

ANNUNCIATION - LORENZO di Credi, c.1490

FERN Lodge Focus - DECEMBER 1993

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The following message, so appropriate for the Christmas season, is an excerpt from the Fern Lodge Annual Meeting talk, "The Dove's Dry Land," given by Barbara Cook, a Christian Science practitioner from La Grange, Illinois:

As you know, our Leader defines "Dove" in the *Glossary of Science and Health* as "a symbol of divine Science."¹ And "divine Science" she gives as the definition of the Holy Ghost. Here's the complete definition: "Holy Ghost. Divine Science; the development of eternal Life, Truth, and Love."²

...since we must receive divine Science, the spiritual truth of God and man, in order to be born again — or born "from above," as the original Greek states it; and since being born from above is the way of salvation from the flesh; the ideas embraced in the virgin birth [of Christ Jesus] must necessarily embrace the essential elements of all human progress. "Spiritual causation is the one question to be considered," the textbook radically declares, "for more than all others spiritual causation relates to human progress."³ The companion to that statement...is this one: "Physical causation was put aside from first to last by this original man, Jesus."⁴ ... Both of these ideas are embraced in the pattern of the virgin birth.

The Annunciation, as recorded by Luke, explains that the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, announced what would happen to her, and then answered the only question she had — probably the most atomic question anybody has ever asked: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?"⁵ Consciousness had to ask this question, because the false claim of sensual, **material** seed had to first be put down, or "put aside," to prepare the mental ground to receive divine seed which Jesus would interpret as the Word of God. And isn't Mary's question, in its substance, the question we ask and answer every moment of every day, without realizing it? Don't we constantly wonder how we're going to get things done, or how any good will appear on the human scene without human ways, means, and methods? Don't we endlessly attribute good to persons, places, and things?

Yet goodness can never be anything but the WORD made flesh. Nothing is more practical than the Word, because it is Mind's disclosure of good **already here** — manifest as loaves and fishes, funding, health, life, joy, honesty, purity already present. And was there ever anyone more practical than this man who was conceived spiritually?

And this brings us to Gabriel's response to Mary's question of **how** she would conceive her child. This conception — unlike the conceptions of barren women like Sarah, Rachel, Rebecca, and Hannah, for example — had to lead human consciousness beyond the belief that God merely **helps** us conceive, or that he **intervenes** in human activities, to the recognition of corporeal impotence and divine omnipotence. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee:..."⁶ Gabriel explained to Mary. The Holy Ghost, the Science, the law, the truth of creation — spiritual understanding — was to be her bridegroom! And of course, *Science and Health* does indeed define "Bridegroom" in the *Glossary* as "spiritual understanding."⁷ Mary was to receive the understanding of the way things really were — PRE-EXISTENT, already created, ready to be discerned and manifested. Her child was already there.

Clearly, Jesus had to come to us through the virgin birth — not only to prove that God creates man, but to demonstrate the redundancy of sensuality... Doesn't our textbook say, "God created all through Mind, and made all perfect and eternal. Where then is the necessity for recreation or procreation?"⁸ In fact, we need to accept without reservation the idea of universal preexistence, as challenging as the idea may seem to us. "If we live after death and are immortal," the textbook reasons, "we must have lived before birth, for if Life ever had any beginning, it must also have an ending, even according to the calculations of natural science."⁹

Realizing that we lived before birth disposes of belief in the birth of a personal ego, and so we cannot declare anything more powerful. Our leader tells us that Jesus' "steadfast and true knowledge of preexistence...made him mighty."¹⁰ We were there "when the morning stars sang together;" we were there

when we were invisible to mortal eyes. Preexistence is the only basis from which we can honestly understand innocence and forgiveness, as well as bodily renewal and healing, which is actually the revealing of present and eternal perfection.

But what about the "dove's dry land"? How do we know Mary was prepared to receive the Holy Ghost and see the Word made flesh? Here is the answer in Mary's simple response to Gabriel's explanation: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word."¹¹ Could it be that simple? Yes. Her answer embodies the genius of Christianly scientific power: receptivity. Mary declared herself, in utter humility and trust and purity of heart, to be ready to do the will of God. There was no egotism — no argument, arrogance, skepticism, hesitancy, or resistance. She simply submitted to her origin, which is what a reflection always does — and in fact, I think this submission to God is the feminine aspect of reflection. Submission to God is genuine spiritual womanhood...and is essential to our new birth, because submission to God receives the bridegroom, the pure spiritual authority of the Holy Ghost. ...

What are some of the ideas embraced in the virgin birth that will help to lead mankind out of false, or personal, authority, and false submission to it?

Mary, after questioning Gabriel, meekly renounced physical origin, the symbol of all personal power and authority; and when she did this she received the Holy Ghost, pure divine authority, and conceived her child. I am in perpetual awe of the simplicity of what happened there. It is as if Gabriel had said, "Just turn away from the false sense of power and authority, and you'll receive the spiritual idea."

How long will it be before we, with the same purity and humility, stop seeing human experience as a chess board, requiring the maneuvering and manipulating of personalities, the changing and fixing of material conditions? Jesus said that we couldn't, by taking thought, make one hair white or black, or add one cubit to our stature. Isn't that a clear statement of the futility of thinking that healing is about fixing and

changing things? "Jesus demonstrated the inability of corporeality," our textbook explains, "as well as the infinite ability of Spirit, thus helping erring human sense to flee from its own convictions and seek safety in divine Science."¹²

Isn't it time to seek safety in divine Science and receive the message of the Holy Ghost — that there are no personalities, good or bad? It is fruitless to discuss the relative authority of persons, because personality has no authority at all. We aren't here to obey or disobey persons. We are here to awaken ourselves and others out of the **illusion** of persons. In fact, we ourselves have no authority at all until we accept the Holy Ghost, the Science of being, and admit that divinity is right where we seem only to see humanity; that misconceptions of man have never actually been objectified as person, place, or thing. The Mind and substance that everybody has right now is God. And the real man, fully representing God, has been given all the authority and power there will ever be.

Barbara Cook

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- 1 *Science and Health* 584:26 (to 1st ;)
 - 2 *Science and Health* 588:7
 - 3 *Science and Health* 170:22-24
 - 4 *Science and Health* 286:12-13
 - 5 *Luke* 1:26-34
 - 6 *Luke* 1:35
 - 7 *Science and Health* 582:17(to ;)
 - 8 *Science and Health* 205:12
 - 9 *Science and Health* 429:21-24
 - 10 *Miscellaneous Writings* 189:8-10
 - 11 *Luke* 1:38
 - 12 *Science and Health* 494:15-19

Mrs. Cook is happy to share a complete printed text of her talk with those who wish to have one. You may write to Fern Lodge or call Valerie Hickam or Evelyn Spelman at (510) 886-2448, and we will send a copy to you.

HEALTH CARE REFORM, WHAT WILL IT MEAN TO CHRISTIAN SCIENCE NURSING?

There is much speculation these days about reform in our nation's health care policies. While the federal and state governments discuss ways and means to provide for a program to ensure that everyone in the country has access to affordable health care, it will be helpful for us all to hold to the clear understanding of health and care which Christian Science provides.

We are grateful that Christian Science Committees on Publication are working to see that the government continues to recognize Christian Science and to that reliance on Christian Science instead of medical treatment is allowed under whatever program is implemented. We can help by affirming, with our lives, the fact that Christian Science is not an alternative health care system; it is our religion. And the practice of our religion, our way of life, includes the most comprehensive and effective health care we know. We take responsibility for our own care, a quality President Clinton recently recommended to all. And we entrust our health to God through constant, active prayer. In addition, Christian Science practitioners and nurses stand ready to offer practical aid to others whenever there is a need.

Much confusion about how, in any government-mandated health care program, to recognize Christian Science treatment centers on misunderstanding of Christian Science nursing. It normally is allowed that the work of Christian Science practitioners is a legitimate means of treatment. It is also understood that this treatment is a religious practice, and therefore it is protected under the Constitution, but it may not be paid for out of public funds. For a variety of reasons the view of Christian Science nursing is less clear. We now have an opportunity to further public understanding of the complete system of care Christian Science includes.

Mary Baker Eddy wrote, *The divine Science of man is woven into one web of consistency without seam or rent*, (*Science and Health* 242:25-26). Although Christian Science practitioners and Christian Science nurses fill unique roles, there is no real difference in the foundation and mental nature of their work.

The basis for our nursing practice is found in the *Bible*, *Science and Health*, and the *Church Manual*. According to the first tenet of Christian Science, *we take the inspired Word of the Bible as our sufficient guide to eternal life*. We look to the Scriptures, especially to the works and words of Christ Jesus, and find teachings and examples of care which direct our Christian desire to help others. Specific standards for Christian Science nurses are given in our *Church Manual*. It's clear that if it is done honestly, Christian Science nursing is a religious practice.

In *Miscellany* (220:8) Mrs. Eddy writes, *When Jesus was questioned concerning obedience to human law, he replied: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's," even while you render "to God the things that are God's."* Following the Master's example, we can pay those taxes which will provide for nation-wide health insurance coverage, if that is what is asked of us, and we can be grateful for the desire to bless everyone. But at the same time we can, as Jesus did, affirm that *the children are free* — that we have the right and the ability to practice Christian Science even if public funds are not available to pay for Christian Science treatment or nursing care.

During this time of debate on how to provide health care for all, we can offer our nation the opportunity to see more of the true nature of God's care for His children. We can be firm in our commitment to practice and rely on spiritual means alone for healing, trusting that prayer will provide for practical, daily care in times of need. We can be alert to counteract the tendency for Christian Science to be classified as a sect and for its healing method to be lumped together with alternative health-care systems which may combine physical and mental means of treatment. If we are faithful our light will shine, and we will provide an example that will help others to see and seek spiritual care themselves.

George Strong
Administrator

Saturday, February 5, 1994
at Fern Lodge

10:00 a.m. 'til 3:00 p.m.

Topics presented for discussion will include:

Christian Science nursing — What is it?
The individual practice of Christian Science nursing
The role nursing plays in fulfilling the mission of Church
Christian Science nursing and community issues

If you are interested in attending or would like more information, please contact
Pat Alvarez or George Strong at (510) 886-2448

SPRING SEMINAR SERIES

Following the all-day Christian Science nursing forum on February 5, Fern Lodge will host its third seminar series on Christian Science nursing. The aim of this series is to assist individuals who wish to learn more about the place of nursing in our Church and our communities, and to share ideas on how we can help others more effectively. These seminars are not designed to teach nursing, but rather to allow opportunity for discussion focused on specific nursing activities and the ideas which form their foundation.

We welcome those with no nursing experience and those who have nursed, either in the nurses training program or their own life experiences.

Christian Science nurses from our community will introduce and lead each discussion. Emphasis in these seminars is on the questions, comments, and experiences of those who attend. These programs are offered free of charge.

The series will begin Thursday, February 10 and will run through May 5, 1994. One of the following topics will be considered each Thursday, from 7 to 9 in the evening.

- The role of Christian Science nursing in Church
- The ethics of Christian Science nursing
- Environment and personal care
- Food preparation, modification and feeding
- Mobility
- Challenging the claims of old age
- Cleansing and covering wounds
- Activity — relating to others
- Mental needs
- Support for Christian Science study and prayer
- Considerations working in someone's home
- Christian Science nursing and the community
- A Christian Science practitioner's view of nursing

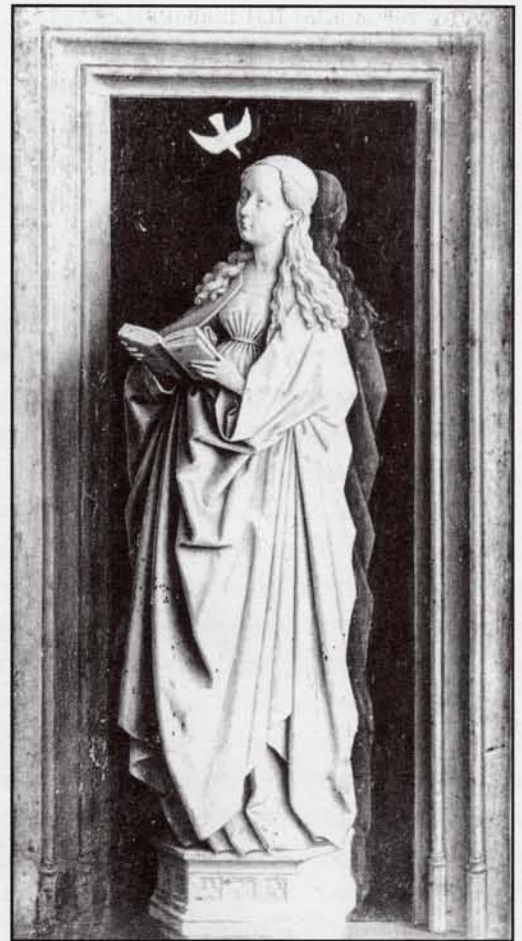
To sign up for any or all of them call Fern Lodge at (510) 886-2448.

OUR CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

The pictures on the front and back of this *Focus* depict two of the many classical renderings of the Annunciation — the announcement by the angel Gabriel to the virgin Mary that she was to bear a child of the Holy Ghost, the Saviour who would be known to mankind as Christ Jesus.

We are grateful to include in this newsletter a depiction of this wonderful occasion, the Annunciation, in spiritual terms. On pages 2 and 3 is an excerpt from the talk, "The Dove's Dry Land," given by Barbara Cook of La Grange, Illinois at the October Fern Lodge Annual Meeting. The complete text of this talk is available. To find out how to receive one, please see the bottom of page 3.

THE VIRGIN OF THE ANNUNCIATION
JAN VAN Eyck, c. 1436



FERN LODGE FOCUS - DECEMBER 1993

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