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Understanding the Religious Gulf between Mary Baker Eddy, Ursula N. Gestefeld, and Their Churches

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Late in 1888, a swift and public rift occurred between Mary Baker Eddy and her student Ursula N. Gestefeld. Historians agree it was a significant break, generally glossing its cause as a personal quarrel later codified in separate organizations: Eddy's Church of Christ, Scientist, reorganized in 1892, and Gestefeld's Church of the New Thought. This article finds, however, that the rift between Eddy and Gestefeld is best explained in terms of theology and religious practice. The two expressed incompatible views of Christianity and its relationship to Theosophy, eclecticism, truth, ethics, ambiguity, and special revelation. They ultimately codified these profound religious differences, not merely personal quarrels, in their distinct churches. The article's findings cause us to rethink the scope and shape of Eddy's self-professed Christianity; the common characterization of her as excluding powerful women from her church for authoritarian reasons; and the terrain occupied by the traditions and churches Eddy and Gestefeld subsequently developed. I show that in their case, contact resulted not in combination but in conversation and contestation, and ultimately perhaps in co-existence. This builds on and sharpens the theoretics describing the religious milieu in which they operated.

"Whether I ever become a successful practitioner or not," Ursula Gestefeld wrote to Mary Baker Eddy in June 1884, "I feel a happiness in the study of [Christian Science] which I never felt before in my life; I have always been vaguely seeking for something I lacked or wanted, and now I feel as if I had that which makes life full and round."[1] Reading Eddy's book, *Science and Health*, had reportedly healed

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[1]Ursula N. Gestefeld (hereafter UNG) to Mary Baker Eddy (hereafter MBE) (30 June 1884). All letters from Gestefeld are courtesy of the Mary Baker Eddy Library.

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her of an illness, and just the month before she had completed a healing class in Chicago taught by Eddy, who was visiting from Boston.[2] Eddy soon confided to Gestefeld that she felt a "tender" care for all her students, "that they shall be lights set upon a hill that others seeing their good works may be led to follow Him."[3] Her letters combine affection, encouragement, and corrective counsel in a "mothering" mix her biographers call characteristic of her student correspondence.[4]

Over the ensuing three years and roughly thirty letters, Gestefeld wrote cordially, often warmly, but gradually lost interest in her teacher's religious counsel; by 1887 her letters breathe a palpable reserve. For Eddy's part, affection and organizational support for her student remained constant, but theological caveats and cautionary advice grew to fill much of her final letter. Then in late 1888, over a year after the two stopped corresponding, a swift and public rift occurred between them.

Eddy's letters to Gestefeld are among thousands she wrote in the 1880s, a decade of phenomenal growth and challenge for her Christian Science Church.[5] During the roughly four-year span of their relationship, Eddy marked twenty years in her roles as "discoverer" and founder of her religion, which she dated to a healing revelation (or "discovery") in 1866. She completed two major revisions of her book, *Science and Health*, in which she continued to refine her codification of the principles behind Jesus' healings. Christian Science, she taught, was the very Comforter Jesus promised. Sales of her book were increasing exponentially, as were applicants to her healing classes. Founded in 1879 to "reinstate primitive Christianity and its lost element of healing," she dismantled her church's structure amid controversy in 1889, citing an inward conviction that it was time to devote herself solely to another major book revision.[6] She would

[2]Charles Brodie Patterson reported Gestefeld's healing in a biographical sketch of her in *Mind* 9, no. 4 (January 1902), 251. She was his close colleague in the New Thought movement. Gestefeld joined Eddy's only Chicago class on May 13, 1884.

[3]MBE to UNG, F00421 (19 December 1884). All letters from Eddy are © The Mary Baker Eddy Collection and used with permission.

[4]See Robert Peel, *Mary Baker Eddy: The Years of Trial* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 123; Robert David Thomas, *With Bleeding Footsteps: Mary Baker Eddy's Path to Religious Leadership* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 211–12; Gillian Gill, *Mary Baker Eddy* (Reading, Mass.: Perseus Books, 1998), 307; and Stephen Gottschalk, *Rolling Away the Stone: Mary Baker Eddy's Challenge to Materialism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 176–79. See also Annie Knott's "Reminiscences of Mary Baker Eddy" in *We Knew Mary Baker Eddy* (Boston: Christian Science Publishing Society, 1979), 85–86; and Eddy's "Unchristian Rumor," *Christian Science Journal* 5, no. 12 (March 1888), 631.

[5]The Mary Baker Eddy Library counts over three thousand outgoing letters in its collection during the 1880s, though hundreds or more are no longer extant.

[6]Mary Baker Eddy, *Church Manual* (Boston: Christian Science Publishing Society, 1936), 17.

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reorganize it in 1892, during a decade of further expansion in which she became a world-known religious leader.

In 1884 Gestefeld was thirty-nine, about twenty-five years Eddy's junior, and just beginning her career. The surviving letters she wrote to Eddy, combined with a handful of publications, significantly augment what little we know of her eclectic religiosity during the 1880s. In the 1890s she traveled widely as a lecturer, wrote two novels, and contributed to Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *The Woman's Bible*. Along with many others, she withdrew from the Theosophical Society when it fractured in 1895, in her case after nine years of membership. By 1900 she called her religion the Science of Being, and in 1904 she founded the Church of the New Thought. She is remembered today, however, largely for the rift with her former teacher.

Historians agree that the Gestefeld–Eddy break was significant. With a few considerable yet partially developed exceptions, scholars usually gloss its cause as a personal quarrel. "Gestefeld quarreled with Eddy and was expelled" from her organization, writes Beryl Satter.[7] Gillian Gill judges Eddy practical and shrewd for what she names a "determination to control" Gestefeld and other Chicago students over against their allegedly mercenary desire for independence, while also acknowledging basic religious differences.[8] In very different ways, Robert David Thomas and Rennie Schoepflin both hold that trouble ensued when Gestefeld published her "own" version of Christian Science.[9] Stephen Gottschalk simply writes that in instituting her later church Eddy wished to distance herself from the type of "quarrelsomeness" caused, he implies, by early students such as Gestefeld.[10] Most accounts emphasize competition and rivalry. Several treat the rift as representative of Eddy's allegedly "authoritarian" and "irascible" manner with ambitious, usually female students.[11] Scholarship also generally holds that Eddy and these former students, Gestefeld among them, subsequently codified their

[7]Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement, 1875–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 126. Satter writes that Gestefeld was expelled from the Christian Science Association, but as this paper shows, she was never a member.

[8]Gill, *Mary Baker Eddy*, 340.

[9]Thomas, *Footsteps*, 173, 220; Rennie Schoepflin, *Christian Science on Trial: Religious Healing in America* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 71–72.

[10]Gottschalk, *Rolling Away the Stone*, 207.

[11]Gail M. Harley, *Emma Curtis Hopkins: Forgotten Founder of New Thought* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 23; R. Marie Griffith, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 83. For the general argument that Eddy was authoritarian with gifted female students, see Ann Braude, "The Perils of Passivity: Women's Leadership in Spiritualism and Christian Science," in *Women's Leadership in Marginal Religions: Explorations outside the Mainstream*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 55–67; and Susan Hill Lindley, *"You Have Stept out of Your Place": A History of Women and Religion in America* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 269.

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personal disagreements in separate religious organizations. Eddy's Christian Science Church and Gestefeld's New Thought milieu, including her Church of the New Thought, are seen as religions that heal according to similar beliefs and differ substantially in terms of organization rather than religious content.

This narrative has been shaped largely by Charles Braden's brief 1963 account, which argues that Eddy "denounced" a promising Gestefeld and "cut her off" before sealing such tendencies (his larger analysis assumes) in a centralized church organization.[12] Some scholars also attend to Robert Peel's longer 1971 study, which grapples with theological issues and corrects Braden's dating to offer the most reliable version to date, while also interpreting Gestefeld as a primarily mercenary figure.[13] Perhaps mindful that these controlling narratives are at odds and have not been revisited for decades, scholars have recently given the Eddy–Gestefeld relationship only the briefest of cameo appearances.

The papers detailing this relationship cause us to revisit and substantially revise the prevailing view of its arc and outcome.[14] The Eddy–Gestefeld letters contain no obvious argument or cutting off; their affectionate, if sometimes efficient, content is instead interwoven with religious searchings, concealings, testings, urgings, and caveats. Set in context with other documents, they delineate how Gestefeld's developing religiosity never truly accommodated Eddy's teachings, even less so over time. Eddy mentored her until their religious differences resulted in an impasse. She then probably exited the correspondence first, quietly and after grappling with spiritual concerns, but in a sense Gestefeld had already quietly exited the teacher–student relationship: at least by 1886 she had chosen a theosophically inflected, esoteric Christian orientation over Eddy's unorthodox yet fully particularistic, revelatory Christianity.

Eventually Gestefeld exploited Eddy's text to produce her own, ushering in a messy episode with issues of book ownership at its center. Still, only later that year did events become truly heated, most notably through Gestefeld's

[12]Charles Braden, *Spirits in Rebellion: The Rise and Development of New Thought* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963), 138–39; Braden revised and slightly expanded this sketch in *Notable American Women, 1607–1950: A Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1971), 27–28. Both versions rely mainly on Brodie Patterson's profile of Gestefeld's later career.

[13]Peel, *Years of Trial*, 229–35. Braden places Eddy's brief response to Gestefeld's polemic before the polemic itself, characterizing it as an "attack," which leads him to mistakenly portray Eddy as aggressor in the rift. This problem is especially evident in his 1971 account. Close study of sources shows that Peel's dating is correct.

[14]Of their at least thirty letters, twenty-five still exist. I also examine their correspondence with key third parties, other writings published during their relationship (including some previously uncited or unexamined), and a few relevant later documents.

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polemical fireworks, which revolved largely around her loosely Theosophical rejection of Eddy's claim to biblically ordained special revelation. Eddy's response dwelt on Christian ethics and her own vehement rejection of Theosophy. She counted the issues raised by Gestefeld's work as serious and ongoing but did not generally interfere with that work, in the end simply letting her former pupil go her own way. As reality often does, this makes a far more interesting story. It assigns Gestefeld more religious agency and gives fuller dimension to our view of Eddy as a religious teacher and leader.

Aside from fully reporting and reframing this significant chapter in the early Christian Science Church, these findings are important in several ways. First, scholars have often stumbled over Eddy's self-professed Christianity, finding it at odds with unorthodox aspects of her teachings. Her exchange with Gestefeld gives fuller shape to how she developed those unorthodoxies within a revisionary Christian framework. Second, as other recent scholarship demonstrates on different grounds, this exchange causes us to rethink the common characterization of Eddy as excluding powerful women from her church for authoritarian reasons.[15] What has been characterized as a sudden and primarily personal falling out is better seen as evidence of a preexisting religious gulf that gradually gained definition throughout the 1880s. Finally, this material causes us to rethink the terrain occupied by Christian Science and New Thought. Differing religious convictions, rather than personal fractiousness or domination, emerge as the basic rationale for the rift between these two women, and this suggests the same was true for their churches. Eddy and Gestefeld were at first participants in overlapping cultural milieus and intimately interacted in that context, but their religious beliefs were gradually seen to co-repel rather than merge. In their case, contact resulted not in combination, but in conversation and contestation, and ultimately perhaps in mere co-existence. This builds on and sharpens the theoretics describing the religious milieu in which they operated.

This paper progresses in nine short sections, organized thematically and in roughly chronological order. An examination of Gestefeld's religiosity, which demonstrates the mysticism, this-worldliness, and altruism always comingling in tension at the heart of her faith, gives way to a discussion of her theosophically oriented eclecticism in contrast with Eddy's Christian particularism. Next I turn to the first indication of a quiet, yet insurmountable, rift between the two women, a deep disagreement regarding Eddy's religious

[15]Gill, *Mary Baker Eddy*, 340–44; Rosemary R. Hicks, "Religion and Remedies Reunited: Rethinking Christian Science," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 20, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 25–58; Gottschalk, *Rolling Away the Stone*; and Eva Payne, March 10, 2010, *Laura Lathrop's Letters: The Challenge of Theology and Practice to Scholarship on Christian Science*, Harvard Divinity School, unpublished paper. Also see Robert Peel, *Mary Baker Eddy: The Years of Authority* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1977).

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role as Christian revelator, which emerged as their preexisting spiritual differences gained definition. The next two sections examine Eddy's Christian Science rejection of Theosophy and, in turn, the Theosophical rejection of special revelation, both of which forced Gestefeld's hand, causing her to claim fidelity to one religion over the other. Her Theosophical sympathies won out, providing almost sole continuity to an intensely negative pamphlet rejecting Eddy's teachings while claiming to carry them forward. As the two parted ways, they reaffirmed the religious nature of their split in their writings and ultimately, I suggest, in their church organizations. I then offer further analysis and concluding thoughts.

I. The "Small Result" and the "Genuine Desire"

Chicago in the 1880s was briskly rebuilding after its disastrous Great Fire in 1871, barreling toward a triumphal display of cosmopolitanism in the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. Poised between a rough-and-tumble West and refined East, it managed to construct an urban identity that partook of both extremes. The exposition, "a more concentrated version of the jumble that was Chicago itself," was a hectic confluence of experimental impulses given polish and flair by the perfect façade of white plaster sheathing the buildings in its famous White City. One observer, comparing the White City to the chaotic biblical city of Babel, "was struck in part by the incoherence that lay just beneath the surface of its apparent unity."[16] These observations could be extended to the fair's religious arm, the World's Parliament of Religions, which served as a meeting ground for the cluster of new religions that thrived in Chicago during the decades immediately before and after the World's Fair.

In particular, Chicago was a magnet for emergent spiritual healing movements. So-called mind cure, faith cure or divine healing, and Christian Science were often conflated by news media by the 1880s, and they shared a modicum of terms and goals. Closer inspection, however, revealed a set of distinct groups practicing sometimes radically different teachings. Babel-like, they often failed to communicate with one another; unlike Babel, it is unclear how much they tried. Many conceived themselves as working toward very different goals, while others did not, resulting in clashes on this very point.

[16]William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 344. For a more recent history, see Dominic A. Pacyga, *Chicago: A Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). Also see Richard Hughes Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions: The East/West Encounter, Chicago, 1893* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

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No study has been done charting circulation and transfer among these groups, but when Gestefeld joined Eddy under her Christian Science banner, she brought with her a mystical religiosity bespeaking an esoteric background. At first it seemed she was open to leaving these behind in order to practice as Eddy taught. Describing the "dazzling and radiant" visions she saw while treating the sick with prayer, she told Eddy she would be "very grateful for a few lines telling me if I am making any mistakes as far as you can judge."[17] "The tone of your letter is right," Eddy responded, adding that it showed promise of considerable growth in Christ ("if the spirit be not quenched").[18] However, "Your revery when treating the sick . . . comes of a vivid imagination and I would . . . confine myself to sober sound reason illumined by understanding, instead of imagination."[19] Gestefeld's "revery," or mystical tendencies, receded in the correspondence, but she retained them in her publications, and they eventually became a central aspect of her later New Thought career.

As Satter has suggested, many persistent tensions and ambiguities in Gestefeld's early thought survive in New Thought.[20] Chief among these continuities was the struggle between idealism and worldly prosperity, which in an 1887 article Gestefeld identified as central to her spiritual formation: "It is hard to remain content with the small result that comes sometimes with hard work and the genuine desire to be unselfish in the doing of it," she wrote, particularly when one sees "the comparative ease with which others attain prosperity." However, "earnest worker[s]" must ask themselves, "Are you making the triumphant vindication of the truth of Christian Science your just object; or are you placing it in the rear of your own personal profit and self-aggrandizement?"[21]

Gestefeld's patients were, as she put it in 1884, "more to me than 'cases,'" and she longed to allay their sicknesses, whether physical or moral, even if this meant "losing caste" among Chicago's wealthier social classes.[22] She earnestly sought "the oneness of man with God." However other considerations simultaneously lobbied in a different direction: "I want to make money I admit," she wrote, then backpedaled to say, "but that shall be with me a secondary consideration." In 1885 she strove "to not make the

[17]UNG to MBE (30 June 1884).

[18]The reference is to 1 Thessalonians 5:19.

[19]MBE to UNG, L14278 (2 July 1884).

[20]Later tensions in Gestefeld's thought, writes Satter, "all help explain why some women were drawn to the contradictory and nonconfrontational doctrines of New Thought" (*Each Mind a Kingdom*, 134). Similarly, Emma Hopkins's "ambiguities . . . may have been the key to her importance" (*Each Mind a Kingdom*, 81).

[21]Ursula N. Gestefeld, "The Test of Sincerity," *The Christian Metaphysician* 1, no. 3 (July 1887), 62–63.

[22]UNG to MBE (24 July 1884).

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money consideration to be first," calling a satisfied patient "more to me than the dollars."[23] Similarly, her allegiance shifted between altruistically wanting to aid "the cause" and personally commanding public "respect."[24] Both seem to have been satisfied somewhat by her patients: "Many a patient has said to me, 'Oh! Mrs. Gestefeld; it does me good just to see you.' That pleases me 'way down to the soles of my boots.'"[25]

Robert Peel highlights what he identifies as Gestefeld's mercenary motives in studying Christian Science, describing her in 1888 as "cool" and "self-assured."[26] This matches an 1886 description of her as "self-possessed" and having a "cultivated air," and her letters undeniably show a preoccupation with money; out of thirteen, nine mention it in some capacity.[27] At the same time, it is arguable that for someone in Gestefeld's position, vaguely middle-class in a manner particular to female dependents of the era, the desire to make money was at least in part a bid for independence. She spoke in 1885 of her "need of . . . earning money," which could possibly point either to a need to supplement her husband's income or a desire to be independent of his financial control.[28] Tellingly, a main theme in her 1892 novel, *The Woman Who Dares*, is financial independence from dominating men.[29]

Gestefeld's many references to financial gain show her alternately identifying with both class extremes in a highly stratified Haymarket-era Chicago and point to an underlying mixture of this-worldly and otherworldly motivations. She appears acutely aware of the tension between these extremes in her 1887 article. How "rapturously and earnestly" the new healer seeks to represent truth and "lift others into that higher atmosphere," she wrote, yet how acute the "time of trial" that besets the healer when "he sees others succeeding where he has failed, to all appearances, and making money—I wish the expression were stricken out of the English language." This frustration, she implied, should ideally give way to self-renunciation and a resulting mystical state in which power extends from the healer as an "unceasing radiation of light and heat."[30] Practically speaking, ambition and idealism shared ground in Gestefeld's early work, and the struggle between

[23]UNG to MBE (5 January 1885).

[24]See UNG to MBE on the following dates: 24 July 1884, 5 December 1886, 12 December 1886, 27 December 1886.

[25]UNG to MBE (5 January 1885).

[26]Peel, *Years of Trial*, 234.

[27]Editorial introduction to Gestefeld's "What is Christian Science?," *Religio-Philosophical Journal* 41, no. 12 (13 November 1886), front page.

[28]UNG to MBE (5 January 1885).

[29]Ursula N. Gestefeld, *The Woman Who Dares* (New York: Lovell, Gestefeld, 1892).

[30]Gestefeld, "The Test of Sincerity," 62–63. Gestefeld's description is similar to what we know of Emma Curtis Hopkins's teaching style; see Catherine Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2007), 317. The two women probably rubbed shoulders in Chicago theosophical circles.

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them appears authentic and deeply felt. Other tensions, more explicitly religious in nature, also persisted.

II. "The *Christian* Side of This Cause[.] And That is the Only Side"

Early 1885 found Gestefeld of two persuasions about joining the Christian Science Association (CSA) in Chicago: "I cannot always act as I would like to," she wrote to Eddy without elaborating, "but if I felt convinced that I ought to join it, I should do so."[31] It was not the concept of joining that gave her pause; she had recently asked about membership in the Boston CSA. Her teacher urged her to join locally instead, but ultimately she joined neither group.[32] One core reason was religious: her Theosophical eclecticism continually levied against Eddy's particularistic Christianity, and vice-versa. Their correspondence shows the two negotiating this difference and outlines the shape of Gestefeld's internal tensions in three ways: her silences, her membership in the Theosophical Society, and her writings outside those to her teacher.

The first and longest silence of three in Gestefeld's letters spanned seventeen months in 1885–1886. After she asked why she was able to heal some cases quickly but not others, Eddy replied, "You, dear one, were taught wrong before I had the honor of teaching you," implying that elements of earlier, incorrect teaching hampered her current practice.[33] Gestefeld then fell silent. Eddy first attributed this to a spate of her own returned or "dead" letters, but eventually she voiced deeper concerns: many students from Chicago had "buried their talent," and she hoped Gestefeld would not.[34]

When her letters resumed in 1886, Gestefeld was still not a member of a CSA but had become instrumental in organizing Christian Science organizations and churches in the "west." Eddy cautioned against striving for place and position, a temptation all must "answer . . . for themselves as Christ did," writing of her own role in the movement as one of supreme servitude. She closed with encouragement and characteristic affection: "Write me dear one all the good news as often as you can."[35] The following day, she wrote another student

[31]UNG to MBE (5 January 1885).

[32]Gestefeld's name does not appear in the records of either the Boston or the Chicago CSA.

[33]MBE to UNG [attributed recipient], L13406 (20 January 1885). This letter bears no recipient address or definite greeting, but an archival note concludes the recipient was almost certainly Gestefeld.

[34]MBE to UNG F00422 (21 August 1885). The reference to the buried talent, or coin, is in Matthew 25:25. Regarding "dead" or miscarried letters, see for example MBE to UNG, L07824 (17 April 1885).

[35]MBE to UNG, V03136 (4 July 1886).

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how "delighted" she was with Gestefeld.[36] Gestefeld did not respond to the cautionary advice, but in late July she sent more plans, anxious for her teacher's approval. There is "little discrimination between the methods" of "mental healing" in Chicago, she wrote, and to make the "truth" of Christian Science "more sought after" and secure its "final triumph," it must organize in a single institute "at the head of all."[37] An earlier letter had found other teachings "identical" to Eddy's, and now she emphasized organization rather than content as the key to distinguishing among groups.[38]

Eddy's main caveat grew more pointed. She was "pleased to hear" of Gestefeld's activities, echoing the common republican phrase her pupil had used: "I like *union*, it is strength." But she wondered why Gestefeld had not yet joined the CSA nor written for the *Christian Science Journal*, underscoring these questions with a serious theological concern: "I have not been able to learn from your lips what your feelings are on the *Christian* side of this Cause[.] And that is the only side—it forms the other three sides of it."[39]

This pointed question went pointedly unanswered. Gestefeld fell silent for over three months. As it turns out, she had joined the Chicago Theosophical Society only two months earlier, in May 1886.[40] The Theosophical Society had been founded in New York in 1875 by the esoteric spiritualists Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Henry Steel Olcott, and William Quan Judge, among others, who conceived its teachings as a merging of Hermetic or occult science and religion that would eventually show all ancient and modern beliefs, Christianity included, to be rooted in, and reducible to, occult philosophy and "pagan origins."[41] It celebrated Asian religions, and Buddhism in particular (or at least, an understanding of Buddhism filtered through Western lenses) as best embodying grand, ancient truths, and it held karma and reincarnation as central principles. Its adherents organized to varying degrees, particularly after an 1895 schism, but each emphasized individualism over organization. The Society had grown into an international organization by 1882, and although its presence in the United States did not expand radically until after its high-profile presentation at the Chicago World's Parliament of Religions in 1893, by 1886 it already had a small but

[36]MBE to Ellen Brown Linscott, L04105 (5 July 1886).
[37]UNG to MBE (27 July 1886).
[38]UNG to MBE (24 July 1884).
[39]MBE to UNG, L12898 (28 July 1886).
[40]Gestefeld joined the International Theosophical Society through a Chicago lodge on May 8, 1886, and she remained a member throughout the rest of her correspondence with Eddy. Along with many others she resigned from the Society on September 13, 1895, after it split into factions. I am indebted to the archives of the Theosophical Society in Pasadena for these dates.
[41]Bruce F. Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 29.

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firm foothold in Chicago.[42] It may have been the teaching that attracted Gestefeld to Christian Science prior to her course with Eddy.

Whether or not Eddy then knew of Gestefeld's Theosophical affiliation, a November article soon seemed to answer her concerns about the totality of Gestefeld's Christian commitment. In it Gestefeld argued that Christian Science is "the result of the understanding of the principle of man, as taught and demonstrated by Jesus."[43] Letters picked up again when Eddy (who may have reasonably assumed Gestefeld meant *only* by Jesus) sent compliments on the paper and offered her a position as Special Contributor for the *Christian Science Journal*. According to pattern, she combined praise with a teacher's concerns, adding another offer. "I was pleased, *delighted* with your correct, clear statement of Christian Science—only a few slight mistakes. . . . I recommend that you put *your* article in a pamphlet, and I will buy them to distribute."[44] Chief among these "mistakes" was almost certainly the following passage in Gestefeld's talk: "it is the quality and not the label of the article that needs to be known and felt."[45] Probably responding to this passage, Eddy wrote, "Goods that are not known, their quality misstated, etc. must be *labeled* before they can be introduced into market[,] purchased and identified."[46]

Though she did not reply to such concerns, Gestefeld was happy to accept both the editorial and publishing opportunities and, she told Eddy, "extremely gratified that my lecture met with your approval." She enthusiastically wrote that her goal in lecturing and publishing was "to represent the grand truth I find in 'Christian Science,' that all who read or listen can find at least fragments of it for themselves and so be led to seek all."[47] Did she feel truth to reside exclusively, primarily, or

[42]In 1886, the year many American lodges were first organized, Chicago had two Theosophical organizations: the Chicago Lodge and the Chicago Theosophical Society. These were soon joined by the Ramayana Lodge in 1887. Membership numbers are difficult to come by. The Theosophical Society has no membership figures for these early organizations and notes that publishing (and perhaps early on, keeping) such figures was and is against their policy. This is not the case for the Theosophical Society in America (or Adyar branch), formed after the 1895 schism, but they have few pre-1895 records. Lodges are able to form with a minimum of seven members but usually involve more. The TSA estimates 40 as a very conservative figure for each of the three lodges, and I have extrapolated to 150 each as a liberal figure. This would put the group at between .0002 percent and .0007 percent of the overall Chicago population (629,895 in 1886, among the top three or four largest U.S. cities), although this figure does not include those casually interested or all who read the three English-language periodicals then in circulation. Indeed, Theosophy seems to have had an outsize influence belying its numbers. I thank Jim Belderis at the Theosophical Society in Pasadena and Janet Kerschner at the TSA in Wheaton, Illinois, for responding to my membership queries.

[43]Gestefeld, "What is Christian Science?," front page.

[44]MBE to UNG, F00424 (19 November 1886).

[45]Gestefeld, "What is Christian Science?," front page.

[46]MBE to UNG, F00424, (19 November 1886).

[47]UNG to MBE (15 November 1886).

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incidentally in Christian Science? Did her lectures contain "fragments" of Christian Science, which was "all," or was Christian Science itself a "fragment" of a greater "grand truth" or "all"? Soon she recommended one of her own students, John Linscott, for Eddy's further instruction, noting that not only did he have "the hearty endorsement of Miss Frances Willard," but also "he has studied and read all sides of the equation and . . . has come to the conclusion that what you have named 'Christian Science' is the truth itself."[48] Was Eddy's truth singular, or was it an ancient, pervasive truth with a new name? Perhaps such questions are palpable only in hindsight.

A letter probably penned the same day, however, provides evidence that Gestefeld maintained sympathetic contact with detractors of the *Journal* and, by extension, probably of Eddy as well. Writing to verify her appointment with William I. Gill, the *Journal*'s editor, she first expressed concern that her work be published "according to copy, without alteration."[49] She had been told, but could not confirm, that submissions "have been changed" contrary to their authors' wishes. (Here at last is one answer to Eddy's repeated query, never answered, regarding why Gestefeld did not contribute to the *Journal*.) However, she was "gratified to see the change for the better in the recent numbers of the Journal . . . . I am with you heartily in your desire 'to see a growing unity in our common thought.'" It is complicated to judge whether she included Eddy in the trend toward "growing unity," but probably her feelings were mixed. She also requested a copy of Gill's book, which was then "Exhibit A" in allegations of theological inaccuracy against him (allegations that culminated two months later when the Boston congregation voted him out of his pastorate at the Mother Church).[50]

Finally, a third period of silence was about to arrive. In January 1887, Eddy responded positively to Gestefeld's pressing request for advice about a proposed lecture tour: "I think it is a good plan and I hope you will succeed

[48]UNG to MBE (29 November 1886). The endorsement of Frances Willard held weight for Eddy, who consistently praised Willard and her temperance movement. Eddy once asked Linscott to recruit Willard as a Christian Science speaker, though this apparently never happened and Eddy later reconsidered. See MBE to John F. Linscott, L11037 (11 August 1887).

[49]UNG to William I. Gill [probable recipient], (undated, probably late November 1886). This letter is missing its first page or pages. However, its wording and content are quite similar to the letter Gestefeld wrote to Eddy in mid-November 1886 (UNG to MBE, F00424 [19 November 1886]). The letter is also clearly to the editor of the *Christian Science Journal*, who in November 1886 was Gill. This is confirmed by Gestefeld's request for "your book." During the timeframe in question, no *Journal* editor but Gill marketed his own book.

[50]The surface issue revolved around the theological accuracy of Gill's preaching and book, which he had written before learning of Christian Science but now marketed and used as an authority on the religion. The underlying issue appears to have been Gill's feelings on Eddy's theodicy, which left him "spiritually paralysed" and convinced "I have not thoroughly understood you yet" (Gill to MBE, L&M 20-2555; cited from Peel, *Years of Trial*, 197). Peel is the only biographer to cover the Gill episode; see *Years of Trial*, 191–98.

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with it," and "with experience you can do well on the platform . . . a truth-teller is needed at every point."[51] She reiterated in a follow-up letter, the last she wrote to her pupil, "Should like to have you take a lecture tour. It is needed." However, she hoped Gestefeld would sell accurate and not "spurious" Christian Science literature. She was unwilling to have her literature distributed with work she considered "incorrect," such as that of Warren Felt Evans, "simply because I know it hinders instead of helps our cause"—a "disheartening" trend. She then closed, "Please write me what you think of this."[52] When Gestefeld's letters resumed over seven months later, they were gracious and enthusiastic, but her teacher's concerns and questions about religious substance again went unanswered.

In February 1887, the *Journal* reprinted an article of Gestefeld's (a piece against mind-cure) from the *Chicago Inter-Ocean*. It appeared the same month a Chicago student plagiarized Eddy's book (by this time not an uncommon event, according to her biographers), and the ousted Gill published a caustic piece against her.[53] Having weathered these storms, and not having heard from Gestefeld in four months, by April Eddy asked another student, she "is writing for Mr. Charles' Mag. is she not? She is a natural and quite talanted writer."[54] Gestefeld had in fact contributed to George B. and Lizzie W. Charles's *Christian Metaphysician* in January, and would do so again in July. Her first article briefly argues that healing depends on being Christian "in the deepest and truest sense of the word," a sense we can now safely say she felt to be theosophical.[55] The second contains her extended meditation on "the small result" versus "the genuine desire." Another of her articles, however, now holds our immediate attention.

III. "A Necessary Factor" and "The Cup of Sorrowful Effort"

On June 18, 1887, Gestefeld published the article "Christian Science: Its Origin," an articulate response to Eddy's detractors.[56] Had Christian Science been discovered before by the late Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, as Julius A. Dresser argued, or did Eddy's alleged personal flaws overwhelm her religion, as ex-pastor Gill argued? On fire, yet logical and restrained,

[51]MBE to UNG, F00552 (16 January 1887).

[52]MBE to UNG, F00420 (undated, probably early 1887). There is a faint possibility that this letter was sent after Gestefeld's final letter of August 1887, but in context it fits better as a follow-up to Eddy's own January 16, 1887, letter to Gestefeld.

[53]See Peel, *Years of Trial*, 198, 201; and Gill, *Mary Baker Eddy*, 340.

[54]MBE to Nellie B. Woodhead, L14376 (27 April 1887).

[55]Gestefeld, "Christian Metaphysicians," *The Christian Metaphysician* 1, no. 1 (January 1887): 6.

[56]Gestefeld, "Christian Science: Its Origin," *Religio-Philosophical Journal* 41–42 (18 June 1887), 8.

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Gestefeld answered both in the negative. Her main concern, however, was to take up the issue of whether Eddy was "a necessary factor" in Christian Science. Gestefeld was conflicted. "Mrs. Eddy is the first person," she wrote, to provide a complete "statement" of "the truth as revealed in his day by Jesus the Christ," but that truth did not need Eddy for its success. If she "were wiped off the face of the earth to-morrow, Christian Science would hold the place it has won for itself; for its life is in itself and not in Mrs. Eddy."

Throughout the article, Gestefeld was by turn ardent and reserved. On the one hand, "that student who has had [Eddy's] help in opening his spiritual eyes will never forget the love, the joy, the utter thankfulness which descended upon him as a flood, when the revelation of the truth thus made possible was brought to him." Further, Eddy was "One woman against the world," against which "the combined forces of theology and materialism" could not prevail. It is therefore proper to resist the considerable pressure preventing students "from giving full acknowledgment where it is due." On the other hand, Gestefeld presented truth as self-sustaining and her teacher as essentially dispensable. Eddy had wonderfully introduced Christian Science to the world, she argued; now it belonged to the world, not to her.

"I have just read the article of Mrs. Gesterfeld," wrote Eddy on June 26 to John Linscott (recommended by Gestefeld, he had since become somewhat of an Eddy confidante).[57] "I give her much credit for acting up to her sense of justice." However, "where is the personal adulation of such that Mrs. Gestefeld spoke of?" The word "adulation" does not appear verbatim in the article, although the piece does refer to the vast extremes of public response elicited by Eddy and her work, ranging from "praise and laudation" to "scorn and contumely." In mid-1887, with the latter gaining in volume, Eddy may have simply felt a stranger to the former.

It is more likely that Eddy was in substance asking Linscott about the uneven personal adulation expressed by Gestefeld herself. The letter is hastily written, and its phraseology supports this reading. Its full context shows that Eddy may have seen repeated instances of highly personal praise as symptomatic of a larger problem. Her biographers suggest as much, citing other instances.[58] Probably referring to the last line of Gestefeld's article, which asks critics to "try to be just," Eddy wrote, "has history a person living ready, willing, or capable of daring me justice? No! And cannot have until some one has *drunk my cup*." She then wished that just once before passing on she might find a student who would represent her completely and truthfully as "the

[57]MBE to John F. Linscott, L11035 (26 June 1887). The "Gesterfeld" misspelling was relatively common.

[58]See Gill, *Mary Baker Eddy*, 243, 332; Peel, *Years of Trial*, 243; Peel, *Years of Authority*, 339; Thomas, *With Bleeding Footsteps*, 144, 246–48.

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person whom God has appointed to do this work, and of the Principle" she had given everything for. Eddy then turned Godward on her own behalf: "Let the human heart be still, and know that His ways are not ours, and He will do what is best for His own." The overall implication was that no student, even Linscott and far less Gestefeld, was prepared to understand her and her work, because none had shared her "cup."

The term "cup," referring to the communion cup Jesus drank and offered to his disciples, appears multiple times in Eddy's published writings, nowhere in more concentrated numbers than her *Science and Health* chapter originally titled "Prayer and Atonement."[59] In the 1886 edition a representative passage reads,

> While I love Jesus' character more than language can tell, and my heart overflows with gratitude for what he has done for mortals,—treading along his loving pathway up to the throne of glory, in speechless agony exploring the way for me,—yet I cannot see that Jesus spares me one individual experience, if I follow his commands faithfully, or that all will not have the cup of sorrowful effort to drink, in proportion to their demonstration of his Truth.[60]

Eddy seems to be expressing that Jesus *patterned* and *enabled* individual salvation through his own agonizing atonement, rather than *substituting* his for others; to follow him to his "throne of glory," everyone must drink from the same cup of "sorrowful effort" in proportion as they are able (though that proportion would never, of course, reach that of Jesus, whose virgin birth and saving mission signaled his christly status, a theological point on which Eddy was consistent).[61] Further, Eddy's letter to Linscott seems to represent her as drinking more deeply of this cup—that is, following Jesus more closely—than anyone. Perhaps this is why she refers to it as *her* cup.

This letter is remarkable in both tone and content. Although showing disappointment with Gestefeld's position, it does not dwell there; it is simply raw, registering an animated yet beleaguered sense of purpose and of distance between self and pupils.[62] Gestefeld is not incidental to the letter,

[59]This chapter was split into two ("Prayer" followed by "Atonement and Eucharist") in 1891, though the contents remained largely the same. In 1886 the term "cup" appears in it thirteen times, out of a book total of twenty-five.

[60]Mary Baker G. Eddy, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (Cambridge, Mass.: University Press, John Wilson & Son, 1886), 497.

[61]For Eddy on the virgin birth of Jesus, see her final edition of *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (Boston: Trustees under the Will of Mary Baker Eddy, 1911), 332. Also see Peel, *Years of Authority*, 422–23nn8–9; and Thomas, *With Bleeding Footsteps*, 248–56.

[62]Peel and Gill both mention such loneliness, though Gill makes much of it. See Gill, *Mary Baker Eddy*, 125, 526, passim. Gottschalk also finds it to be a major theme but sees it fully resolved in a satisfying family of students in her church and household. See *Rolling Away the Stone*, 287–90 and 312–19.

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but neither is she its main subject. She is a touchstone to larger issues revolving around the cup, salvation, and Eddy's leadership.

Taken together, Gestefeld's article and Eddy's letter mark the first quiet yet concrete indication of a rift between the two women, or better, pre-existing differences gradually gaining definition. At hand was a matter of theology and practice: what was Eddy's relationship to what both women agreed was revealed to her by God? To Gestefeld, Eddy's once-laudable role was temporary and had already passed its usefulness. To Eddy, her role was incomprehensible, ongoing, and best expressed by reference to the "cup" Jesus required his followers to drink.

Two months later, in early August, Eddy wrote John Linscott, "I must have one woman lecturer, I need hundreds, but have not one who is loyal to C.S."[63] By all indications, the comment included Gestefeld. At the end of the month, Gestefeld sent her final letter to Eddy. She detailed her work in Kansas, noted that she was using Eddy's book *Science and Health* to steer students away from false teaching, and implied that Emma Curtis Hopkins, an ex-student of Eddy's known for her embrace of Theosophy, was not loyal. A student had founded a Christian Science college, she wrote, and "gave it at first the name 'branch of the Emma Hopkins College' but has stricken that out and is anxious to get teachers who are students of yours only. . . . Nothing gives me more pleasure than to speak a kindly word of those who are trying to walk in the light of Truth and help them to seek for guidance."[64] In closing, Gestefeld asked her teacher to "believe me one . . . who give[s] you all love and sympathy in your work for humanity." This time, it was Eddy that did not answer.

IV. "*Pure* Christianity" Versus "Gnosticism and Theosophy"

"Unless a great and radical change is effected by *pure* Christianity," Eddy had written to a student just a few months prior, in early 1887, "our Cause will disappear and the schools of Gnosticism and Theosophy, vice and crime will

[63]MBE to John F. Linscott, L11037 (11 August 1887).

[64]UNG to MBE (31 August 1887). The situation in Kansas is confirmed by Arthur Schooley to his teacher, Joseph Armstrong, 13 October 1887, courtesy of the Mary Baker Eddy Library. Writing from Topeka to Irving, where Armstrong lived, Schooley noted, "I find CS is not unknown here by any means. The most that stands in the way is this false teaching a party came here from Chicago about a year or so ago and offered to teach for almost nothing she could not even heal herself and did not use Mrs Eddy's S&H only tried to teach by some lectures. this has prejudiced a good many but there are a good many ready people here after all" (the Dunbar brothers "are both doing good work"; he also mentions Mr. Fisk and Mrs. Coleman). Gestefeld was in Kansas City a month or two prior to Schooley's letter, and possibly still in residence there.

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take the place of Chr[istian] Sci[ence].”[65] Several letters from 1887 to 1889 issue warnings against esotericism and Theosophy in the starkest of terms. Eddy’s writings had always eschewed the various elements of these traditions, including spiritualism, reincarnation, pantheism, and paganism (as well as the free love movement that overlapped with some of these).[66] However around the time she stopped corresponding with Gestefeld, in mid-1887, she began to reject not only the elements of Theosophy but also the movement specifically by name.

In August 1887, Eddy published *Christian Science: No and Yes*, which contains several anti-Theosophical passages. This was followed by *Rudimental Divine Science* in November, the same month her theosophically minded opponents (several from Chicago) held a Mental Healer’s Convention in Boston. A typical *No and Yes* passage reads: “No greater opposites can be conceived of, physically, morally, and spiritually, than Christian Science, spiritualism, and theosophy.”[67] Her next major revision of *Science and Health* included, for the first time, three similar passages.[68] As Theosophy expanded, a small but increasing number of Eddy’s former students represented her teachings as compatible with it in ever more public ways, and these passages can be understood in part as a response to this development.[69]

Hopkins and her partner, Mary Plunkett, were at the forefront of the trend Eddy worked to stem. In August 1887, Eddy wrote asking why they continued to spread rumors about her, declaring her Christian love for them, and inviting them to reform and join forces with her once more. “I had a letter from Mrs. Lathrop [another student] last week in which she spoke very

[65]MBE to Ellen Brown (later Linscott), L11008 (8 March 1887). Gottschalk discusses the pervasive nature of such writings; see *Rolling Away the Stone*, 140–41.

[66]Eddy’s biographers have noted her consistent rejection of these elements. A perusal of primary sources corroborates their findings. A Bible Lesson from early 1884 (reprinted in mid-1885) refers to “pagan religionists” in the same breath as “wicked mortals such as crucified our Master,” both of whom “opposed the doctrines of Christ” (Mary Baker Eddy, “Bible Lesson,” *Christian Science Journal* 1, no. 6 [2 February 1884]: 5; reprinted August 1885; the text for the lesson was 1 Corinthians 15:45). In late 1884, about six months after teaching Gestefeld, one of Eddy’s sermons noted that “whenever [my] thoughts had wandered into the bypaths of ancient philosophies or pagan literatures, [my] spiritual insight had been darkened thereby, till [I] was God-driven back to the inspired pages” of the Bible (Mary Baker Eddy, “Editor’s Extracts from Sermon,” *Christian Science Journal* 2, no. 12 [1 November 1884], 1; reprinted 1 December 1884). These are but two of several similar passages; even in her first edition of *Science and Health*, in 1875, no discernible counter-examples exist.

[67]MBE, *Christian Science: No and Yes* (Boston: Mary Baker Eddy, 1887), 13.

[68]In the 1891 edition, see pages 111, 129, 139. More such passages were added in later editions.

[69]Phebe L. Haines to MBE, L17416 (24 October 1888), courtesy of the Mary Baker Eddy Library. Eddy’s followers may or may not have constituted a smaller group than Theosophists; membership numbers are similarly difficult to come by. However Satter estimates Eddy’s “Christian Scientists” as twenty percent of the total group using that name (*Each Mind a Kingdom*, 2).

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encouragingly of you both," she wrote, "and it may give me great hope."[70] What those rumors may have been, and how Hopkins or Plunkett may have responded, has been lost to history, though Hopkins had denied spreading rumors the year before in a freely emotive, mystical letter mixing reconciliation and reserve.[71] For our purposes, here Eddy can be seen as ministering to those she saw as wayward students while also working to stem the flow toward their prominent association of her work with theosophical ideas.

The flow was apparently considerable, but a core group of students, probably a majority, welcomed Eddy's message. In 1888 she received a letter from a Chicago Christian Scientist complaining that there was still "such a mixture of Science and Theosophy here in the west," adding that her own teacher had instructed her that "Theosophy and Buddaism was not what were seeking for, but the perfect Truth as it was taught by Christ."[72] In 1889 Eddy told a student, Ruth B. Ewing, "I am pleased to learn of your intention" to organize, but then added, "Are you fully persuaded in your own minds of the *one* Truth? Are you aloff from the least amalgamation with Theosophy and the hundred and one *small*, *big* errors that steal into the teachings at this period—in the name of Christian Science? I trust you are."[73] Ewing must have been, as she remained dedicated to the Church of Christ, Scientist.[74]

Eddy began the 1880s willing to accommodate the esoterically oriented interested in her teachings, such as Gestefeld and Hopkins. She may have appreciated their openness to her religion (a quality then in short supply) and perhaps assumed a degree of camaraderie based on shared cultural status as women or religious revisionaries. However her letters to Gestefeld show that she expected a willingness to be educated away from what she called prior "wrong" teaching and to accept the full context of her radically unorthodox view of "*pure* Christianity" in a special and particularistic sense. As her understanding of Theosophy grew along with that movement itself, she seemed to conclude that even great professions of Christianity, as some of Gestefeld's were, could only be canceled by mingling with non-Christian beliefs, which also augmented incomprehension of her religious role (a role she framed, along

[70]MBE to Emma Curtis Hopkins and Mary Plunkett, V01015 (22 August 1887). The word "may" is in superscript, inserted as a second thought. This letter changes the view that Eddy issued continual "attacks" on Hopkins by 1887 and generally complicates the picture of their relationship found in Gail Harley's *Emma Curtis Hopkins: Forgotten Founder of New Thought* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 23.

[71]See Harley, *Emma Curtis Hopkins*, 23.

[72]Phebe L. Haines to MBE (24 October 1888).

[73]MBE to Ruth B. Ewing, V01088 (3 February 1889).

[74]A *New York Times* article places Ewing at the dedication of a Christian Science church in Detroit on February 14, 1898. See "Christian Science Church in Detroit," http://query.nytimes.com (accessed May 10, 2011). Ewing was also a reader in Eddy's church in the late 1890s; see Peel, *Years of Authority*, 89.

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with her other unorthodoxies, earnestly and in entirely Christian terms). In this manner she identified a concentrated type of anti-Christ in Theosophical mixing. Her final critique of Gestefeld's theosophically oriented work in 1888 read, referring to the esoteric symbol on its cover, "She who would chain the eye of God and hold it in her hand, needs to know the lesson of the cross and crown."[75]

Early Theosophists attracted to Eddy's teachings may have valued her anti-dogmatic and anti-creedal ethos, radical revision of Eve's fall, universal teaching of God's love, and timeless representation of the Christ, among other elements. They may also have assumed religious compatibility based on a common cultural classification as heterodox revisionaries. Eventually, however, they found themselves confronting how firmly even Eddy's most unorthodox teachings were rooted in a biblical framework. As Gillian Gill writes, former students in Chicago "could not understand or accept the exclusively Christian cast of her thought. They found intellectual nourishment and spiritual inspiration in Eastern religions, and to them Mrs. Eddy appeared provincial and reactionary in her refusal to place the Upanishads or the Koran on the same plane as the Gospels."[76] To her the Christ may be timeless, but only Jesus and Christian Science embodied it fully; her church was his church, the "true evangelical" church carrying the mantle forward for Christendom.[77] God's love was universal but also chastening to those attempting to live apart from it. Truth, she taught, could not certainly or safely be found in the scattered merits embodied in other religious systems. "There is a little truth in all creeds, isms, and ologies," she reportedly said, "but if you try to find the truth in a part of the vessel, you will get cut. Study the Bible and Science and Health and leave the fragments alone."[78] No Theosophist could ultimately support such teachings.

The 1880s were a forum in which Eddy and Theosophists (among others not discussed here, notably Protestant divine healers) parsed their beliefs over against one another and clarified assumptions regarding compatibility. Only by radically divorcing some elements of her theology from the complete context of unorthodox yet "evangelical" Christianity in which she emphatically placed them could a handful of Theosophists in the 1880s feel temporarily at home in what they at first took Eddy's Christian Science to be. For Gestefeld, this tenuous position would soon be critically tested.

[75]Mary Baker Eddy, "Jesuitism in Christian Science," *Christian Science Journal* 6, no. 8 (November 1888), 428.

[76]Gill, *Mary Baker Eddy*, 340.

[77]Mary Baker Eddy, "Bible Lesson," *Christian Science Journal* 2, no. 7 (April 5, 1884), 4. The text of the lesson was John 14:12.

[78]Martha Harris Bogue, *Miscellaneous Documents Relating to Christian Science and its Discoverer and Founder Mary Baker Eddy* (Providence, R.I.: Carpenter Foundation, 1961), 70. Quoted in Gottschalk, *The Emergence of Christian Science*, 119.

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V. "The Works of God, Which Has Not Revelation"

At the same time Eddy began to publish against Theosophy, in a parallel universe, the Russian émigré and undisputed theosophical leader Helena Blavatsky sharpened her teaching against revelation. In the 1870s and into the 1880s, Blavatsky had allowed for revelation in some cases (including the possibility of a "revealed book"), though calling a Theosophist (after Henry Vaughan) one who "gives you a theory of God or the works of God, which has not revelation, but an inspiration of his own."[79] She originally interpreted Vaughan to mean that "every great thinker and philosopher, especially every founder of a new religion, school of philosophy, or sect, is necessarily a Theosophist." In reducing all "great" religious persons to a theosophical framework, she operated within her own type of particularism, within which no true religion could exist outside Theosophy. Now, in autumn 1887, she modified and sharpened this view by adding important anti-revelatory qualifications, contrasting "dogma" and "Christian revelation" with "Eastern wisdom." This distinction became fundamental to Theosophical teaching, which held that accepting authority from one who claimed Christian revelation was anathema and dogmatic.[80]

Gestefeld was now caught between two particularistic views that could not be reconciled. During their correspondence, she had met with silence Eddy's comments and queries about "wrong" teaching, depth of Christian commitment, and use of "incorrect" literature. In this way, she could leave the question open and seem to have it both ways. Now Eddy's writings on Theosophy pressed the question, just when Gestefeld's Theosophical cushion of comfort—its looseness on revelation, which had allowed her to maintain a cautious affection for Eddy —disappeared. Lodged in this untenable limbo, Gestefeld overcame a potential crisis of faith by what may have been a supreme act of will, the path of least resistance, or both. Codifying her long-established inclinations, she chose the term "Christian Science" as an outward shell for her inwardly Theosophical views. If her teacher could not

[79]Helena P. Blavatsky, "The Arya Samaj," in *A Modern Parnarion: A Collection of Fugitive Fragments* (The Theosophy Company of Los Angeles, 1981/1895), 188 (probably first published in the late 1870s); "What is a Theosophist?" originally published in October 1879 and reprinted in *A Modern Parnarion*, 262. For both references, see http://www.phx-ult-lodge.org/Panarion.htm (accessed January 20, 2010).

[80]Helena Blavatsky, "The History of a Planet," *Lucifer* 1 (September 1887), 15–22. For further (and later) nuance, see the Theosophist J. J. van der Leeuw's 1930 lecture "Revelation or Realization: The Conflict in Theosophy," http://www.tphta.ws/JJL_RRCT.HTM (accessed January 16, 2010). Van der Leeuw writes that while historically "realization" has predominated in Theosophy from its inception, to the exclusion of "revelation," revelatory elements have been present. However, he judges that revelation involves a "hierarchic system" in which "the authority of superiors is not be questioned and the slightest hint is an order not to be criticised but to be obeyed." Therefore, "We must sharply distinguish revelation from authority."

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see Christian Science in the grand and clear esoteric light of Theosophical truth, she would do it for her.

In August 1887, Gestefeld stopped writing to Eddy. She soon began a series of lectures published in 1888 as her *Statement on Christian Science*.[81] The lectures had a mystical tone, mixing redacted chunks of source material from *Science and Health* with quasi-Eastern or loosely Theosophical verbiage. Like others, she sought to "link [Eddy's] teachings with various forms—often garbled and popularized—of Eastern religious thought."[82] As Gestefeld wrote in the leading Theosophical magazine *Lucifer* later in 1888, "Instead of being the 'Buddhist,' or the 'Yoga' science," Christian Science "is the science of those sciences individually and collectively. It reveals what they conceal" and "is the interior meaning of the four gospels."[83] Her goal seems to have roughly paralleled that of Hopkins, who sought to unite Eddy's teachings with those of Warren Felt Evans. As Catherine L. Albanese notes, "Evans was theosophical; Eddy was not. Hopkins did not unify their teaching but rather juxtaposed it," in her most well-known work paying only "lip service to Eddy."[84] Though Evans did not explicitly figure into Gestefeld's work, the same conclusions apply.

Gestefeld's *Statement*, she later explained in a circular, was "not intended to supplant *Science and Health*" but "offered as a key for those who are unable to discern its meaning."[85] The Christian Science textbook was "pre-eminent" among statements of Christian Science, but too "difficult of comprehension."[86] Gestefeld's lectures (later bound as a book) presented major ownership problems, however, even considering the absence of consistent copyright law and the relatively lax and shifting standards of literary "borrowing" in the nineteenth century. Most pages lifted passages directly from *Science and Health* without quote marks or attribution, and its structure, style, and illustrations copy or clearly echo Eddy's.[87] She was hardly alone. "Book after book appeared" during this time, notes Peel, "borrowing Mrs. Eddy's terminology, her ideas, often her very words, but losing the whole structure

[81]Ursula N. Gestefeld, *Ursula Gestefeld's Statement of Christian Science, Comprised in Eighteen Lessons and Twelve Sections* (New York: Ursula Gestefeld, 1888). The work was originally published as twelve pamphlets in 1888 and bound into a self-published, 259-page book in 1889. An edition of the book may have also been produced in 1888, but probably not; see L17835.

[82]Gottschalk, *Rolling Away the Stone*, 141.

[83]Ursula N. Gestefeld, "Christian Science," *Lucifer* 3, no. 14 (October 15, 1888), 164.

[84]Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 318.

[85]*Christian Science Journal* 6, no. 11 (February 1889), 583. The *Journal* reprinted Gestefeld's advertising circular.

[86]Excerpted from an advertising circular printed by Gestefeld and quoted in the *Christian Science Journal* 6, no. 11 (February 1889), 583.

[87]When she published her lectures as a book in 1889, Gestefeld mentioned Eddy in an advertising circular, though not in the book itself. Two references to *Science and Health* can be found in the book.

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and character of her thought." Some writers claimed to follow her yet "railed against her," while others "praised her to the skies and claimed her sanction for ideas and practices which she had explicitly disapproved."[88] Though Gestefeld's work later came to exemplify the former category, her lectures fit into the latter.

Interestingly, the lectures met virtually no response among Eddy and her followers for several months. In May, Eddy privately jotted a few terse comments about it in response to a student's question, then dropped it.[89] In June, she traveled to Chicago to give an address that received massive attention; it is unknown whether Gestefeld attended, but that month she contacted the *Journal* requesting its subscriber list for use in marketing her work.[90] While Eddy was in Chicago, a schism erupted in the Boston church that fully occupied her attention on returning. Perhaps for this reason, her few early comments indicate that she may have at first only skimmed or heard about the lectures.

In September, the *Journal* published a short letter from an anonymous Christian Scientist who was "somewhat bemused and very much saddened" by a recent unnamed heterodox publication, clearly Gestefeld's.[91] October correspondence shows that Eddy did not know of the letter even after its publication, or of the *Journal*'s attached commentary.[92] That month, apparently after receiving reader inquiries about this cryptic entry, Eddy requested that a second letter be published. This author was more specific: "I recognize the same difference between Mrs. Gestefeld's Lectures and your book, that I do between the zeal of Saul and the zeal of Paul. Her lectures lack regeneration. She has not yet been to Damascus." The editors then tacked on a brief question and answer section stating that Gestefeld was "no more fitted to comment on Mrs. Eddy's work, Science and Health, than an infant is qualified to teach its mother." She was, in fact, not even a Christian Scientist: "Can a Theosophist be a Christian Scientist?"[93] The immediate response to this rhetorical question: No.

[88]Peel, *Years of Trial*, 227–28. On the problem of book "borrowing," see Peel, *Years of Trial*, 134–35; and Gill, *Mary Baker Eddy*, 314. Eddy addressed the problem in her "Vainglory," *Christian Science Journal* 5, no. 8 (November 1887), 379; and "Things to Be Thought Of," *Christian Science Journal* 5, no. 12 (March 1888), 595. At times even her most faithful students copied her words verbatim as their own; see Gill, *Mary Baker Eddy*, 340; Peel, *Years of Trial*, 201; and Gottschalk, *Emergence*, 113. For perspective on changing practices regarding nineteenth-century book ownership, see Meredith L. McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834–1853* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

[89]MBE notation on Mary Hinds Philbrick to MBE (24 May 1888).

[90]See *Christian Science Journal* 6, no. 11 (February 1889), 583.

[91]*Christian Science Journal* 6, no. 6 (September 1888), 290.

[92]MBE to Nellie N. Woodhead, L14381 (7 October 1888).

[93]*Christian Science Journal* 6, no. 7 (October 1888), 345.

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VI. "Jesuitism in Christian Science"

This brief, pointed rebuke from the pages of the *Journal* sparked in Gestefeld a smoldering tinderbox of latent emotions (or, perhaps, touched off tightly coiled tensions). She immediately produced a pamphlet, its title sure to strike a chord with the widespread nativist and anti-Catholic sentiments of the era: *Jesuitism in Christian Science*.[94] Published in October or very early November 1888, it is essentially a refinement and augmentation of the argument she had laid out in her earlier quasi-defense of Eddy (to which Eddy had objected to John Linscott) but with personal invective in place of "personal adulation." Although the pamphlet's argument is multi-layered and lengthy (almost fifty pages), it is summed up at the end of the fifth section: the Christian Science movement had matured beyond its "mother" and no longer needed her.[95] To argue otherwise was "Jesuitism."

As with Gestefeld's earlier lectures, *Jesuitism* barely registers in Eddy's correspondence.[96] She immediately drafted two private responses, though, publishing a third shorter piece in the November *Journal*.[97] The crux of her most urgent, and therefore probably first, response was to "rescue" her "child," of which Gestefeld was making a "prey": "Christian Science is the child of honest parents and the true mother feeds the wants of her child and ministers to them," she wrote, "With balm of love and the life of Spirit. While the gaunt wolf in sheep's clothing is making of her child a prey she hears its cry and hastens to rescue it."[98] Her church movement, she had written in March 1888, was still hampered by its "infancy," and she seemed to feel now more than ever it needed the guiding protection of its mother.[99] Interestingly, each of Eddy's three responses only minimally addressed the pamphlet's most obvious problems (or at least its easiest targets for rebuttal), its personal attacks and logical inconsistencies. They focus less on *Jesuitism* per se than on the moral and theological issues raised by Gestefeld's earlier *Statement*. How had Gestefeld made a "prey" of her child? In short, plagiarism, vanity, and Theosophy.

Eddy's unpublished responses dwelt particularly (though not exclusively) on plagiarism. The measured and concise public response, however, serially

[94]Ursula N. Gestefeld, *Jesuitism in Christian Science* (Central Music Hall, Chicago: Ursula N. Gestefeld, 1888).

[95]Gestefeld, *Jesuitism*, 41.

[96]That year she mentioned *Jesuitism* briefly to two students, once in response to a query. See MBE to Malinda J. Lancaster, L04539 (7 November 1888); and MBE to Ellen Brown Linscott, L11018 (9 November 1888).

[97]Eddy, "Jesuitism in Christian Science," 427–28. A third unpublished fragment also exists; possibly it was initially part of one of the other two drafts.

[98]MBE, A10163 (November 1888), 16.

[99]Mary Baker Eddy, "Things to Be Thought Of," *Christian Science Journal* 5, no. 12 (March 1888), 595.

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focused on multiple reasons she judged her pupil unfit to interpret her works. Plagiarism was one; vanity figured in on two levels, both as an element of character and a hallmark of Gestefeld's effete arguments. Like the longer drafts, this brief piece also foregrounded Eddy's maternal relationship to her religion, biblically cast:

> The honest seeker after Christian Science asks, 'Where shall the young child be born?' Where shall the human concept of the divine idea be given birth? He queries, Is the mother of Science and Health a misnomer? Does the child look like its mother, act like her, and does it resemble in the least the hideous counterfeit that Mrs. Gestefeld has conjured up? My heart's desire is, that the mind of this woman be imbued with better thoughts, and her life uplifted.[100]

The attempt to explain her theology does not seem to be what Eddy found problematic, but claiming to speak for her against her expressed wishes, sourcing her book while denying her its parentage, and claiming her personal authority for championing elements she and her religion explicitly rejected.

Among these elements, as might be expected, Theosophy topped Eddy's list. "Though a Christian Scientist in name," Eddy wrote, Gestefeld "is a member of the Theosophical Society." As she wrote more urgently in an unpublished draft, "the premise of Truth she [Gestefeld] sinks in . . . the rerobed dreams of theosophy and pagan theology," creating a "mad meadley."[101] In order to attempt such a medley, Gestefeld must divorce Eddy from Christian Science, a key preoccupation in *Jesuitism*. This rationale allows us to make some sense of the pamphlet's deeply negative animus and white-hot intensity. Beyond its sensationalistic tone, however (which is, remarkably, focused enough to lend the piece an overall air of precision), and even beneath its conspicuous logical contradictions, *Jesuitism* promoted a viewpoint about the nature of truth and its relationship to humans that was rooted in Theosophical sympathies. These sympathies form what is, apart from its tone, the pamphlet's central coherence.

For example, first the pamphlet named Eddy's book the grandest possible synthesis of truths already voiced "from Buddha down to our own Emerson" (rather than a discovery of the principle of truth revealed fully only in the Bible, as Eddy claimed). Later, however, it stated that all could and should find Christian Science for themselves directly in the Bible (notwithstanding the premise of Gestefeld's *Statement*, which had been that she had found the truth of Christian Science in *Science and Health*, not the Bible, and was now restating and "simplifying" it). To complicate matters further, *Jesuitism* later

[100]Eddy, "Jesuitism in Christian Science," 427.
[101]MBE, A10164 (undated).

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portrayed Eddy's nearly exclusive recommendation of Bible-reading as denying others the "power" to understand Christian Science.[102] Some of these statements appear to have been constructed primarily as a defense against charges of plagiarism and thus might be expected to fit only bumpily with other arguments. However, they are also all rooted in Theosophical tropes. The Bible that emerges here is one of many containers for ancient esoteric truths; finding truth there, one might then stultify it by limiting oneself to that book. In this manner, Gestefeld described the Bible as both the open and closed source of Christian Science.

Also, as in her earlier writings, Gestefeld's portrayals of Eddy are often at odds yet threaded through with an underlying skeptical view of special revelation. This skepticism did not mean, wrote Gestefeld, that a champion was not needed to protect Christian Science from distortion. Many claims to the religion were "fraudulent," she asserted, and "deserve[d] unqualified rebuke."[103] She hoped her pamphlet would safeguard the future of Christian Science by warning people away from its falsified practice under Eddy's direction, which was often (she argued without apparent irony) the result of attempts to "break down Mrs. Eddy"—who was therefore, along with her students, right to "denounce it."[104] Gestefeld's position then shifts, however: such rebukes should *not* be made, as they tread on the right of people to read any literature they want to, "fraudulent" and "adulterated" or not. In contradictory terms, both positions emphasize the individualism prized by Theosophists.

Gestefeld offered a twofold solution to quality control. First, she now assumed the mantle for Christian Science, rebuking Eddy, her "loyal students," their writings, and their organizations. Second, she wrote that Christian Science is "not a new theory" but truth itself, which will necessarily prevail on its own.[105] This tension between the claim to special religious control, and the release of such control to the forces of the truth, aligns with and prefigures other tensions in Gestefeld's emergent New Thought teachings. Her final resolution is theosophically rooted: because "every human being is evolving the Christ, be he Pagan or Christian," all will sometime inevitably come to embrace this truth.[106]

Not all the contradictions in *Jesuitism* can be explained by reference to Theosophy; some are simply contradictions, born of passion, enmity, and assorted other emotions. Also, Gestefeld was not entirely Theosophical; she was as selective about Theosophy as she was about Christian Science

[102]Gestefeld, *Jesuitism*, 10, 15, 38.
[103]Gestefeld, *Jesuitism*, 32.
[104]Gestefeld, *Jesuitism*, 32.
[105]Gestefeld, *Jesuitism*, 45.
[106]Gestefeld, *Jesuitism*, 48.

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(she appears to have ignored, for example, Blavatsky's injunctions against sympathizing with Christianity, and later sources show her rejecting reincarnation).[107] Yet to the extent that the contradictions in *Jesuitism* can be reconciled, a Theosophical orientation provides the overarching umbrella.

Theosophical sympathies formed a key thread in *Jesuitism*, and they provided Gestefeld with the rationale to finally and fully reject Eddy, her teaching, and her church. Characteristically, though, she claimed to reject these while simultaneously fulfilling their conjoined promise.

VII. "Retain Her as a Member if You Think Best"

In February 1889, Gestefeld published her lectures in book form, and the *Journal* responded in its section on book notices in order to warn "uninformed persons who may be misled."[108] Five pages followed comparing passages in the *Statement* to those they copy or paraphrase in *Science and Health*. Throughout, the article's emphasis lay on the spiritual dangers the editors saw in this plagiarism.

Probably around the same time, Martha Harris Bogue, "a successful practitioner in Chicago," recalled a class that "revolved around the crucifixion of Jesus." According to Robert David Thomas, Eddy drew a comparison to how "Christian Science truth was being crucified by Ursula Gestefeld's recent book, which claimed to be Christian Science but grossly distorted her message. When a student asked Mrs. Eddy whether she meant to say that she herself was about to be crucified, she said no." She referred to her Christian Science "child," which she defined as the "Comforter" or second appearing of Christ, not to herself personally.[109] This gives dimension to Eddy's earlier judgment that Gestefeld showed "the spirit of a Judas."

Gestefeld's status in the Chicago church had been at issue within the congregation for a few years prior to this episode. As she had earlier with Gill, Eddy had advocated reform over dismissal; however, now she wrote the church urging excommunication. The congregation was split regarding the proper course of action, and its pastor begged her off in stinging prose. Eddy responded with wounded dignity, "Rest assured that I should never have

[107]Blavatsky herself challenged Gestefeld on such points. See H. P. Blavatsky, "Christian Science," *Lucifer* 2, no. 11 (July 1888), 410–14. Theosophical responses to Gestefeld's ideas were generally muted, even skeptical; see Editor's Note [by William Q. Judge] in *The Path* (February 1892), 346. Perhaps for this reason, Gestefeld's involvement with the organization seems to have peaked before she left it in 1895. Mixed reviews of her theosophically oriented books appeared in Theosophical publications into the 1900s.

[108]*Christian Science Journal* 6, no. 11 (February 1889), 574–79.

[109]Thomas, *Footsteps*, 265, dates this to late 1888 or early 1889.

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named your dealings with Mrs. Gesterfeld if it had not first been named to me. . . . I shall take not further notice of the matter. . . . I wish her no harm." Her final words were, "I hope this will drop now and forever and that you will retain her as a member if you think best."[110] Ultimately the church voted Gestefeld off its rolls, but she had in substance, and probably in fact, already left. The storm having passed, Gestefeld refocused her career as a spiritually eclectic mental healer in Chicago, eventually founding the Church of The New Thought. She referred to Eddy and her work frequently in later years, always in deeply conflicted terms.

The *Journal* grappled with several of the larger issues raised by this rift—Theosophy, "book theft," "personality"—in ensuing years, though almost never in combination with Gestefeld's name. Eddy treated such topics seriously and to varying degrees in her writings, but her letters mention Gestefeld only once more, incidentally, in 1893. She had vigorously worked to keep her student in her fold as long as she saw evidence of serious interest, but when Gestefeld finally made her choice, her former teacher's first and final inclination was to let her go her own way.

VIII. Understanding This Religious Rift

Scholars have often struggled to understand the scope and nature of Eddy's self-professed Christianity, and our interpretations commonly ignore or minimize it. This can operate to assign her something like a "false consciousness" in which she thought she was following Jesus but was actually not, an interpretation markedly in line with polemics against her during her day (and after). Interpretations need not conform to a subject's self-understanding, of course, but they need to at least be accompanied by a full representation and recognition of it. To this end, this paper shows how completely Eddy articulated her work as resting on biblical authority, how she rejected religious elements and movements (notably Theosophy) that she could not work out theologically in revisionary Christian terms, and how others rejected her for both reasons. It demonstrates how some unorthodox elements of her faith, such as her anti-creedal and universalist teachings, may have seemed compatible with eclectic religiosity until their pervasively Christian framework came more fully into view. More work is needed to explore how this may or may not have been the case with a broader array of terms and elements within her faith.

In her key and representative relationship with Gestefeld, Eddy's religious leadership centered on one of her chief Christian unorthodoxies: an

[110]MBE to George B. Day, L14736 (18 March 1889).

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expression of herself as drinking Jesus' "cup" more fully and completely than any of his other followers, and doing so on behalf of the Comforter he promised God would send, her Christian Science "child." Her raw, uncensored letter to her student John Linscott provides a window into how she felt this role was roundly misunderstood among her students, not least by Gestefeld. As she wrote to a student in December 1887, four months after her correspondence with Gestefeld closed, "Now do you not see that even my best students get blinded a little as to my meaning and *motives*? And yet I do not blame them, but it is something to keep their eyes open, and cannot be done unless they *understand me*. The whole question of the history of C.S. lies in this."[111]

Gestefeld chose a different understanding of Eddy's religious role than the one Eddy taught. She valued her teacher's affection and mentorship but could not accept her as a final revelator of biblical truth "appointed" by God. She sometimes described Eddy as a revelator with accidental, incidental, or temporary status, "the beginning of a mighty work" yet with no ongoing or permanent relationship to the revelation. At other times, she called her not a revelator but a synthesizer of various ancient truths. Her views reflected the Theosophical rejection of special revelation, occasionally modulated by a personal inclination toward the Christian acceptance of it (or perhaps the looser pre-1887 Theosophical position).[112] Just as Eddy's religion could not accommodate Theosophy, the Theosophical teachings Gestefeld embraced could not accommodate Christian Science. She never fully embraced Eddy's religious teachings and grew further away from them as years went by, eventually self-selecting out of her church. This was, admittedly, an occasionally stormy process. Yet it frees us from seeing her as an eternal victim; the storms arose not from any attack by Eddy, which we can now confirm to be nonexistent, but from clashes within as Gestefeld actively sorted out her religious allegiances.

This also suggests, as others have intimated and argued, that we should finally abandon the characterization of Eddy as excluding powerful women from her church for personally authoritarian reasons. Indeed, Eddy seems to have found most of Gestefeld's claims less threatening than ridiculous

[111]MBE to M. Bettie Bell, L09908 (24 December 1887).

[112]She may also have been influenced by earlier spiritualism, in which the medium was thought to be a trance vessel through which others spoke, inspired by spirits in the divine beyond. The vessel was considered special but interchangeable with other vessels and therefore essentially disposable. Further, the medium was considered worthy in proportion to how much she did *not* claim a special relationship to the "truth" she voiced. The classic text on nineteenth-century spiritualism is Ann Braude's *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-century America* (Boston: Beacon, 1989). More recent work includes Barbara Weisberg's *Talking to the Dead: Kate and Maggie Fox and the Rise of Spiritualism* (New York: HarperOne, 2005); and Molly McGarry's *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

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(or "silly," as she put it) and, in the end, hardly commented on them.[113] More to the point, in later editions of *Science and Health* Eddy was to write, "The first edition of *Science and Health* was published in 1875. Various books on mental healing have since been issued, most of them incorrect in theory and filled with plagiarisms from *Science and Health*. They regard the human mind as a healing agent, whereas this mind is not a factor in the Principle of Christian Science. A few books, however, which are based on this book, are useful."[114] Gestefeld's 1889 book clearly did not fall into Eddy's latter category, but the fact that it existed as a category underscores what I have presented as her overriding concern: not that other people wrote books based on hers, but that such publications were both "incorrect in theory" and plagiarized. In 1888, she privately wrote that Gestefeld's book was especially harmful because it copied so many passages from her own writings, "and all of [their] beauties are deformed" by Theosophy and "book theft."[115] Five years later she commented in public, "Christian Science is not copyrighted. . . . A student can write voluminous works on Science without trespassing, if he writes honestly."[116] The underlying issues were of critical religious importance. When juxtaposed with Theosophy, her teachings were no longer her teachings, and by all indications she viewed this as a matter of life and death: how could people find life and salvation unless the statement of Christian Science remained pure? Universal salvation was at stake, not mere personal preference.

What was at stake for Gestefeld is more difficult to pinpoint, since she expressed the conviction that no matter what may happen, everyone is "evolving the Christ, be he Pagan or Christian." However it is safe to say that one of Gestefeld's motivations was a desire to safeguard what she deemed human progress. Many of her later writings were loosely framed in terms of a humanistic Christian salvation (such as her 1892 novel, in which Murva's will was the main feature). Her later theology was biblically oriented and, notes Satter, it "differed from standard New Thought teachings primarily in its use of the Bible as an allegorical key to psychic development."[117] Gary Ward Materra usefully describes New Thought organizations as either "apparently oriented within a form of Christianity" or "apparently oriented differently," favoring non-Christian religious

[113]Eddy, "Jesuitism in Christian Science," 427. Eddy wrote that Gestefeld "attempts to vilify" me and my works "while she, a suckling, is drawing her nutriment from them. This is at least, silly."
[114]Eddy, *Science and Health* (1911), x. Similar verbiage first appeared in the 1897 edition.
[115]MBE, A10163, 7.
[116]Mary Baker Eddy, *Retrospection and Introspection* (Boston: Trustees under the Will of Mary Baker Eddy, 1891), 76.
[117]Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom*, 290.

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traditions.[118] Gestefeld's teachings were on the farthest Christian-oriented end of the spectrum even while they remained deeply linked to Theosophy, which she seems to have seen as a mode by which she could retain and develop an eclectically biblical altruism. Her sensibility in the 1880s seems to have matched the masthead of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, which shows the "Holy Bible" atop a stack of Eastern scriptures including the "Koran, Zend-Avesta, and Shaster."

In her 1901 *The Builder and the Plan* (arguably her most influential work), Gestefeld wrote that "Some of the fundamental propositions" of her work were "not original with myself. I first read them in 1884 in the book *Science and Health*." How does this claim relate to earlier charges of plagiarism? She does not elaborate. She devotes the book's two final, brief chapters to the Bible's relationship to her faith—it provided external confirmation of her teachings, but was not their authority—and to cataloging what she saw as differences between Christian Science and her own Science of Being. The book also included a special foreword dedicated to her relationship with Eddy.[119] Her feelings had by then settled into a bifurcated distillation of earlier sentiments. "I make glad and grateful acknowledgement for her teaching that was then bread to my hungry soul," she wrote, but she saw the "lack" in this teaching from the beginning. Her qualified gratitude to Eddy hinged on the "preparation" it gave her to succeed Eddy: Gestefeld's Science of Being, she wrote, was the "legitimate and necessary successor" to Christian Science. If Christian Scientists did not see this, she continued, it is because they were lacking in logic. The primary reason for this lack? The doctrine of special revelation, which had instilled in them a "fanatical fervor" and kept them in a "stupor."

Drawing largely from *The Builder and the Plan*, C. B. Patterson wrote in 1902 that Gestefeld had "always, both in print and on the rostrum, gratefully acknowledged the help she derived from Mrs. Eddy."[120] If so it was a fraught gratitude, qualified by unresolved tensions and conflicted, negative feelings primarily centered on the teaching of special revelation. With the exception of perhaps the earliest months following her 1884 class instruction, Gestefeld never convincingly embraced Eddy's teachings. She can be most accurately seen as emerging from a Theosophical milieu, trying her hand at Christian Science only to find it incompatible with her deeply

[118]Materra, "Women in Early New Thought: Lives and Theology in Transition, From the Civil War to World War I" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1997), 108. "For most of their participants," Materra writes, "the 'heart and soul' of New Thought was 'practical Christianity,'" a phrase popular in the women's club movement, though here imbued here with eclectic meaning.

[119]Gestefeld, *The Builder and the Plan*, 9–12.

[120]Patterson, *A Biographical Sketch*, 251.

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ingrained esotericism, and ultimately returning to more comfortable religious territory in eclectic Theosophical Christianity. She brought the claim to Eddy's mantle with her, but not that mantle itself. Eddy, after all, was still wearing it.

IX. Concluding Thoughts

The rift between Eddy and Gestefeld had personal overtones and undercurrents, but these should not mask the deeply religious issues at its core: theology, practice, and ethics. The two women had different and ultimately co-repellant views about the source, legitimacy, and specificity of revelation; the particularity and eclecticism of Christianity and Theosophy; the ambiguity and certainty of Jesus and scripture, Bible prophecy, and Eddy's religious role as revelator or spiritual "mother" to her religion. Theirs was not a personal quarrel leading to distinction through organization, with religious differences trailing behind as so much *adiaphora*. Instead, these women disagreed over profoundly religious issues and distinguished themselves through belief and its attendant practice, with discrete organizations following.

In his early study, Charles Braden attends to a sole religious claim by linking the "authoritarianism" he assigns to Eddy to her teaching of herself as special revelator and of her religion as "final revelation." He judges both teachings unacceptable because "Truth continues to reveal itself" and no person or entity has "authority to declare what Truth is," in essence replicating the New Thought view.[121] This article seeks to present Eddy's teaching of herself as "appointed" by God, and of her religion as finally fulfilling Bible prophecy, as not necessarily "true" (which is not a historian's work to say) but as a legitimate historical and theological claim that seems to have involved not authoritarianism, but teaching consistency and, in this case, the often understated exercise of authority. This article also seeks to present Gestefeld's religiosity in a fair light. The rift with Eddy eventually sees her involved in unfortunate incidents; however, her early papers also show a thread of earnest altruism alternately submerging and resurfacing. An eclectic mix of elements in her early spiritual development variously leavened, stoked, or neutralized her charged feelings about Eddy, which took ultimate but not always leading form in a religion and church sincerely intended to address humanity's needs.

Gestefeld was one of a handful of Eddy's students who interpreted her work in partly or mostly non-Christian terms, due to what I identify in this paper as

[121]Braden, *Spirits in Rebellion*, 18. J. Stillson Judah agrees: "It is unfortunate that Christian Science has made such an issue concerning the uniqueness of Mrs. Eddy's revelation." Quoted in Harley, *Emma Curtis Hopkins*, 25.

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pre-existing religious inclinations differing from Eddy's and assumptions about religious location based on similar cultural or societal status. These students borrowed and altered some of her terms (how many, no one is sure) and must have built some practices on their new understandings. Yet this appears to have been based less on Eddy's teachings per se than on a view of her teachings filtered through esoteric, broadly Emersonian lenses she and the majority of her students did not claim or embrace.[122] This puts Christian Science and New Thought, like Eddy and Gestefeld, in distinct religious realms that were both theologically different and historically interwoven.

Gottschalk provides the most detailed description of the theological differences between Christian Science and New Thought, and his findings mesh with those in this essay, as well as other recent scholarship.[123] At the same time, he concludes that "personal rivalry and desire for power" and not "ideological considerations as such" led Eddy to develop the "tightly organized" institutional structure of Christian Science, which separated the two traditions, and most analyses since have reasonably interpreted this to mean that differences in theology and practice were ultimately minimal compared to differences in personality and institutional structure.[124] The research in this essay suggests a new interpretative direction, one that attends to the former at least as fully as the latter.

Like her relationship with Gestefeld, Eddy's church codified not a desire for personal authority per se but for spiritual authenticity and accuracy, of which her religious leadership was (and is) a key part. Interestingly, and not unimportantly, Gestefeld left the Christian Science church at the moment it was least organized in its history. Eddy disorganized it in 1889, and although she ultimately reorganized it in a centralized manner in 1892, this was far from clear at the time, giving further weight to Gestefeld's religious motivations in their rift. When Gestefeld founded her own church, it embodied not a reconstitution or offshoot of Eddy's teachings, but an appropriately ambiguous claim to some of them juxtaposed with her own theosophically Christian

[122]Leigh Eric Schmidt ably describes such Emersonian lenses, including key aspects of Gestefeld's theosophical milieu, in his *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality from Emerson to Oprah* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).

[123]Gottschalk, *Emergence of Christian Science*, 98–157; Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 219; Gill, *Mary Baker Eddy*, 341; and Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom*, 4, 64. Materra has argued that because Christian language and themes of redemption are found in New Thought, the distance between New Thought and Christian Science was not as strong as Gottschalk suggests; yet Gottschalk urges attention to different meanings underlying similar forms. The phrase "apparently oriented" is also key. Religions identifying as *apparently* or *usually Christian-oriented* can be mapped to a different continuum, as a class, than those identifying as *exclusively Christian* and further, *fulfilling biblical prophecy through special revelation*.

[124]Gottschalk, *Emergence of Christian Science*, 100.

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eclecticism, by which she had consistently marked her differences with her teacher. This does not necessarily mean that Gestefeld herself instantiated a type of "false consciousness" in her organization; unlike Eddy, self-acknowledged ambiguity and contradictory tensions were part and parcel of her religiosity.

These observations have implications for the history of sectarianism, of which this is a prime case study; for the taxonomy of Christian Science and New Thought in relation to each other and to other American religiosities; and for the historiography of American religions. Such implications are well beyond the scope of this paper to explore, but in them we see the nuances between two religions with major historical links that turn out to signify a gulf in belief, denominational culture, and self-conception, not merely organization. This suggests that all American religiosities are indelibly separate and also interconnected, with different persons and teachings dynamically attracting and repelling one another over time in often unsuspected ways. It suggests a field of religious beliefs operating less as monoliths and more as networks with variously interconnected or isolated elements, or perhaps as threads that variously braid, unravel, or lie side by side.[125]

Returning to the teachings at the core of our two organizations: the Church of Christ, Scientist affirmed itself as the "true evangelical" church in which Eddy completed biblical prophecy by bringing Jesus' promised Comforter, Christian Science, into the world, restoring "primitive" Christianity and operating at the vanguard of Christendom; like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, they said, others might fail to comprehend this. Gestefeld's Church of the New Thought emerged over against Eddy's, self-identifying as an eclectically Christian-oriented organization in which the Bible provided confirmation of Gestefeld's teachings but was not their source or authority, the God within was equated with the God without, and imagination trumped revelation. It cast itself at the vanguard of truth, though Eddy's followers, in a "stupor" brought on by believing in special revelation, excluded themselves from it.

In her work on textual Protestants, Pamela Klassen traces how emergent liberal Protestantism "bore within itself reflections of its disparaged literate and illiterate others."[126] Her larger argument rests in part on evidence that those "others" were not entirely disparaged: like R. Bruce Mullin, she brings out the ambiguity in mainstream Protestant (Anglican) thought regarding Christian Science, which included some grudging acknowledgement that "there was truth to" it although it was not presented in "sane" ways, a task churchmen saw as their own.[127] "For Protestants to forswear the principles

[125]My thanks to Ann Taves for a conversation leading to the "networks" concept.

[126]Pamela E. Klassen, "Textual Healing: Mainstream Protestants and the Therapeutic Text, 1900–1925," *Church History* 75, no. 4 (December 2006): 819.

[127]Klassen, "Textual Healing," 838.

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behind Christian Science altogether," Klassen comments, "would be to deny God's effectiveness in the world. Instead they were to find a middle ground between thoroughly idealistic Christian Science and thoroughly materialist biomedicine."[128] Based on this logic, it is possible to say that Gestefeld's Science of Being bore within itself reflections of Christian Science, its key disparaged "other," which Gestefeld claimed both to dismiss and inherit. The term "reflections" appropriately suggests mirroring rather than absorption.

For Eddy's part, she used the language of Christian purity to flatly reject "Gnosticism and Theosophy," equating them with "vice and crime" and registering not even a stray indication of agreement, in text or praxis. It is not so much that Christian Science bore within itself, but perhaps wore outside itself, reflections of such elements. Her letters to Gestefeld emphasize a non-esoteric restorationism that meshes with her 1891 description of Christian Science as the "second appearing of Jesus," and their relationship gives better shape to what she meant when she wrote, in the first edition of her textbook in 1875, that Christian Science "will absorb the attention of sage and philosopher at a not far-distant day, but the Christian alone will fathom it."[129]

It is axiomatic yet often unacknowledged, as Albanese so cogently demonstrates, that participants in the same cultural milieu do not live in "hermetically . . . sealed worlds, separate from one another."[130] Extending Klassen's analysis, it may also be possible to axiomatically state that every corporeal and theological body contains traces of elements it rejected, whether inside or out, in the sense that every contact made with another leaves its mark. However as the rift between Eddy and Gestefeld shows, every contact with another does not necessarily result in combination; it can instead result in conversation or contestation. This leaves open the possibility that sometimes the things we contest—as with Theosophy for Eddy, and ultimately special revelation for Gestefeld—we simply contest, or reject. It also allows for conversations, of whatever duration, across partly or wholly intact self-drawn religious lines. It is these conversations that hold such rich promise for scholars hoping to understand how two people, religiosities, movements, and churches could overlap, co-repel, and ultimately tend toward co-existence in the larger American religious landscape.

[128]Klassen, "Textual Healing," 839.

[129]Eddy, *Retrospection and Introspection*, 70; Eddy, *Science and Health* (Boston: W. F. Brown, 1875), 275. The entire sentence reads, "The great point, is to understand the Principle of being,—the Life that is eternal, without beginning and without end, and this study will absorb the attention of sage and philosopher at a not far-distant day; but the Christian alone will fathom it, for he it is that understands better the Life that is God." By the final 1911 edition this had been distilled to "Christian Science may absorb the attention of sage and philosopher, but the Christian alone can fathom it" (556).

[130]Catherine L. Albanese, "Horace Bushnell Among the Metaphysicians," *Church History* 79, no. 3 (September 2010): 653.

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