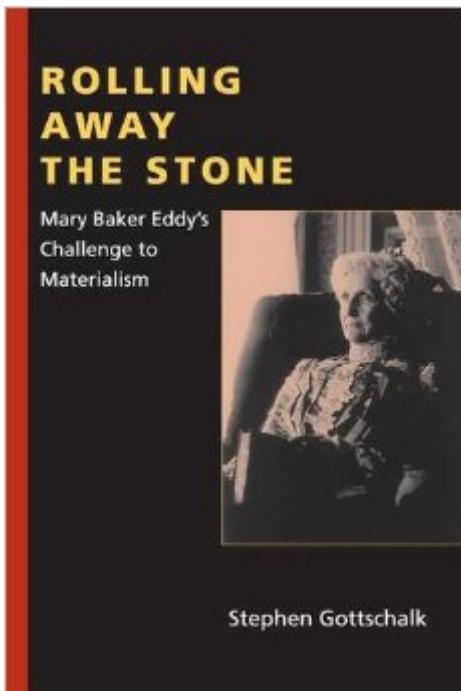


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# Rolling Away The Stone: Mary Baker Eddy's Challenge To Materialism (Religion In North America)



## Synopsis

This richly detailed study highlights the last two decades of the life of Mary Baker Eddy, a prominent religious thinker whose character and achievement are just beginning to be understood. It is the first book-length discussion of Eddy to make full use of the resources of the Mary Baker Eddy Collection in Boston. *Rolling Away the Stone* focuses on her long-reaching legacy as a Christian thinker, specifically her challenge to the materialism that threatens religious belief and practice.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Marinating in materialism" is an apt sound bite describing society entering the 21st century. Some nostalgics might yearn for a simpler time-say a hundred years ago-before cell phones, high speed Internet and the Jerry Springer Show. According to Stephen Gottschalk, other than new technology, little has changed in media strategy and social values in the last century. His new book, "Rolling Away The Stone: Mary Baker Eddy's Challenge to Materialism" focuses on the period from 1890 to 1910, the ending twenty years in the controversial career of Mary Baker Eddy, religious leader, church founder, publisher and media lightening rod. Through meticulous historical research, including new original source material recently made public, Gottschalk portrays both the heart-rending struggles and triumphs of a religious reformer who challenged the growing encroachment of materialism in society and particularly in religion. Through her Bible study, hard-knock life experiences, experimenting and discovery (or as she called it "reason and revelation") she felt she glimpsed the essential vitality of original Christianity. Not encumbered by

formal education, no degree in classical theology, her reading of the Bible bore through centuries of tradition, ritual and dogma to share with the world a view of "primitive Christianity and its lost element of healing." Much of 19th century church teaching was colored by doctrinal assumptions dating back to ancient church councils where it was agreed to make God the cause of not only infinite good but of matter and finitude which lead to death and suffering in human experience. Healing, common in the first years of the Christian era, was considered something confined to Bible times and not for contemporary practice.

My comments below will review the book, and also speak to a review in The Christian Science Monitor 2/21/2006 (available in archive at csmonitor [dot] com). This book is an important story about a significant contributor to the intellectual history of the world. But the 'official' review by Monitor reviewer, Richard Bergenheim, editor of the Monitor, seems to wish Gottschalk had told a different story. And he bases some of his critique on the story not told, dismissing the book, in part, as dogmatic -- yet he does not establish his assessment charging 'dogmatism' by citing a single quote. (Here's one of his: "Regretfully, Gottschalk feels compelled to tell the more familiar story yet again, leaving examination of what Mrs. Eddy achieved during this period and how it was accomplished still largely unexplored. . . . Its tone, however, is often uncomfortably dogmatic.") 'More familiar?' RB seems to miss the point that the book is not about the church but about her challenge to materialism. What a pity. Perhaps he's the dogmatist, being more fixated by the (failing?) empire, than focused on the significant insight about the nature of matter and the way of treating it which Eddy has delivered to the world. Yes, the book revisits ground covered by Robert Peel (in what still remains the leading scholarly biography on Eddy), but Gottschalk is on a new mission. The intrigue of prominent thinkers (Twain, Cather, Pulitzer, et al) and their differing perceptions of reality was, for me, worth contemplating. I came away with the distinct feeling that Eddy would have been much further ahead had she not allowed herself to be distracted by the founding of a centralized church, an effort she attempted to resist. (Let the local branches be the church!

Mary Baker Eddy took a radical stand against materialism, and, resultantly, evil. Both Mary Baker Eddy and Mark Twain experienced moments of blackness, despair. Although Twain could believe in healing through Christian Science, he could not believe that God is Love. This new scholarly biography by Stephen Gottschalk is of interest to both historians of religion in America and Christian Scientists. The author's focus is Mary Baker Eddy's final twenty years. For the most part these

years were spent by her at her New Hampshire retreat near Concord, Pleasant View. Gottschalk uses pressure points encountered by Mrs. Eddy to organize the book. The first is the regrettable Next Friends Suit triggered by inquiries of Pulitzer's WORLD. Other points used are the vehement opposition of Mark Twain to Mrs. Eddy and the World Parliament of Religions. In the near term the Parliament was deemed a success by Christian Science adherents. Mrs. Eddy had, nonetheless, fear of overexposure and she was more perceptive than her followers in this regard. The discussion of MBE and Mark Twain is interesting in terms of the Calvinist background they shared. Mrs. Eddy is characterized as a reluctant Charismatic. Her position was a radical one. Dissension in the movement threatened its prosperity. Through unity of action the Mother Church was built in 1894. Mrs. Eddy made unremitting demands upon members and officers for concerted purposeful action. The boom in branch church edifices, though, signaled a danger--creeping materialism. Mrs. Eddy believed her source of authority was spiritual listening. More than Emma Hopkins and Augusta Stetson, Josephine Woodbury was a conflicted follower of Mary Baker Eddy. She passed from ardent disciple to adversary. She had drama and flair.

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