means living from a spiritual premise all the time.

A second test for measuring the use of our time is to ask ourselves: Am I benefiting others? We all have certain responsibilities to fulfill. We want to be good citizens, good residents, good friends. How do we fulfill these responsibilities from a spiritual premise? First, we'll think about what our responsibilities are. Then we'll respond intelligently. But we'll go beyond this. The spiritual premise shows that each individual is the offspring of God and reflects all the qualities and abilities of God. Each person reflects them in his own way. So in working to benefit others, the highest service you can perform is to help them bring out their God-given abilities. You do this through your example of doing your job well. This will help others to see the abilities that God is providing for them, along with the energy and wisdom to exercise these abilities.

A third test for telling if we're using our time effectively involves serving the Christian Science movement. When I've had an important decision to make, I've often asked myself, "Will this help me serve Christian Science better?" Christian Science has revealed the truth of God and man. It's the Comforter promised by Jesus. We're just beginning to grasp the immensity of this revelation! Mrs. Eddy has made it available to us through her writings. She's also made it possible to share this truth through the organization she established in the Manual of The Mother Church: branch churches and services, Sunday School, periodicals, lectures, class instruction, practitioners, nurses, Reading Rooms, Committees on Publication. Each activity has a spiritual purpose behind it. As an active Christian Scientist, you're continually exploring that purpose, and you're looking for ways you can fulfill

it better. The purpose of Christian Science is to uplift and harmonize people's lives. This leads us to its even deeper purpose: to show that life is not material. Life is spiritual and godlike right now. This is the purpose you're committed to.

Because this purpose is so vital, I'd like to invite a little audience participation at this time. Would you be willing to pledge with me the same three pledges the employees at The Mother Church made those many years ago? May I hear you say it aloud. Number one: I will not criticize. Number two: I will not complain. Number three: I will not be lazy.

I'd like to conclude with a little story. A month ago, I flew over to England for 8 days where I was scheduled to give two talks. The first was to a group of about 150 young Christian Scientists between the ages of 15 and 30. Half of them were from England, the other half from the continent, mostly from Germany and France, and five from Russia. They were concluding two weeks of wonderful cultural and recreational activities, interspersed with talks on Christian Science. I was asked to give the final talk dealing with the Christian Science Church. I had four days with these young people and with the staff. It couldn't have been richer, happier, more inspiring. Then I spent four more days southwest of London where I gave a talk to a church in that area. That time, also, was very inspiring, including conversations with a number of workers about Christian Science and the practice.

I was scheduled to fly out of London on Wednesday noon at 12:10. I'd been staying with a couple in Weybridge, about 45 minutes from the airport. That morning I'd gotten up early, finished my packing, and placed all of my important papers carefully in my jacket so they'd be easily accessible at the airport -- my ticket, my money and my passport. The wife of the couple, Angie, drove me to the airport. We arrived about 10 o'clock, two hours before

flight time as requested. I took my luggage from the trunk, (or from the boot, as they say in England), bid Angie good-by, and proceeded to the information board where the flight schedules were posted. I reached for my tickets only to realize I was standing there in my shirtsleeves. It was a warm day and I'd laid my jacket in the back seat of the car. I had forgotten to take it out. I cannot remember ever feeling more devastated! More empty! More helpless! Here had been eight absolutely perfect, harmonious, faultless, inspired days. How could it end like this? Here I stood without my tickets, without any money, and without my passport. They were in the back seat of Angie's car, speeding back to Weybridge. I went to the ticket counter and explained the situation to the woman there. She was most kind and accommodating. She called the American Consulate to find out if I could travel back to the States without my passport. No way. The airline could write me another ticket, at considerable expense, but that wouldn't help without a passport. There was the possibility of a later flight, or one the next day. Neither alternative was at all appealing. I had important schedules to keep at home.

I did have a Journal in my luggage with the telephone number of Angie, my hostess, who was a listed practitioner. The woman called and left a message on Angie's answering machine with a number to call back at the airport.

My first prayer, when I discovered what I had done, was to hope that divine Mind would direct Angie to turn around and see my jacket in the back seat. Somehow I didn't have a lot of confidence in that prayer. There was too much human outlining in it. I also had to wipe out the thought of deep regret. I'd made such an effort for eight days to be so mentally alert and spiritually aware. Then on the very last leg of the journey I "lose it!"

I realized I had to stop outlining materially, and I had to rise above my regrets. I had to get away from the material factors entirely. So I raised the

level of my prayer. I translated the whole situation into completely spiritual terms. I thought about the fact that God is ever-present and that God is everywhere present. I knew that God could never be without His expression or effect. Therefore, God's omnipresence had to be accompanied by the omnipresence of every idea expressing Him. There could be no absence of any right idea. I didn't know how the situation would be resolved, but I felt a great peace in knowing every idea necessary for the completeness of God's creation was present right then.

After a while I checked with the woman at the counter. Angie had driven straight home, had checked her messages, and was already on the way back to the airport. Shortly after 11:30 she appeared with my jacket, complete with tickets, money, and passport in the pockets. By this time the woman had written up my boarding pass -- with a very favorable seat assignment. I thanked Angie again, with great gratitude you may be sure, and made my way to the plane with even a little time to spare. It was one beautiful flight home.

I learned two very important lessons. The first lesson was that God's all-presence had to be accompanied by the all-presence of every idea expressing Him. I had never felt this so strongly or so clearly. It was so strong that it lifted me right out of the material fear and limitation. I was not concerned about how the situation would turn out. Though I was glad it worked out the way it did!

The second lesson I learned was to be even more diligent in my metaphysical work against reversal. I've found that when things have gone unusually well, (as they had here) it's important to affirm that the basis for the harmony has been entirely spiritual. This assures a firm and truthful foundation for the activity. It also alerted me to the need for affirming this fact in regard to all the participants in the two week youth camp. They, too,

had felt a tremendous uplift and harmony during those two weeks. This experience alerted me to affirming the spiritual basis of their activity. Then there can be no reversal for them either. Only the further unfoldment of God's goodness.

I've told this experience to highlight the two main points that I've been speaking about today. The first point is that you're working from the premise that God and His spiritual expression are reality. The second point is that you are determined to allow nothing to reverse your progressive demonstration of this reality in your life. I compliment you again for your commitment to these two points. I know your commitment will continue.

Happy living to you all!