

The role of Mary Baker Eddy in Christian Science compared to the role of Jesus

Question:

What kind of esteem is Mary Baker Eddy held in by the Christian Science Church – especially in relation to Jesus himself? In Christian Science churches, the words of both Eddy and Jesus are prominent at the front of the sanctuary – seemingly with an insistence that they be given equal consideration and meditation. Coming from a Catholic background, it is of course well-bred into me that nothing is to be held in higher esteem than Jesus and his teachings. I wonder if you could shed some light on this for me.

Response:

The question you've raised is one that Mary Baker Eddy herself frequently encountered – from critics and even from over-zealous admirers – and she was always absolutely adamant in her response. She would have thoroughly agreed with you that “nothing is to be held in higher esteem than Jesus and his teachings.”

Although Mary Baker Eddy is honored by Christian Scientists as the Discoverer of Christian Science and Founder of the Church of Christ, Scientist, there is no sense in which she can legitimately be equated with Jesus or seen as superseding him. Rather, she saw herself as having *discovered* (not originated or invented) the divine law, or Science, which Jesus embodied and by which he healed the sick and sinful. She considered this Science to be the Comforter, the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised “will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (John 14:26).

In this sense, the Science of Christianity reveals and makes manifest the presence and power of Christ to heal and save, just as Jesus did during his earthly ministry. Eddy held that Christian Science is the complete and ultimate revelation of what Jesus lived and proved. She wrote her primary work, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, to explain this divine law that she discovered in the Bible, showing how it permeates the whole of Holy Scripture, and to present this divine Science to humanity in “a form comprehensible by and adapted to the thought of the age in which we live” (*Science and Health*, pp. 146-7). This is why *Science and Health* is read alongside the Bible in Christian Science services – to illumine and explain the Scriptures and Jesus' teachings, not to replace or supersede them.

To ensure that Christian Science would be taught and practiced effectively and its significance understood, Eddy saw it as all-important that her own historic place and indispensable role as its Discoverer should be known and acknowledged. Her name, message, and mission can't be separated from her discovery, any more than Moses can be separated from the Ten

Commandments or St. John from his Revelation on the Isle of Patmos – or, in more modern terms, Einstein from his discoveries that revolutionized the science of physics.

Again, however, this doesn't mean that Eddy saw herself and her role as in any way equal or comparable to our Lord and Master, Christ Jesus. Throughout her career, she absolutely rejected personal adulation of herself and counseled her followers to "follow your Leader only so far as she follows Christ" (*Message to The Mother Church for 1901*, p. 34). When asked by a major New York newspaper if she considered herself to be "the second Christ", she responded frankly:

Even the question shocks me. What I am is for God to declare in His infinite mercy. As it is, I claim nothing more than what I am, the Discoverer and Founder of Christian Science, and the blessing it has been to mankind which eternity enfolds....

"There was, is, and never can be but one God, one Christ, one Jesus of Nazareth. Whoever in any age expresses most of the spirit of Truth and Love, the Principle of God's idea, has most of the spirit of Christ, of that Mind which was in Christ Jesus.

If Christian Scientists find in my writings, teachings, and example a greater degree of this spirit than in others, they can justly declare it. But to think or speak of me in any manner as a Christ, is sacrilegious. Such a statement would not only be false, but the absolute antipode of Christian Science, and would savor more of heathenism than of my doctrines. (*New York Herald*, February 6, 1895; reprinted in Mary Baker Eddy, *Pulpit and Press*, pp. 74-75)

In her *Manual of The Mother Church*, a concise volume that provides guiding rules for all Church members, Eddy included this strong injunction:

Christ Jesus the Ensample.... He who dated the Christian era is the Ensample in Christian Science. Careless comparison or irreverent reference to Christ Jesus is abnormal in a Christian Scientist, and is prohibited. (*Manual of The Mother Church*, p. 41)

In a private conversation recorded by her long-time secretary Calvin Frye, she was even more explicit: "When I hear people speak of me or any other mortal as an equal with Jesus it makes me shiver, for I realize more and more as I apprehend his true character and work his infinite distance above us." (Calvin Frye diaries, March 5, 1900, The Mary Baker Eddy Collection, The Mary Baker Eddy Library)

If you're interested in learning more about Mary Baker Eddy's life and how she came to found her Church, you may like to watch this 1-hour biographical documentary:

Mary Baker Eddy: A Heart in Protest

<http://christianscience.com/what-is-christian-science/mary-baker-eddy-discoverer-founder-author/mary-baker-eddy-a-heart-in-protest/%28language%29/eng-US>