



Christian Science Institutional Committee for New York State

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SPECIAL EDITION

The Christian Science Institutional Committee for New York State held its annual meeting at First Church of Christ, Scientist, East Rochester, on October 30, 2016. The keynote address is presented in its entirety in this special edition of our Newsletter, because of its powerful message. Please read, enjoy, and share.



“The higher mission of the Christ-power to take away the sins of the world”

by Ethel Baker, C.S.B. of Buffalo, NY

One summer Sunday, about five years ago, a quite senior Christian Scientist from another upstate New York community visited our church with her daughter. Immediately after the service, I watched as this visitor, whom I'd gotten to know over the previous few years, approached the podium and spoke at length with our First Reader at the time, Jim “Pappy” Martin. Afterward, as she turned toward me and went to the pew to get her things, I could see that she had tears in her eyes. I asked if everything was all right. She exclaimed, “O yes!” with the greatest joy and amazement. Then she said, “I just can't believe it's been fifty years since I introduced Jim to Christian Science in Attica prison. Who would have imagined he would do so much with his life since then.” All those years earlier Marie, our visitor that day, had been serving as a Christian Science chaplain at that maximum security prison.

Jim—or Pappy, as everyone called him—passed away last year. He was in his eighties. I don't know what caused him to serve time in Attica nor do I know how long he was in prison. But I would be very glad to tell you a few things that I came to know about Jim in the six years I did know him as a fellow member of the Buffalo-Kenmore Christian Science church.

For one thing, Jim served for 25 years as a Christian Science volunteer and chaplain at Attica, Auburn, and a few other medium and maximum security prisons in upstate New York. He regularly visited inmates, especially on weekends—and this was the only reason anyone could ever recall that Jim missed a church service in more than 40 years. It's hard to estimate how many lives he touched through that work, but it is a sure thing that it was a significant number of men and women.

Jim was also a gifted trumpet and bass player, and largely self-taught. He was, in fact, so able a musician that Aretha Franklin once offered him a spot in the band with which she traveled. But Jim declined in order to raise his five children and contribute to music and education in Buffalo.

Pappy Martin earned a BA in psychology and an MA in general studies. Also, for more than 30 years, he ran two music schools for underserved youth, particularly African American children, and more recently served as music instructor for several Buffalo charter schools.

Pappy had his own band (several bands, over time) and played throughout the Buffalo area and beyond. He also started the Masten District Jazz Festival in Buffalo 21 years ago. It is still going strong and draws international artists to play in it each year.

Pappy taught community tennis to children and adults for more than two decades. He also received a host of awards in his later years—from the Urban League; NAACP; Colored Musicians Club; City, State, educational institutions, etc. etc. etc.

Always, Christian Science and church were the centerpiece of his life and his commitments. When asked the secret of his success or when he was congratulated for an award or commendation, he would bow his head, close his eyes, and quietly point upward.

A memorial service for Jim was held last year at St. John's Baptist Church in Buffalo, where he taught in their community programs. The service was attended by the mayor; there were proclamations from the City, the Statehouse, and the House of Representatives in Washington, DC. The service was attended by city faith leaders including an Imam, a rabbi, and ministers of a variety of Christian faiths as well as numerous musicians, friends, family, and civic leaders. There was a concert the night before in Jim's honor. It was attended by several hundred people, including Jim's five kids, and was a grand collection of former students of his returning as soloists and in bands to pay tribute to their mentor. They came from all over the country. The concert lasted 6 hours and even then, not everyone got a chance to play.

Mary Baker Eddy has written in the Christian Science textbook, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (412): "The power of Christian Science and divine Love is omnipotent. It is indeed adequate to unclasp the hold and to destroy disease, sin, and death." The Master Christian promised (Matt 17:20): "Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" and "Ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

There are many lives we could consider where sin at one time seemed to have a ferocious grip on the individual and yet they found freedom and transformation through the Christ, the true idea of God. This is not at all a novel experience in the annals of Christianity.

Perhaps it is worth taking a few moments to look at someone whose life was profoundly affected by Jesus' touch—by the one individual in all human history who fully understood God, who preeminently embodied Christ, and who has been and will forever be mankind's Way-shower.

Zaccheus was, in Jesus' time, an infamous tax collector who lived in the city of Jericho. He was very wealthy. He was, in fact, a known criminal who probably used extortion or bribes to amass his fortune, routinely overcharging Jericho citizens and lining his own pockets with the excess. Apparently a lot of people were getting pilfered. When a crowd gathered to greet and hear Jesus, when he came to preach and heal, the Bible says: "They all murmured that Jesus was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner." Zaccheus was committing his crimes every day and out in the open. It is safe to say the city was as demoralized as it was corrupt. After all, it is a sure thing that if the "chief among the publicans" was extorting his fellow citizens, that every tax-collector under Zaccheus was doing the same thing.

What were the townspeople saying or thinking about Zaccheus when they murmured? Didn't they want him arrested, stopped? Didn't they want him to pay for his crimes? Maybe they wanted him thrown out of Jericho altogether. Didn't they want the first-century, Middle Eastern equivalent of sheriff to ride into town, capture this man, lock him up, and throw away the key?

What, we might ask, would have followed that course of action? Would the townsfolk have been relieved/satisfied/free? Would the corruption have stopped? Would the murmuring have ended? Would the citizens of Jericho have seen their stolen funds returned? Would the city have improved?

What actually happened? Jesus came to town. But Jesus didn't arrest this man. He didn't condemn him (any more than he did the adulterous woman). What did he do? He saw God's own likeness; he "beheld in Science the perfect man who appeared to him where sinning mortal man appears to mortals." He "marked the perfect man and beheld the upright"—exactly where a conniving, broken, arrogant mortal appeared to an apparently victimized community.

It's not clear that there was ever a conversation between Jesus and Zaccheus. But what was the outcome of their encounter? Jesus didn't take away Zaccheus. He took away the sin. A sin of the world. Jesus fully rejected the material definition of Zaccheus as a crook, a liar, a thief, a bully, a victimizer. He denounced the fear of unworthiness and lack that perhaps gave rise to the criminal mentality and activity that the tax-collector may have been haunted by. Instead he embraced the heaven-sent man of integrity, of light, of goodness and love that stood before him and not only yearned to "see Jesus, who he was" but in reality stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the Master, a fellow-citizen with the saints and of the household of God. The "best man who ever trod this planet" said to the crowd in front of the tax-collector's house: "This day is salvation come to this house, for so much as he also is a son of Abraham." He might just as well have said, "Freedom, restoration, divinity has come to this house, for so much as Zaccheus also—like each of you—is a child of God."

Perfect justice was done—divine justice, not criminal justice. How do we know? What happened? Zaccheus didn't just say, "I'm sorry. I won't steal any more" and walk into his home to have dinner with Jesus. He made changes. Immediate changes. He reformed. He came to himself. He restored four times the money he had stolen to those from whom he had wrongly taken money. And he gave half of all his belongings to the poor. Just doing a little math, Zaccheus probably had little left for himself. Yet I think he was only too happy to make this profound change and do what was not just, but truly magnanimous, loving, and good.

What did he have left? Zaccheus was made new; he had come home. Like the Prodigal, the adulterous woman, Mary Magdalene, like Saul turned Paul. The greatest treasure: Zaccheus was his true self. No amount of money could buy that—or take it away.

True justice is done only when everyone wins, everyone progresses, no one is disadvantaged or hurt or blamed. "His arm encircles me, and mine, and all." (Try looking at the adulterous woman story, or the Prodigal parable, or any other healing involving sin or a crime from that vantage point.)

What do you think happened after Jesus left Jericho that day? Would corruption have continued in the wake of Zaccheus' transformation? Not likely. If your boss was now committed to honesty, humility, and trustworthiness, it's doubtful any protégé could continue in the old ways of corruption. What about the murmurers? What was left to complain about? What became of Zaccheus? Did he stay a tax-collector? Did he become a reformer, a healer, a Christian and thereafter let his light "so shine before men" that they saw his good works "and glorified" his Father in heaven?

Two men—Zaccheus and Pappy Martin--two vastly different times and circumstances and environments, 2000 years apart. But they had the most essential thing in common. The Christ. As Mary Baker Eddy explains it in her textbook, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*: "Christ is the true idea voicing good, the divine message from God to men speaking to the human consciousness." (p. 332) Each man heard and responded to that divine idea and its message, and conformed to the good it preached. The evidence of the Christ is healing—the sign of Immanuel, or "God with us," — a divine influence ever present in human consciousness and repeating itself, coming now as was promised aforetime,

To preach deliverance to the captives [of sense],
And recovering of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty them that are bruised. (*S&H*, p. xi)

Both these men saw their savior — one in the spirit, the other in the flesh. They felt the power of the Word and heard the glad sound, knew the truth and it made them free.

John the Baptist described Jesus as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) *Science and Health* explains (p. 150): "...the mission of Christian Science now, as in the time of its earlier demonstration, is not primarily one of physical healing. Now, as then, signs and wonders are wrought in the metaphysical healing of physical disease; but these signs are only to demonstrate its divine origin, — to attest the reality of the higher mission of the Christ-power to take away the sins of the world." The Christ doesn't take away the inhabitants of the world. It takes away the *sins* of the world. It

does not destroy or even punish the person. It expunges the sin. It corrects individual consciousness. It redeems individual lives.

How does it do this? It awakens individual human thought to true being, to one's actual nature and character as the son or daughter of God, divine and intelligent good. It makes one recognize their innate innocence, perfection, honor, wisdom, strength, goodness, meekness, and loving nature. It makes one conscious of his/her utter and permanent inseparability from God, from Life, Love, infinite Spirit, divine Truth.

In her *Message to The Mother Church for 1902*, p. 8, Mrs. Eddy wrote: "Spiritual love makes man conscious that God is his Father, and the consciousness of God as Love gives man power with untold furtherance. Then God becomes to him the All-presence — quenching sin; the All-power — giving life, health, holiness; the All-science — all law and gospel." The silent, spiritual realizations cause one to change not only in attitude but in action. Words and deeds are forever products of thought. And so it is only as thought changes—as it is renovated to see the reality of good alone and to worship and know our true God, perfect Love—that words and deeds can become truly and lastingly elevated, humane, moral, civil, loving, just, and spiritually-based — being good and doing good.

From this vantage point, the misdeed is never the real crime. The crime is sin itself — believing that man, that anyone, can be separated from God. The belief that there is no God or that God is good and evil. The belief that God is manlike instead man Godlike. Until these sins, these false beliefs, are eradicated from human thought, crime can never be arrested, let alone ended. And criminals will continue to be perceived as human beings, instead of what *Science and Health* says they are: "mortal mind," the mistaken sense that there is a mind apart from God, infinite, immortal Mind.

Today, though only 5 percent of the world's population live in the United States, our nation is home to 25 percent of the world's prison inmates. How is it that the most democratic, wealthiest, freest country on earth should have to imprison so many of its own citizens? It is tremendously costly and ineffectual (in some states recidivism is as high as 50%). In New York State, as of the end of March of this year, more than 77,000 men and women were incarcerated in 66 correctional facilities. What's wrong? What needs to change? How can this possibly be the most effective way to heal crime and bring about constructive changes that help men and women who have made even very serious mistakes to become more useful, progressive, and self-governing?

And if anyone thinks that getting released from jail or prison is the end of the "crime problem," we should think again. Currently only 2.5% of all inmates are serving life sentences. This means that more than 97% of those incarcerated now will be released. That turns out to be 600,000 people a year nationwide. That's nearly 2000 per day.

If the thinking of these former inmates is basically the same as it was going into jail or prison, how will their (and our) experiences be any different? Also these men and women very often have received little or no work training or education in prison. There are hundreds of daily tasks that are new to them on release — everything from finding a place to live and a job to dealing with money and even ordering a hamburger in a drive-thru Burger King. It can seem a tough climb every day and sometimes for many months and years. So much so at times, that incarceration can start to look safe and desirable.

Well, if everything begins with thought, then thought needs to change. Whose thought? The one incarcerated? The victim's? The judge? The jury? In fact, you and I can start. We don't need anyone's permission to do this. Mrs. Eddy once said to a gathering of 65 of her students: "We, to-day, in this class-room, are enough to convert the world if we are of one Mind; for then the whole world will feel the influence of this Mind; as when the earth was without form, and Mind spake and form appeared." (*Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 279)

The numbers of crimes and those labeled as offenders may seem very large and the problems daunting. But we have two all-powerful tools at our immediate disposal: prayer and church.

Prayer: "The prayer that reforms the sinner and heals the sick is an absolute faith that all things are possible to God, a spiritual understanding of Him, and unselfed love. (SH 1) Also this: "Self-forgetfulness, purity, and affection are constant prayers." And then the gauge of our prayer and the difference we can expect it to make (*S&H*, p. 9): "The test of all prayer lies in the answer to these questions: Do we love our neighbor better because of this asking? Do we pursue the old selfishness, satisfied with having prayed for something better though we give no evidence of the sincerity of our requests by living consistently with our prayer?"

Church—"THE structure of Truth and Love; whatever rests upon and proceeds from divine Principle. The church is that institution which affords proof of its utility and is found elevating the race, rousing the dormant understanding..." (*S&H*, p. 583). Church is society's foundational institution — the first, the most essential, the most powerful. Church is in the lead. As Church goes, so goes society. As Church — this epicenter of collective prayer — becomes more significant to us and our fellow citizens, it will increasingly become a beacon of morality and spirituality in our communities and the world.

Church is where we can work together—in collective, spiritually scientific, unselfish mental action. Remember (*S&H*, p. 516): "The sunlight glints from the church dome, glances into the prison cell, glides into the sick chamber, brightens the flower, beautifies the landscape, blesses the earth." Why does the light go first to and then from the church dome? Why does it start there—and then move on to prisons, hospitals, etc.? Because healing, real healing, true justice, has to start with God and the only institution that begins there is Church.

All our institutions—prisons, hospitals, courts, government, schools, etc.—are approximators of church. We need to see the uniqueness and indispensability of church—the structure of Truth and Love, and recognize that the Christ—the true understanding of God—is already present in these other institutions. Therefore, those who inhabit them, the children, men, and women living and working in these places are not in the clutches of the devil but in the arms of divine Love. They already hear the glad sound and feel the power of the Word. See the inhabitants as children of God and humanity's true structure and framework as Church.

I once found these words, by an unknown author, written on a piece of paper inside the textbook of a dear practitioner who had been a mentor to me: "Because the immaculate idea or Christ could enter a room when the doors were closed and locked, so the same immaculate idea can enter a closed consciousness and illumine every chamber of thought.

Thus every wall of partition, which is but a phantom belief to separate man from God, would disappear into its native nothingness....”

Christian healing is natural and you can realize that naturalness by pouring in “truth through flood-tides of Love.” (*S&H*, p. 201) Where do we do this? In our own consciousness. When can we do this? Right now. [Let’s take a few minutes and pray about church.]

The “about us” section of the Christian Science Institutional Services in New York State website says of its activities: “Our work is the combined activity of volunteer branch church members providing services, literature, and prayerful support, when requested, to individuals *isolated from regular church activities*. ...Currently served are the residents of New York State correctional facilities, prisons, psychiatric institutions, major city hospitals, state youth facilities, federal V.A. hospitals and prisons, nursing homes, and county and local jails.” Well, if those in these institutions can’t get to church, church can come to them. Like the Good Samaritan—we can go where our injured neighbor is instead of walking by on the other side or expecting them to come to us. We can do this in thought, in prayer. [Let’s take a few minutes and pray about our institutions. You can pick one in particular, if you’d like.]

My first experiences visiting jails and prisons, I was struck by the variety of people visiting. I was touched by the families, friends, neighbors, and by all that people had to do to get to these facilities to visit. I remember seeing a grandmother using a walker get off a bus from the Bronx. She told me she had climbed on that bus at 2 am that morning to get to the prison to see her grandson for a few hours, and then would be getting on another bus to arrive in the Bronx in the wee hours of Sunday morning. A very common story. The sin, the crime, the errors and evil seemed to reach like terrible tentacles through generations of families, across communities, deep into souls and bodies, corrupting and hurting large numbers of people for long years. It can appear a poison infecting dozens, hundreds, and even thousands of people beyond the one incarcerated or hospitalized or committed.

Jesus words to his followers, as part of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:13-15, The Message): “Let me tell you why you are here. You’re here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You’ve lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage. Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.” (Take a look at the 11/28/16 featured story in *The Christian Science Monitor*. It’s about the “Last Mile” program at San Quentin, where inmates are learning to do computer coding—in preparation for release from prison and an equal dose of release from self-imposed and generally assumed limitations.)

Let me finish with the rest of that thought from Matthew: “And your fellow citizens, your brothers and sisters, seemingly trapped in sin, sickness, and even death because they and the world seem to believe in evil as real, will find their way home, will find their way

forward, will find God and thus find their true lives, their true selves, and really know the truth that made them free.”

I'd like to call on all of us here today to make a commitment for the next twelve months to pray for five minutes each day for all those who seem isolated from church — those in jail or prison, hospitals, psychiatric facilities, nursing homes, and youth detention centers. And if your prayers cause you to feel drawn to become actively involved as a Christian Science volunteer, providing church services or meeting with individuals to pray and study our pastor in one or more of these places, by all means follow that call! It can only do good. And the first one who will feel that—is you.



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