



Peace Haven

WHAT IS THE WORLD ASKING OF CHRISTIAN SCIENCE TODAY?

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By the time Minnesota Senator Allen J. Greer arose to address his state assembly, the future of Christian Science and its practice ... hung precariously in the balance.

Inside the Minnesota State Capitol a contingent of assemblymen had already argued – in concert with the local medical community – that Mary Baker Eddy’s new faith was dangerous. Indeed, they claimed, citizens of Minnesota needed a law to protect them from the harm that would come when Christian Scientists disobeyed the quarantine laws.

Then State Senator Greer arose and made a powerful appeal for the constitutional right of every citizen to choose for themselves their religion and method of treating disease. This highly respected legislator’s speech single-handedly shifted the momentum of the room, and when he finished, an appreciative group of Christian Scientists who were observing the proceedings approached him to thank him.

But where, he asked, might he find a Mrs. Thompson of Minneapolis? “She is the one I wish to speak to,” he told them.

Greer walked over, greeted the quiet Christian Science practitioner who had been standing by herself watching the legislative session from the side of the room, and then explained to her what he had just done.

“Mrs. Thompson,” he said, “when I left my home this morning my little grandson called me back from the door and said, ‘Grandpa, please save my Mrs. Thompson tonight.’ You will remember the little boy,” he told Mrs. Thompson. “You saved [him] after the physicians had given him up as a hopeless case of heart trouble and asthma.”

The following day the proposed bill was voted down to defeat, the argument that carried the day coming from the mouth of a little boy testifying to Mrs. Thompson’s work.

As some of you will surely know, that passage comes from the book “Paths of Pioneer Christian Scientists,” and it came to me when thinking about our time together here today. In the Preface of her book, “Science & Health with Key to the Scriptures,” Mary Baker Eddy wrote: “A book introduces new thoughts, but it cannot make them speedily understood. It is the task of the sturdy

pioneer to hew the tall oak and to cut the rough granite. Future ages must declare what the pioneer has accomplished” (S&H vii:22). I’ve always gravitated toward that passage because I think it has a particular meaning for the Cause of Christian Science today.

Mrs. Eddy and workers like Mrs. Thompson were the pioneers of Christian Science for their day. Their work hewed the tall oak and cut the rough granite – it laid the path forward for Christian Science. You could say it settled a new frontier of thought. What Mrs. Eddy and her workers did was based on the timeless truth of Christian Science, but it was also perfectly calibrated for that era. The astonishing growth of Christian Science through their lifetimes was a direct result of the fact that they saw the needs of their time and practically applied Christian Science to it.

Which raises the question: What are the needs of this time? Mrs. Eddy’s statement in the Preface suggests it is not the same as it was in her time. It suggests pioneers are still needed – that they will always be needed to hew the tall oak and cut the rough granite of their age. Jesus “did life's work aright not only in justice to himself, but in mercy to mortals, — to show them how to do theirs, but not to do it for them nor to relieve them of a single responsibility,” Mrs. Eddy writes in “Science & Health” (S&H 18:6–9). The same is true of every worker in Christian Science. The work of our Cause’s pioneers did not relieve us of a single responsibility. Today, as in every age, there are tall oaks to hew and rough granite to cut. So what are the demands of our pioneer work today?

That’s what I want to talk with you about. On one hand, the answer to that question is always the same – it never changes. The need of the day is the destruction of mortal mind and its lie of sin, disease, and death. But I think we could all agree that sin, disease, and death are often making their claims differently than they did 120 years ago. Many of the diseases paraded before the thought are different. When was the last time a friend complained that they were suffering from catarrh? Even more dramatically, modern medicine now appears competent, with seeming miracle drugs and procedures treating ills that the doctors of Mrs. Eddy’s time either misdiagnosed or made worse. And then there is society in general. Though the news rarely tells us this, we as a whole – at least in the West – are generally wealthier and healthier than we have ever been. But we are also less religious. We have on-demand entertainment bringing us whatever we want whenever we want it, and we have social media instantly connecting us to billions of people across the planet in real time. The mental landscape of today is radically different from what the early pioneers knew. To put that in our pioneer language: There are new frontiers of thought to be settled.

And that’s O.K. It’s good, actually. We think of time simply as the random unfoldment of events. But to theoretical physicists, time is still a mystery. Why does it only go one direction – toward the future? What is it, really? What is the mechanism for how it works? The Christian Scientist can look at the mystery and solve it. What is time except our evolving understanding of God? It is the perpetual unfoldment of our understanding of the nature and eternal presence of God. So we can’t stand still, mentally. The new challenges that today’s pioneers face are not the result of the random unfoldment of material events. They are our onward path to demonstrating more of God’s allness. In other words, the one demand of time is that we must keep growing, keep pushing,

keep deepening our understanding of God. In her article called “The New Birth,” Mrs. Eddy says, “Time may commence, but it cannot complete, [this] new birth: eternity does this; for progress is the law of infinity” (Mis. 15:18–20).

So that makes our task a little clearer. The question for any pioneer is always: What does the mental landscape of today tell us about how humanity is wrestling with the nature of God? Or, more simply, what does the world need to learn about God today? As we do that, we get progress, and it is the Christian Scientist’s job to speed this progress Godward. Jesus called this process discerning “the signs of the times” (Matthew 16:3) – taking the mental temperature of the times we live in, discerning the greatest need, and how Christian Science fills that need.

So let’s take our time together today to do that. The ideas we’ll discuss are hardly a comprehensive list. And ultimately, each of us discerns the signs of the times not through listening to Zoom lectures, but through communion with the one Mind. Still, I think this exercise can be practical and useful, because it reminds us of something essential. One thing that becomes so plain in reading Mrs. Eddy’s writings is her absolute refusal to personalize error. That is error’s only supposed power, really – to get us to believe that it is an external thing attached to a person or a condition or place or group. Then *we* have made it real. Mrs. Eddy made it clear that instantaneous healing is possible only by *not* doing this – by rigorously *impersonalizing* error. And that’s what I think we can do briefly today. We can take some things in the mental landscape today and impersonalize them. We can explore how they are not things or conditions or people, but false statements about the nature of existence – of God. That makes them riper for destruction, and it makes our pioneer path plainer.

And the first one I’d like to touch on goes back to that scene of Mrs. Thompson standing quietly in the Minnesota legislature as politicians considered their anti-Christian Science bill. Those of you who have read “Paths of Pioneer Christian Scientists” will know Mrs. Thompson was one of the most successful healers our Cause has ever known. To say that she was invested in the outcome of that legislative session was severest understatement. She went through three different classes with Mrs. Eddy – including the legendary Class of 1898, where she was singled out by Mrs. Eddy for her healing work. Every aspect of her being was singlemindedly focused on promoting Christian Science – to a degree that unfortunately can almost feel shocking today. So what if her state was the one to pass an anti-Christian Science law that might then sweep across the country? The bill being considered that day was literally an attack on her life’s work and purpose.

Today, we can be tempted to feel the same sense of danger politically. It doesn’t matter if you’re a liberal or a conservative or somewhere in the middle. Political scientists say negative partisanship is at historic highs. That means we don’t just disagree with the other side, we fear them – we think they are driving the country to ruin. The political atmosphere calls us to take a side and fight for it, or everything we cherish could be marred or even lost. We protest or we share Facebook posts or argue with family members because there is the sense that we must do *something*.

But what did Emma Thompson do to fight that Minnesota law?

According to “Paths of Pioneer Christian Scientists,” she made no argument or effort to sway Senator Greer. Nor does the book suggest that Senator Greer was swayed by any material argument or effort whatsoever. “The argument that carried the day,” the book says, came “from the mouth of a little boy testifying to Mrs. Thompson’s work.” The mouth of a little boy *testifying* to Mrs. Thompson’s *work*.

In considering a bill, Congress will often ask those affected to come before a committee and give testimony. What was Mrs. Thompson’s testimony? She didn’t even give it. A little boy did. And who do we suppose put that testimony in that little boy’s mouth? It was God, wasn’t it?

So what kind of advocacy did Mrs. Thompson employ? According to the standard of human politics, she did absolutely nothing. But that was not her standard. She employed divine law alone and so was about her Father’s business.

We have plentiful evidence that Jesus did the same. Not long ago, I looked into the political history of Jesus’ day to see if there was anything we could learn. The parallels are remarkable. In short, you had two factions that one historian likened to political parties – the Pharisees and the Sadducees – each vying for supremacy in the Jewish state. It doesn’t take too much imagination to see echoes of today. If you read the New Testament in that light, it’s astonishing how much the Jewish politics of the day tried to coopt Jesus – tried to get him to take one side or the other on any number of topics, from religious doctrine to the Roman occupation. And every time, Jesus refused to be drawn in. He was about his Father’s business. “Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” he once told the Pharisees (Mark 12:17).

Emma Thompson was about her Father’s business – her Leader’s business. And that was more effective advocacy than any human effort to lobby or persuade.

There is a scene in the book of Revelation that is directly relevant to this story and, I would say, deeply relevant to this “sign of the times” we see so clearly in politics today. It is almost universally known and, to my mind, almost universally misunderstood. It’s called the Four Horsemen, and even the name is wrong, I’d argue. There’s only one Horseman – us.

The scene starts just after we have gotten our initial taste of heaven in the First Vision. We saw celestial beings and thrones and the Lamb of God. We were in awe. In “The New Birth,” Mrs. Eddy calls this experience “the sweet revealings of a new and more spiritual Life and Love” (Mis. 15:30). Jesus spoke about it to Nicodemus as being “born again” (John 3). It is our first real conviction of the presence and reality of Spirit. As Christian Scientists, we’ve all had it. It’s why we’re Christian Scientists.

But in “The New Birth,” Mrs. Eddy says this realization brings us to a moment of decision: “Here you stand face to face with the laws of infinite Spirit, and behold for the first time the irresistible conflict between the flesh and Spirit” (Mis. 16:30–32). What are we to do? How do we fight for this new revelation? How do we spread it? Deepen it? Prove it?

In Revelation, we take precisely the wrong step. Immediately after the first glorious vision, we set out on a white horse with a bow – the symbol human, military strength. Our goal? We go out “conquering and to conquer.” Our intent is pure – as symbolized by the white horse. But our means are material. We want everyone to understand and accept the vision we have seen, and we’re determined to succeed. What happens instead is that everything goes downhill fast. Our horse’s color changes from blood red to black to ghostly pale, and the fruits of our efforts are war and famine and death. After that, things continue to spiral so that, by the end of the vision, all the people we care about are being tortured and the world is literally falling apart around us.

What did we do wrong?

We could also ask: What did Emma Thompson do right? She needed no bow – no human activism or argument. She was quiet in that legislative chamber. She knew God had already spoken – through that little child – and the work was done.

This is one of the signs of the times that Christian Scientists must be alert to. The mental tides of political polarization would seek to draw us in – to get us to take up our bow and head out into the fight as well-meaning Horsemen. Politics today gives us a strong taste of how well that approach works. We don’t need to fear it. Polarization – the division of one into two – is an old trick. It’s the oldest trick, actually. Adam was the lie that God needed to divide himself to express himself – that the indissoluble nature of Spirit wasn’t good enough, that something else called “matter” had to exist. So we got the first polarization: matter and spirit. Then Adam himself wasn’t enough, so we got our second polarization: man and woman. Then all the trees in Eden weren’t good enough, so Adam and Eve chose the third polarization: the knowledge of good and evil. Mortal mind always needs two. It needs something to be against another thing. If there is only one, mortal mind has no claim to exist, since only Spirit can be one. So polarization is inherent to the lie of matter and always has been.

In this way, we impersonalize politics. The problem is not any policy, really. It is the primal claim of division. These days, we hear a lot about “fake news.” Well, let me tell you something, folks. All matter-based news is fake. There is no such thing as journalistic truth or political truth or scientific truth. There is only Truth with a capital “T.” Like Emma Thompson, like Jesus, we keep about our Father’s business, and resist the temptation *ever* to depart from divine Truth. Then mental polarization has no foothold or foundation. Divine government is revealed.

This is sufficient *in every instance*. When a vindictive local doctor found out that Mrs. Thompson had healed one of his patients, he put a sign in the family’s front yard, saying they were under quarantine. Then he left on vacation. “I would like to see Mrs. Thompson get you out of” that, he said. Mrs. Thompson’s counsel to the family: “The same power that healed your child can remove the sign from your house.” That night, a windstorm destroyed the sign.

What’s interesting about the experiences of pioneers like Mrs. Thompson, as well as Mrs. Eddy and Jesus, is the shape that their spiritual activism took. Today we have a lot of human activism.

In general, that takes the form of trying to get others to change their minds, and it does this by intellectual or emotional argument. If I can show you the injustice of something, either by reasoned argument or personal experience, I can change your mind, the thinking goes. But there's actually very little in human psychology to suggest that is true. In fact, psychologists suggest that the more common human reaction is what they call the backlash effect. Put simply, the more you try to convince someone of something they don't believe, the more they will fight you. In that way, the surest product of human activism is frustration and – there's that word again – division. As we've seen, that's Four Horseman thinking.

But what did Jesus say about his brand of *spiritual* activism? He laid out its tenets quite succinctly in the Sermon on the Mount. And interestingly, they involve a suite of qualities that are not directed outward at convincing others, but inward toward changing one's self – meekness, purity, and a thirst for righteousness, for example. While human activism draws a clear line between an enlightened “us” and a benighted “them,” the Beatitudes welcome all and promise the blessing to all. Again, we see how the spiritual path unites and is founded on only one, while the material needs two.

Then right at the end of the Beatitudes, we get the master stroke of spiritual activism. Up until this point, Jesus has been talking generally – he has said, “blessed are *they*” – but now he zeroes on us specifically. “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matthew 5:11, 12).

The keystone of spiritual activism is persecution.

This is not something we often like to talk about. But I would like to raise it as my second sign of the times that requires Christian Science healing: The twin beliefs of personal comfort and trauma.

It is safe to say that at no time in history have humans sought out persecution and suffering. The great biological impulse of human beings is to thrive, and that has not changed. But the world *has* changed dramatically, and that has begun to change our views of comfort and suffering. From electricity to hygiene to modern medicine to computers to personal appliances to public education, our expectations for our own wealth, health, and safety have risen dramatically during the past two centuries. Before the Industrial Revolution, the middle class didn't even exist. The vast majority of the world were peasants, with war, childbirth, and disease offering dubious prospects for a long life. Compared with millennia of human history, we have come a remarkably long way in a very short amount of time. Now we live in a time of air conditioning, on-demand television, Amazon Prime, and Google searches that can access the sum total of human knowledge with the flick of a thumb. One could make a strong argument that the single greatest product of the 20th century in the West was material comfort.

Again, that's not a bad thing. According to our new understanding of time, it's another sign of divine progress. The uplifted ideals of democracy, free markets, and global cooperation are nearer divine than autocracy, feudalism, and ceaseless war. But there's a danger in material progress if it

becomes an end in itself.

Jesus, for one, didn't think much of material comfort. To the would-be disciple who asked to follow him, he said: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20). To another who first asked to put his human affairs in order, he added: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

From the standpoint of human logic, one might connect those seemingly ascetic sayings to his exhortation to embrace persecution and see a kind of doctrine of holy misery – burning the sin of materialism out by starvation. But that's exactly backward. To Jesus, the Spirit was the real and the material was the unreal. The reason that he didn't worry about houses and human affairs was that their joys were meager when compared with the joys of Spirit; he didn't want to be distracted or misled. We see that repeatedly, whether on Gethsemane or in the wilderness. So the reason he embraced persecution was not from some sense of personal martyrdom, but the simple realization that a life lived in opposition to mortal mind will enflame mortal mind. In that way, persecution becomes a kind of barometer. If you're not being persecuted, then you're probably too comfortable in your sense of a material life. And to Jesus, ease in matter was much worse than persecution.

What does that tell us about today? Well, Jesus' parables repeatedly emphasized how material comfort came at the cost of spiritual growth. Think of Lazarus and the beggar or the man who built larger barns to eat, drink, and be merry. Is it any wonder, then, that this year, for the first time in history, more than half of Americans say they no longer belong to any organized religion?

What's just as interesting, though, is the effect this has on those who seem to lack this new standard of material comfort – who are facing hardship, injustice, and persecution. Jesus' way was always to lift them up, often literally as he did with Peter in the storm on the sea of Galilee and as Peter himself did with the beggar at the Temple called Beautiful. But when society values material comfort above spiritual truth, something different happens. The needy become defined by what they lack or what has been taken from them. Rather than lifting them up, society stoops down to "honor their trauma," whether it be systemic prejudice or individual abuse. If material comfort is what a society values, then a lack of it is a violation of human rights.

In many ways, this, too is a sign of progress. In a world progressing Godward, the space for injustice and inequality must shrink. In a world progressing Godward, we must all become Good Samaritans, eager to help those that seem to the world beaten and broken. But here, too, there is a danger. In doing that, do we make the evil real? Are our new catalogue of microaggressions and demands for safe spaces simply another form of Four Horseman thinking – thinking we have to fight human battles rather than radically declaring divine Truth?

The need is not to make these evils more real but exactly the opposite. At one point, Emma Thompson struggled with local practitioners of mind-cure, who were maligning her and trying to take down Christian Science. Mrs. Eddy wrote to her:

You have nothing to fear from 10,000 mind-curiers. Why do you feel shocked at things unreal? There is no power in evil – a million [zeroes] make no number. Evil is a naught; why do you call it a unit and units?

From the standpoint of humanistic empathy, this might seem naïve or even cruel. But just as Christian Science is not a holy misery, it is not a heartless taskmaster. This difference, as always, is in looking clearly through a spiritual lens, not a material one. The material lens sees people and institutions doing cruel and unjust things, so its only answer is to try to counteract that – emotional lobbying, you might call it. It sees two things in opposition and seeks to sustain the one that seems to be wronged with affection and good intention. That's not bad, it just will never be sufficient.

The spiritual thinker, meanwhile, realizes that injustice and inequality are not really the product of people or policies. They are the natural state of mortal mind. Therefore the spiritual thinker correctly identifies the real enemy as mortal mind itself and works on those lines. This was the genius of Jesus' exhortation to embrace persecution. To see all forms of persecution merely as claims against the true nature of God is to *impersonalize* them. And to impersonalize them is to use them as fuel for growth spiritward. Was there ever a man who was more unjustly persecuted than Jesus? Yet he said, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:30). In dismissing the claims of material comfort, he banished any sense of burden or trauma. This is the divine *Comforter*, and it addresses the unreal claims of the nature of both material comfort and trauma.

In thinking about these things, what you find is that the pioneer walks the path of Christ as an example to this world. Isaiah knew that mortal thought is always in some turmoil, swinging between extremes (40:3-5). There would be mountains and valleys, rough places and deserts. The Christly way is to find the spiritual line that makes the rough places plain and finds a highway through the desert. This is not human moderation. It is the oneness of Spirit asserting itself, finding the forever space where all is concord.

This is the purpose of Christian Science, and it brings us to a third sign of the times the pioneer must be alert to: The rise of material and medical science.

From a material perspective, this one might seem obvious: As science increases in influence, secularism gains and religion falters, which puts God, religion, and Christian Science itself at risk. But that's not true. That is material, polarized thinking that splits creation into two opposites at odds with one another, which we know is a lie.

So I'd like to consider a little history. On June 30, 1860, the British Association for the Advancement of Science convened in Oxford, England, for a debate. Nine months earlier, a revolutionary book had been published, and some of the most renowned thinkers in Britain had come together that night to discuss it.

In this book, "On the Origin of Species," Charles Darwin had provided a theory that, for the first time, presented a comprehensive answer to why the world's plants and animals had come to look

and act the way they did. This process of evolution he described was entirely natural and required no divine guidance. Famously, it backed the notion that humans had evolved from monkeys.

To many people worldwide, this idea was scandalous. To many leaders of the Anglican Church, it was dangerous. What was a world that had no need for God? It seemed that science was attempting to throw God out on His ear.

Though there are no transcripts, the debate would become legendary. According to most accounts, the crucial moment came when the Bishop of Oxford, seen as one of the most formidable orators of the day, attacked one strident supporter of Darwin. Was he descended from monkeys on his grandmother or grandfather's side, the Bishop asked. The scientist responded: "I am not ashamed to have a monkey for an ancestor, but I would be ashamed to be connected with a man who used great gifts to obscure the truth."

One attendee wrote, with a bit of hyperbole, that the debate "was really the first time Christianity had ever been asked to square off against science in a public forum in the whole of its history." But the idea stuck. In a recent magazine article, a Harvard scientist wrote: "That debate, on June 30, 1860, has become legendary in the history of science... The clash ... has come to symbolize what many people—then and now—take to be the inevitable conflict between the new science and the old religion."

Why I am bringing this up? Because I think it is no coincidence that six years later, a woman in Lynn, Massachusetts, fell on the ice and began to discover that this conflict was a lie. Christianity could never overthrow science, and science could never overthrow Christianity. They are one.

Fast forward 161 years, and what do we see in society generally? If I were to dramatically oversimplify the answer, I might say that we see science winning, and the moment when that shift began to gain momentum in earnest could easily be placed right around that Oxford debate.

But let's use our spiritual lens to look at the real sign of the times. We know that Christ Jesus came precisely when the world was ready for him. He was misunderstood, but his spiritual impetus dramatically changed the direction of humanity. I would argue the same is true of Christian Science. Christian Science came precisely when the lump of human thought was beginning to shift from faith in religion to faith in science. For all other human religions, this is an existential crisis. What space does a scientific and secular society leave for faith?

But Christian Science came precisely when it did to show that is a falsely polarized choice. Christian Science is not naturally on one "side" or the other in this debate. It is perfectly ambidextrous. A scientific age is no more troubling to Christian Science than a religious age. During religious ages, only Christian Science can show that spiritual faith amounts to little without scientific proof. And during scientific ages, Christian Science can show that scientific proof amounts to little without

spiritual faith. Put bluntly, Christian Science came when it did to prove the power and presence of God to a scientific age. No other religion on Earth is equipped to do that.

And the need for such pioneers is only growing.

Why is spiritual healing so important? In Mrs. Eddy's day, we know it was often the only option. You got Christian Science treatment or you died. But that's no longer the case. Medical science is not so incompetent. When it comes to treating the body, it's actually pretty decent.

But the next time you have a few moments, open the Fruitage chapter in "Science & Health." The material thinker will see a list of healings that, today, can seem both remarkable and a bit distant. If you were to ask: Could medicine treat that today? The answer, in many cases, would probably be "yes."

Yet what does the spiritual thinker see in Fruitage? Time and again, the writers speak of how more was healed than mere physical conditions. Morals were improved, mental burdens were lifted, a sense of freedom and purpose were restored. The healing was not a material healing at all. It was a spiritual renewal. Now, if you were to ask: Could medicine do *that* today? The answer in almost every case would be "absolutely not."

This points to the oak and granite for today's pioneer. Mrs. Eddy wrote in "Rudimental Divine Science: "The emphatic purpose of Christian Science is the healing of sin; and this task, sometimes, may be harder than the cure of disease; because, while mortals love to sin, they do not love to be sick" (2:25-2). The signs of these times suggest that imperative of addressing sin is more urgent than ever.

Christian Science did not come to the world to give human beings healthier bodies. It came to prove that spiritual law is the only law of the universe. That demonstration brings what appears to be physical healing. But the authors of Fruitage would tell you that that is the smallest part of its power. In their day, the vanquishing of sin was compelled by the need for physical healing – people turned to Christian Science because they were sick, and their healing brought spiritual renewal. Today, people can keep their sin and just get a body-treating pill or procedure.

But at what cost to spiritual growth?

In the 13th chapter of Revelation, we are standing on the sea shore when a beast rises from the sea. To leave us in no doubt of how menacing he is, he has the word "blasphemy" tattooed on his heads. His job, not surprisingly, is to speak blasphemies and to make war against the saints and overcome them. And the whole world worships him.

The funny thing is, by this point in Revelation we've learned not to trust our senses as completely

as we did when we were the Horseman, so we're not that impressed by this act. Just a few verses before, we had been in heaven and seen the Red Dragon defeated, and then we had seen the Red Dragon try to kill with a flood the Woman who had exposed him. He failed miserably.

This Beast is the Red Dragon's deputy, so what power can he really have? When it comes time for us to act, this time we pause and listen. "He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints." We do nothing. We don't go get a bow. We don't fear. We don't fight. And what happens?

A new creature appears. He looks like a lamb but he speaks like a Dragon and he gets his power from the Beast. His job is to make absolutely sure everyone worships the Beast, and to do this, he has interesting powers. He can make fire come down from heaven and he can do miracles. In the end, his great accomplishment is to make sure that everyone who believes the Beast has a mark on their right hands and foreheads: 666.

There's a lot to unpack there – and a lot that I would argue has been hopelessly misunderstood, as with the Horseman. But it speaks directly to how we, as pioneers, need to be alert.

What happened when Christian Science came to the world? Material medicine was exposed as hopelessly inept. That's what happened in Revelation when the Woman clothed with the sun appeared in heaven. But then what happened? The Dragon appeared in new forms to try to deceive us and get us to worship them. And one of these forms looked like a lamb, which is the symbol for Christ, and did works that look an awful lot like Christian miracles.

Isn't this what material science and medical science are trying to do? They were exposed by Christian Science, so now they're trying to confuse us by doing what Christian Science did.

What is the effect of that? Revelation says each person who believes in the Beast is marked on the right hand and head with the number 666. This number is not remotely Satanic. Like all the numbers in Revelation, it is a puzzle. In Revelation, the number 7 symbolizes perfection, and the number 3 symbolizes completeness. So 666 symbolizes a state that is forever imperfect – one digit short of 7 yet complete because it is repeated three times. In other words, the believers are doomed to a life of eternal imperfection. This is mortal mind. The entire thing is a trick of mortal mind to get us to re-enthroned mortal mind – to give the Dragon his kingdom back.

The point here is not that material science and medical science are evil. The efforts of scientists and honest doctors show clear elements of progress. But all material science is by definition a product of mortal mind, and so tempts believers into worshipping mortal mind. And we can see this same impersonal nature in every trick of mortal mind – tempting us to see human government as more powerful than divine law. Tempting us into being satisfied with a life of material comfort and seeing the injustices inherent to mortal mind as personal traumas. Mortal mind exists only by tempting us to hold fast to the sins that keep us from gaining spiritual renewal, and so we voluntarily carve "imperfection" – 666 – into our every thought and action.

So what is the way forward? How do ensure we are the next generation of Christian Science pioneers? The answer is not very original. We do the same thing that they did – we recognize how error is constantly mutating to try and avoid detection, and then we cast it out.

The second part – the casting out – we know how to do well. When I was reading about Emma Thompson recently, I was struggling with a recurrence of an allergic infection that had once made my face swell alarmingly. I felt the signs that it might be returning when I read this: “Mrs. Thompson held a deep compassion for her patients. But from the very beginning of her practice, she was uncompromising with any underlying error.” When a patient came in with bandages over her eyes, Mrs. Thompson requested she take them off. When another came in with crutches, Mrs. Thompson asked that she lay them aside.

Mrs. Eddy said in “Science & Health” that we must speak to disease “as one having authority (14:28). In that moment, I saw that Mrs. Thompson had spoken with authority because she genuinely had not believed the disease was a real thing. My job was not to find the right prayer or find the most comfortable way to sit. It was to disbelieve in the disease’s very existence so completely that nothing would be left. The pain I was feeling ended immediately.

The challenge now, as always, is identifying how the Red Dragon evolves to evade detection – to make us believe in mortal mind. Mrs. Eddy’s writings were perfectly calibrated to address the error of her day. But while “a book introduces new thoughts,... it cannot make them speedily understood.” Later in “Science & Health,” she added: “Mortal thought does not at once catch the higher meaning, and can do so only as thought is educated up to spiritual apprehension” (349:26).

That makes our task clear: We are to educate thought up to spiritual apprehension. And doesn’t that make our lesson plans for the world clear, too? If Mrs. Eddy exposed the lies of mortal mind, then isn’t our job to expand that understanding – to uproot deeper and deeper forms of error?

So let’s flip all of these three things we discussed around and instead see through the eyes of the spiritual pioneer. What new groves are there to clear and quarries to dig that we might spiritualize more of the new mental frontier?

In rejecting the first claim we recognize that the world has never had a democracy as large, as diverse, as wealthy, or as free as the United States. The highest ideals of the United States are an attack against mortal mind’s claim of division. That means that now we are being asked to prove that in deeper and deeper ways. What does the practical unity of more divine humanity look like? Well-meaning secular humanism, which is increasingly the best model for much of the world, will not be enough. Can we root out every thought and action but the Christly humanity that, the apostle Paul said, “Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things”? Is not “puffed up,” “is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil”?

The pioneer, Mrs. Eddy wrote, shows patience and obedience in dissolving “the adamant of error, — self-will, self-justification, and self-love, — which wars against spirituality and is the law of sin

and death” (S&H 242:15).

In rejecting the second claim, we recognize the world has never known a period of the kind of material comfort we see now in the West. That means that now we are being asked to show that the Comforter is infinitely greater. On our progress Godward, we must at some point advance into a more mature Christianity that overcomes both the claims of ease and trauma and finds all, whole and safe, in Spirit.

In rejecting the third claim we recognize that the world has never before so relied on material science to show it the way forward. That means that now we are being asked to show what true Science is. Is it enough to just be a successful religion? Or must we topple the very laws of physics, too, proving that God alone is law?

It is only in this way that we can destroy sin. The nothingness of sin is the most radical thought in Christian Science. So often we are pegged as “the people who don’t go to doctors,” and that inevitably leads to the statement that there is no matter. But the nothingness of sin and evil is even more revolutionary. So it will be the last to yield. But the signs of the times are suggesting that the need is for us to make some proper progress in demonstrating this. A world of healthy human beings is not a sufficient step forward. There are no such things as human beings. There is God, Spirit, and his image and likeness.

Mrs. Eddy once said: “The building up of churches, the writing of articles and the speaking in public is the old way of building up a Cause. The way I brought this Cause into sight was through healing.” In late 1896, Mrs. Eddy sent a message to Emma Thompson: Start a new church in Minneapolis. Seven years later, when the congregation moved into its own building, 5,000 people attended the opening-day services. When the clerk of the church in 1935 looked back on its founding, she wrote: “Second Church is the natural outgrowth of the healing work of Mrs. Emma Thompson...”

The same rules apply today. Our churches are not just houses of religious worship, they are laboratories of spiritual innovation, providing proof of the scientific principles they explore. Our religion is not a human organization with members lobbying for political rights and policies, it is the demonstration of divine government. And we are not here to live happier human lives. We are here to destroy the belief in human life, revealing the happiness that has “no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17) – that wipes away all tears, because there is no death, no sorrow, no crying, nor any more pain: because the former things are passed away (Revelation 21:4).

We are here to be the spiritual pioneers of today, and that begins by awakening ourselves from what would deceive us to see God’s unbroken line of progress carrying us forward.