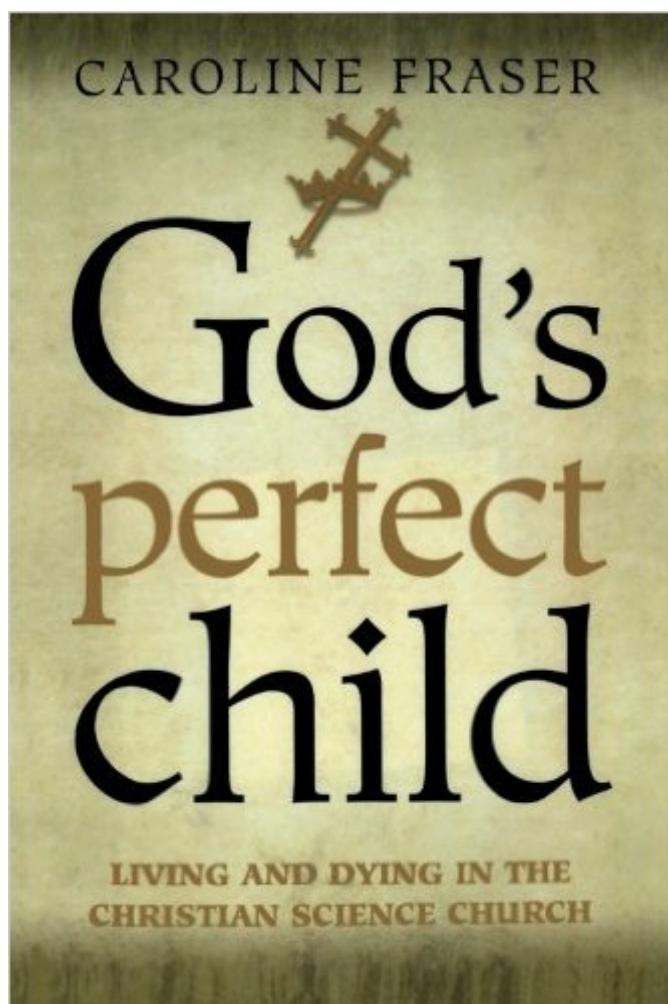


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God's Perfect Child: Living And Dying In The Christian Science Church



Synopsis

From a former Christian Scientist, the first unvarnished account of one of America's most controversial and little-understood religious movements. Millions of Americans—from Lady Astor to Ginger Rogers to Watergate conspirator H. R. Haldeman—have been touched by the Church of Christ, Scientist. Founded by Mary Baker Eddy in 1879, Christian Science was based on a belief that intense contemplation of the perfection of God can heal all ills—an extreme expression of the American faith in self-reliance. In this unflinching investigation, Caroline Fraser, herself raised in a Scientist household, shows how the Church transformed itself from a small, eccentric sect into a politically powerful and socially respectable religion, and explores the human cost of Christian Science's remarkable rise. Fraser examines the strange life and psychology of Mary Baker Eddy, who lived in dread of a kind of witchcraft she called Malicious Animal Magnetism. She takes us into the closed world of Eddy's followers, who refuse to acknowledge the existence of illness and death and reject modern medicine, even at the cost of their children's lives. She reveals just how Christian Science managed to gain extraordinary legal and Congressional sanction for its dubious practices and tracks its enormous influence on new-age beliefs and other modern healing cults. A passionate exposé of zealotry, God's Perfect Child tells one of the most dramatic and little-known stories in American religious history.

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Customer Reviews

I grew up in a Christian Science family and tried for years attempting to confirm in my own life that

its principles of "healing demonstration" actually worked, before giving it up when I began to actually start thinking for myself partway through college. Based on my own childhood, it was obvious from the lengthy preface's emotionally nuanced, on-target portrayals of the characteristic inner life and other features of a Christian Science upbringing that this was going to be an insightful book. Many have focused on the corruption, backstabbing, and stonewalling in the Mother Church as documented in Perfect Child, or have argued about the book's portrayal of Mary Baker Eddy. But for me its thematic core lies in its rich storehouse of insight and examples about how the psychology of denial inherent in the practice of C.S. gives rise to the "shadow" side of the movement, both in the individual lives of adherents as well as how this shadow has been collectively woven through-and-through the movement's history from the beginning. As anyone knows from Psychology 101, any time a part of the psyche is suppressed or regarded as unreal, it merely expresses itself in distorted and unconscious ways, and much of this book is about just this fascinating side of Christian Science. This includes not just the toll taken in terms of wrongful deaths as discussed in the central sections about the "child cases." As tragic as they are, these cases and/or those of permanently disabling untreated illnesses or accidents probably only involve a modicum of Scientist families.

Whatever your beliefs, and whether you are a former Christian Scientist or a continuing member of the Mother Church, you owe it to yourself to be willing find answers about Christian Science from a 3rd party, not your practitioner, your Teacher, your Sunday School Teacher, or your parents. Documented, footnoted, and deliberate, this book takes you beyond the sanitized biographies of MBE and the history of the church put out by the CSP in the Reading Room. This book was, for me, not only eye-opening in terms of the origins of the church (and the continuing 'dissenting' movement I had no idea existed), but also affirming: Learning that there are others who suffered at the hands of well-meaning, compassionate people who otherwise were caring, giving parents, except when it came to acknowledging your pain, disease, or injury -- when they became emotionally unavailable, sometimes pretending they didn't understand when you asked to go to a doctor...or assuring you that healing would take place as soon as you acknowledged the "Divine Truth" of your relationship with God. When you became no longer an individual but a 'divine idea' that couldn't really be sick, injured, or in pain, because that wasn't part of God and couldn't be part of you either, as His creation. More shocking still was the realization after reading this book that based on the exclusions for CS treatment still provided in many state laws, abused and neglected animals may have more protections afforded them than the children of practicing Christian Scientists.

Like Caroline Fraser, I too am a former Christian Scientist. I was raised in Christian Science, joined the Mother Church in my teens, graduated from Principia College (for Christian Scientists only), was president of a college "Org" while in grad school, and attended church services until I was in my early 30's. So I can testify to the spot-on accuracy and fairness of Fraser's portrayal of Christian Science in this book. Hostile reviewers have claimed that Fraser's father, described in the prologue, is some sort of "oddball" Christian Scientist for habits such as not using the seatbelts in his car. In fact, if you truly believe that "accidents are impossible in God's kingdom," as Scientists are taught, then there is no logical reason to use your seatbelts. Christian Scientists who do use seatbelts, like previous reviewer Richard Biever, are tacitly acknowledging that at least some teachings of Christian Science are ridiculous. After the brief personal account which opens the book, Fraser devotes about the first third of the book to a review of the life and career of Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science. Her primary source, contrary to hostile reviewers, is the church-approved biography by Robert Peel. Fraser does not set out to write a full biography; rather, her focus is on clearing away the mythology Scientists have constricted about their "beloved Leader." For example, Fraser demolishes one of the central Christian Science myths, that of Eddy's "fall on the ice" in 1866, which supposedly led to the epiphanic moment when she "discovered" Christian Science. Fraser also describes the CS Church's efforts to suppress any unfavorable treatments of Eddy in print.

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