



# Church alive--yesterday, today, and always!

By Janet Clements

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**It is amazing to ponder** the tremendous growth of Christianity from just one man, Christ Jesus, to the more than two billion Christians today. What caused the early Christian church to multiply in such numbers? I have found in the Bible a solid foundation for the Church's growth and aliveness that has been very helpful in praying about our Church today.

The Scriptures tell us that Christ Jesus established his church on Peter's rock-solid understanding of Jesus' identity as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16), which was revealed to Peter by the Father. Jesus impelled his disciples to acknowledge that the power behind all of his healing work was this Christ, "the godliness which animated him" (Science and Health, p. 26), and this placed the church on a divinely defined track. Wouldn't that mean that everything about Church has to do with following, living, and cherishing the Christ, the divine idea of man's oneness with God and the basis of all healing? The more we are living the message of the Christ that gives structure to our oneness with God, the more we are connected with Church. So we can never be separated from Church any more than we can be separated from Christ.

Underlying the Church's growth and vitality is the overarching fact that Church is a divine idea, supported and perpetuated by God, the only Cause and Creator. Mary Baker Eddy declared, "The creative Principle—Life, Truth, and Love—is God," and then she connected that statement with Church, which she defined as "the structure of Truth and Love; whatever rests upon and proceeds from divine Principle" (Science and Health, pp. 502 and 583). Church is structured by divine Truth and Love, with Principle as its basis and foundation. This Principle is like a rock, for Principle is invariable and indestructible, eternally secure. The vitality and growth of the Church is caused and perpetuated by divine Life itself.

The engine behind the multiplication of any divine idea, including Church, is God, Mind. And because God is supreme, there is no opposing power that can abbreviate, diminish, or destroy Mind's idea and the fulfilling of the divine mission assigned to it.

## **The Holy Ghost: the only communicator**

A significant event that resulted in the expansion of the early Church was the day of Pentecost, a day in which a small group of Jesus' followers gathered together "with one accord in one place" fifty days after his resurrection (see [Acts, chap. 2](#)). Suddenly, they were filled with the Holy Ghost and "began to speak with other tongues," as the Spirit moved them. Yet, when a multitude of folks of different

nationalities came to find out what the commotion was, everyone heard the group speak in their own language. This amazing communication across languages was possible by the very activity of the Holy Ghost proclaiming the message of the Christ in the language of Spirit. The effect was all-encompassing, lighting the fires of inspiration and revealing the presence of God's healing power. Following the event, Peter gave a moving sermon to those who questioned the meaning of this remarkable encounter with the Holy Spirit, reminding them that the prophet Joel had prophesied it. That day those who "gladly received" Peter's word were baptized, and three thousand folks joined the church! Later we read, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" ([Acts 2:47](#)).

Wouldn't that indicate how vital it is for Christian Scientists to cherish each Christian Science Bible Lesson, for it is built on the ongoing activity of the Holy Ghost, which communicates the Word of God with the artistry and poetry of divine Soul? The action of the Holy Ghost unites all of us in its holy communication of divine Science, the Word of God. Our true identity is "the temple of the Holy Ghost" ([1 Cor. 6:19](#)), and individually bears witness to its activity. That would explain why everyone could hear the Pentecostal message in their own tongue and why, today, the Bible Lessons speaks to every heart, comforting, guiding, inspiring, and teaching the reality of being. They proclaim that the Comforter is here—it is the leaven of Truth at work universally, shining through the mist of materialism and melting away discord to reveal the unbroken harmony of God and the universe. Indeed, the message of our Bible Lessons impels the growth of the Church today.

## **A Church that heals the multitudes**

Another determiner of the aliveness of the early Church was divine healing. The multitudes were being healed! In Acts we read, “There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one” ([Acts 5:16](#)). Think what it must have been like to have found yourself healed immediately of some difficulty! The joy and gratitude of such an event would naturally forward you into the company of the Church.

What do we need to be doing better to heal the multitudes today? It’s interesting to note that the word *all* comes from the word *heal* or *whole*. The allness of God actually declares and mandates the wholeness and health of all He made! God’s allness leaves no room for discord. In healing the multitudes, the allness of God is honored and accepted. There is nothing else, no discord, sin, disease for anyone, anywhere in the allness of God. Healing includes cherishing the infinite manifestation of God’s allness. It is the fulfilling of the command to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and our neighbor as ourselves. In doing this we see God’s wholeness individually expressed in the wholeness and well-being, health and harmony of all His children.

Our healing of the multitudes today may take form as we pray for our families, our communities, our countries, the world. When we gather for church, we pray exclusively and collectively for the congregation. It seems natural to heal in multitudes since God is impartial in His Love and universally All-in-all. No one is left out of God’s grace and goodness. God’s allness is like a universal umbrella of health, wholeness. A multitude of healings brings the blessing of multitudinous church growth.

## **Animal magnetism, disarmed**

As animal magnetism was dissolved, the early Church multiplied. In the book of Acts, it says that the sons of Sceva practiced magic, casting out evil spirits in the name of Jesus, whom Paul preached (see [Acts 19:13–20](#)). They were really mocking the healing activity of Paul. In one instance, the evil spirits leapt on the sons of Sceva, and overpowered them, and they were exposed as imposters who could not heal. This clearly proved the singular power of the Christ. Not only that, those who practiced the “curious arts” confessed their error and freed themselves from this false influence, and publicly burned their books about their practices. This action broke the mesmeric mental hold on the people. As a result, “So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.”

In praying about church, I see how important it is today to heed Eddy's instruction that "animal magnetism, hypnotism, *etc.*, are disarmed by the practitioner who excludes from his own consciousness, and that of his patients, all sense of the realism of any other cause or effect save that which cometh from God. And he should teach his students to defend themselves from all evil, and to heal the sick, by recognizing the supremacy and allness of good. This epitomizes what heals all manner of sickness and disease, moral or physical" (*The First Church of Christ, Scientist, and Miscellany*, p. 364). As Christian Scientists put into practice this instruction they will find that the full blessings of Church cannot be paralyzed, stopped, or abbreviated, but can actively witness to the rousing action of the Christ and the Holy Ghost.

## **Divine Structure Restores Unity**

In the story of the Grecian widows we find that church unity and fellowship resulted in the expansion of the Word and added many disciples to the church (see [Acts 6:1-7](#)).

Initially, there had been discrimination displayed toward the widows of the church. When the church daily distributed food and other necessities, the Greek-speaking widows were not given the same amount as the Hebrew-speaking widows. There may have been many reasons for this lack of respect and charity. Perhaps the Hebrew widows were better known in the community; thus they wanted their own to be better taken care of. Perhaps there was some pride of power on the part of the Hebrew widows resulting in the injustice. But how quickly that conflict was healed in the church! An inspired restructuring of its organization restored unity. The disciples proposed that they keep focused on healing and preaching and that the church appoint seven who would focus on this matter. The seven were selected specifically for their expression of the gifts of grace and the Holy Ghost, and who would impartially and justly cherish each person of the church irrespective of national origin. All classes of people were subverted to the obedience of Christ. Those chosen to be in the service of the church were commended to divine grace through the prayers of the church. This action pleased all in the church. The circumstances that would try to divide the church through the sin of pride and misunderstanding did not succeed, but resulted in a unity that spread the success of the church. "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" ([Acts 6:7](#))

Today, as well, Christian Scientists have the opportunity to demonstrate that there is no room for the pride of any kind in the structure of their movement. The mission of the Christ-power, both in Jesus' day and today, is to take away the sin of the world. If that is to be done, it begins with each individual

and the actions of the church collectively. The disciples quickly dispatched the sin of pride and its misunderstandings. They set in motion that which revealed the impartial and universal love of God embracing all. And the church prayerfully supported that action and those invested in carrying out its intent. What a powerful model this is for us today to dearly love and tenderly respect each and every member without discrimination or labeling of any kind. We are all of the household of God, equally united in divine fellowship and beautifully woven in the tapestry of Christ!

## **The universality of the Christ Science**

Another event that advanced the church occurred between a Roman centurion, named Cornelius of Caesarea, and Peter. The meeting of the two men set in motion their desire to spread the healing message of the Christ, universally and impartially (see Acts, chap. 10). Through an angel thought, Cornelius was guided to send messengers to Peter, who was living in Joppa, to tell him that he was to come to Caesarea to preach the gospel, and that this was a divinely directed instruction. Just before the messengers arrived at Peter's house to tell him this, Peter had a vision that enabled him to perceive that "God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." Thus, Peter was willing to go with the messengers. Previously he would have had no dealings with those who were not Jews. Peter went to Caesarea and proceeded to preach the message of Jesus Christ. Just as on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was with those present. All those who were gathered were baptized. And so the Word was opened not only to the Jews but to all Gentiles, and the church grew, "and the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord" (Acts 11:21).

In our prayers for Church we can know that there are no barriers to those seeking the truth. Christian Science is ". . . the law of God, the law of good, interpreting and demonstrating the divine Principle and rule of universal harmony" (Rudimental Divine Science, p. 1). This law of God is already written in everyone's heart and the healing Christ defines everyone's consciousness. As it says in Colossians, "Christ is all, and in all" (3:11). The more we rejoice in the universality of God's law and His Christ, Truth, we will understand there are no barriers to anyone to finding and experiencing Christian Science healing and walking forward with grace and freedom.

How helpful to pray and ponder the great growth of the early Church, to see what illumined the way for the advancement, and to humbly open thought to the insights it gives us today as we cherish "the Church Universal and Triumphant" (Church Manual, p. 19), forever vitally alive in Life!

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