US founder of Christian Science (1879). She claimed to have rediscovered the secret of primitive Christian healing after an instantaneous recovery from serious injury. She expounded her system in *Science and Health With Key to the Scriptures* (1875).

Mary Baker Eddy was an American religious leader and author of the book *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. Known to her followers as the “Discoverer and Founder of Christian Science,” Eddy claimed to have discovered the Principle of Christ Jesus’s healing in 1866; she spent the rest of her life establishing Christian Science as a system of healing and founding a church to promote and extend it.

Eddy understood herself as both the discoverer of a scientific truth and the founder and leader of a Christian church. Her work as an interpreter of the Bible was central to both enterprises. Controversial from the beginning of her career to its end, and beyond, Eddy insisted that her writings on the Scriptures were the result of a tripartite synergy between “revelation, reason, and demonstration” (*Science and Health*, 109). Her basis for this claim is rooted in her life experience.

Born Mary Morse Baker on a farm at Bow, New Hampshire, as the youngest of six children, she was intelligent, lively, attractive, and chronically ill. Her father, Mark Baker, was a staunch orthodox Calvinist; her mother, Abigail Ambrose Baker, was a gentler influence. Both were active in the Congregational Church. Eddy later described herself as “early a child of the Church” (*Message to the Mother Church*, 32). This affinity was tested when she was examined for membership during her adolescence and withstood the minister on the subject of predestination; she was admitted to membership, maintaining that affiliation for over thirty years until she founded a church of her own.

Eddy’s regular schooling was limited by bad health, yet her older brother, Albert Baker, tutored her during his vacations from Dartmouth College. However, it was life experience, including a series of personal disasters, that had the greatest impact on Eddy’s emerging approach to scriptural study and interpretation.

Widowed during her first year of marriage, Eddy returned home pregnant in 1844. She was too sick to care for her child, and the boy was eventually taken from her. She remarried in 1853, principally to regain custody, but instead found herself in a precarious marriage plagued by financial setbacks. She was bedridden much of the time, and the Bible was her primary source of comfort, encouragement, and insight.

During these difficult decades, Eddy studied homeopathy, becoming convinced of the mental nature of disease, but she was unable to find permanent health. She tried different therapies, finally making her way to Portland, Maine, in 1862 for treatment by Phineas Quimby, a self-taught healer who used no drugs but talked to his patients about their ills and rubbed their heads, controlling them mentally without...
placing them in a trance state. At first Eddy improved dramatically under Quimby's supervision and
interrogated him about his theory, associating it with Christianity, which was basically incompatible with
Quimby's ideas but congenial to her own religious sensibilities. However, she relapsed when she
returned to Lynn, Massachusetts, where she and her husband had recently moved. She became
dependent on Quimby but did not regain her health.

The year 1866 began on a dismal note. Eddy's father died, predeceased by her mother. Her husband's
infidelities became increasingly embarrassing. Quimby's death early in the year must have darkened the
bleak picture. On a bitterly cold night in February, she was on her way with friends to a temperance
meeting when she fell on the icy pavement, striking her head. By turns unconscious and in agony, she
was soon moved to a nearby house, and the next day to her own apartment on a stretcher. She was
sedated by her doctor, and the local paper reported her condition as “critical.” It was then that she
asked for her Bible and turned in the Gospels to one of Jesus's healings. At that moment, she writes, a
powerful spiritual insight welled up in her: “That short experience included a glimpse of the great fact
that I have since tried to make plain to others, namely, Life in and of Spirit; this Life being the sole
reality of existence” (Miscellaneous, 24). She got up, dressed, and told her friends what had happened.
She had launched out on a new life.

Eddy spent the next three years immersed in biblical study. At first she planned to write a book titled
“The Bible in Its Spiritual Meaning.” Her husband left her; almost destitute, Eddy moved from one
boardinghouse to another, reading and writing all day in her room, talking to others about her ideas at
meals, and taking cases for healing, not as a homoeopathist or a hypnotist, but under the newfound
regime of her discovery.

Eddy began her scriptural research in Genesis. According to her emerging theology, Gen. 1:1–2:3
contains the spiritual, true account of God's “very good” creation, whose elements are to be
interpreted metaphysically. In contrast, Gen. 2:4–4:26, narrating the fall and its aftermath, represents
an allegory based on matter, the reverse of creation by God, who is Spirit. In Eddy's dialectic, if the first
account is true, then the second is false, including its implications of humankind's doomed subjection
to evil, sin, sickness, and death. She believed that the Hebrew prophets glimpsed this distinction, and that
Christ Jesus, born of a virgin in contravention of material law, fully embodied it as the Son of God. He
healed the sick, raised the dead, cleansed the sinful, and ratified his mission to humanity through his
crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.

The terms that Eddy uses for God—Father-Mother, Divine Principle, Love, Mind, Spirit, Soul, Truth, and
Life—are intended to be synonymous and emerged from her study and interpretation of the Bible.
Convinced that a spiritual understanding of God would heal people, she taught Christian Science to
others, moving into the roles that would define her for the next two decades: author and teacher.

In this matrix of research, teaching, healing, and the emerging criticism of her ideas, Science and Health
was born, published in 1875. Eddy's most enduring relationship was to her book. She revised and
refined it for thirty-five years, sometimes alone, sometimes in consultation with editors. Hundreds of
scriptural quotations, references, metaphors, themes, and paraphrases pack the text. Eddy intended
her book to induce readers to study the Bible, as well as to regain physical and mental health or to let
go of chronic sin. She added the section “Key to the Scriptures” in 1883; it included metaphysical
exegeses of Genesis and Revelation, along with a glossary of biblical terms.

For example, her “spiritual interpretation” of Gen. 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the
earth," explains: "The infinite has no beginning. This word beginning is employed to signify the only—that is, the eternal verity and unity of God and man, including the universe.... There is but one creator and one creation. This creation consists of the unfolding of spiritual ideas and their identities, which are embraced in the infinite Mind and forever reflected. These ideas range from the infinitesimal to infinity, and the highest ideas are the sons and daughters of God" (502–3).

*Science and Health* attracted little public attention until the 1880s, when Eddy and her third husband, Asa “Gilbert” Eddy, relocated to Boston. Ministers denounced Eddy and her interpretation of the Bible; physicians charged that she was a fraud. However, the Christian Science Church, established in 1879, began to put down roots and grow. Eddy “retired” to New Hampshire in 1889 but was more engaged than ever with her church and the world. She became a public figure whose views on the Bible, religion, and national and international affairs were published and dissected in the newspapers. Her development as a religious leader culminated in the unique form of government she developed in her *Church Manual* and in her founding of *The Christian Science Monitor* in 1908. The newspaper, although not “religious” in the conventional sense, was a manifestation of Eddy’s conviction that Christian Science was designed to heal collective as well as individual ills. Her death in 1910 transferred the responsibility for the business of her church, including the publishing of *Science and Health*, to the Christian Science board of directors.

Mary Baker Eddy’s career spanned a tumultuous period of combat between traditional Christianity and the physical sciences. Her provocative interpretation of the Bible offered a unique critique of the conflict between science and religion, challenging what she saw as the materiality of both systems. She claimed a spiritual origin for humanity and the universe, articulated in a metaphysics designed to heal. Her writings continue to shape the practice of Christian Science and her church.

**Bibliography**

APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA