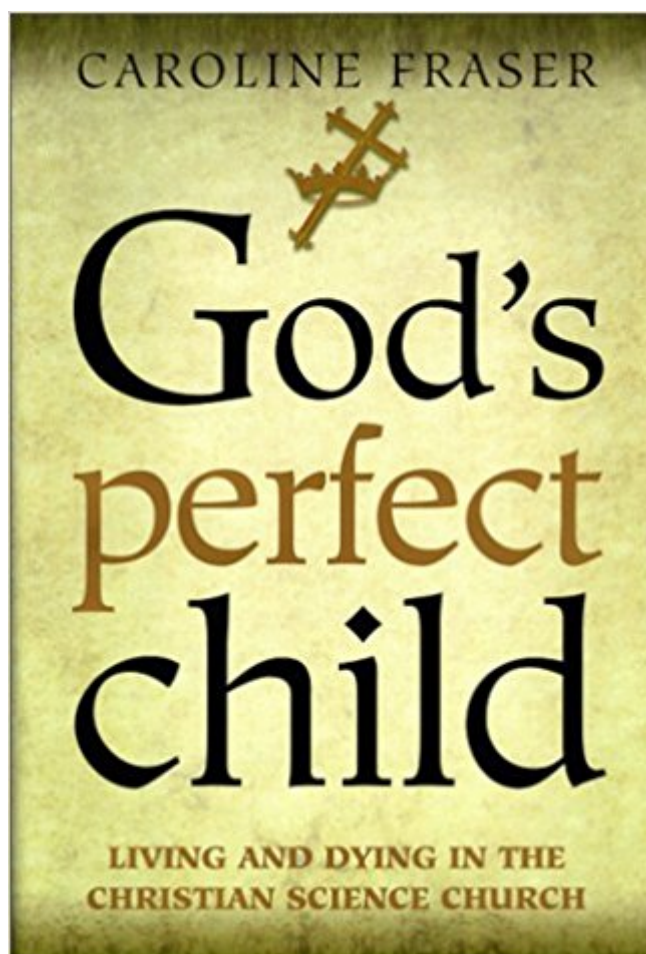


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God's Perfect Child: Living And Dying In The Christian Science Church



Synopsis

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

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Customer Reviews

In *God's Perfect Child: Living and Dying in the Christian Science Church*, Caroline Fraser delivers

the most intelligent, humane, and even-handed history yet published of this important American religion. *God's Perfect Child* begins by telling the life story of Mary Baker Eddy, who founded Christian Science in 1879. Eddy built the church from a fringe sect into a mainstream religion whose wealth and power exceeded that of many Protestant denominations in the mid-20th century--and were considerably augmented by the church's once-popular newspaper, the *Christian Science Monitor*. Fraser, a literary critic and poet who was raised a Christian Scientist, has a relentless analytic bent and an acute eye for physical detail, both of which are in evidence on every page of this book. Her stories of parents whose attempts at faith-healing resulted in their children's deaths are especially poignant. These stories also illuminate and analyze the fears and pains that have plagued many Christian Scientists who subscribe to Eddy's belief that individuals can control their physical destiny by force of faith. Ultimately, Fraser has little sympathy for the obdurate self-reliance advocated by Christian Scientist doctrine, which she sees as a forerunner to the extremist paranoia of contemporary cults. "The suggestibility, infatuation, and enthusiasm that sparked Christian Science ... lies behind our current anxious fixations on imaginary perils and medical conspiracies," Fraser writes. "Florid though they may seem, such fears can have far from imaginary consequences." The goal of Fraser's book is to track down and annihilate irrational fears in the religion of her childhood; her reason for doing so, however, exudes an undeniably spiritual grace: "Should we continue to pursue [these fears], our providences will surely grow ever more remarkable." --Michael Joseph Gross

Freelance writer Fraser spent her childhood practicing the teachings of Christian Science. She was told that she was "God's Perfect Child" and that any errors she made, including being carsick every Sunday as she and her family traveled to her grandparents' house, were due to her "Mortal Mind." Although she left the church before she entered college, Fraser acknowledges that Christian Science is "profoundly complex" and "worth understanding in its own right." She sets out in this scintillating religious history to show the good, but especially the harm, that Christian Science has done. She opens with a brief biography of Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, whose *Science and Health* is studied reverentially by church members. She reveals Baker Eddy's fear of the material world and the ways in which she fashioned this fear into a religion that resists the advances of the scientific age. Fraser traces the development of Christian Science from a small sect to today's large political and religious organization that attracts numerous followers eager to embrace its messages of human perfectibility and self-reliance. In the course of her history, the author also briefly examines the lives of some famous Christian Scientists: Doris Day, Carol

Channing and Mr. Ed's Alan Young and their contributions to the church. But, Fraser's history is also a rousing exposé. Not only does she reveal what she sees as Mary Baker Eddy's neuroses, but she also delves into what she calls the church's "pernicious" teachings that illness is not real (it's only the "Mortal Mind" obscuring the "Divine Mind") and that people can heal themselves without the benefit of medical help. Fraser combines episodes from her own experience with an evenhanded historical analysis in this first-rate social and religious history. (Aug.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

After reading this book, I had to contact Caroline Fraser and tell her how spot on her book was!!! I was also raised as a Christian Scientist, from a mixed marriage (a term I had never heard before) with my mom a Strict True Believer and my dad not). Although it seemed that Caroline's experience was more extreme than mine, both me and my brother "saw through these beliefs" by Jr High. We realized that "praying away" broken or sprained ankles, fingers, torn ligaments, was NOT going to work. (we both played at high level of sports). Also, mumps, measles and flu did NOT get better by praying or pretending they did not exist. When I went to a doctor (on my own) with a 103 temperature because of tonsillitis in High School and one shot of an antibiotic cured it over night, both me and my brother quite the religion right there!!!. My mom eventually contracted very bad arthritis, and after years of praying, even she turned to help from modern medicine. My brother died in 1986 from Hereditary Hemochromatosis, which I found out I had. If I had stayed with CS, I would NOT be writing this at a healthy age of 63. Having been brought up as a Christian Scientist, I did find her information on the inner workings of the church and the power struggle very interesting. It is well worth reading. Christian Science is NOT a "cult" and I do find some very good things in it's teachings, but I am thankful I did not raise my children in that religion. ps. I still have my mom's "Science and Health" and do read it once in a while. John M. Wedeward

This book is so good! I've read most of the books for ex-Scientists and have found this to be the best. It is objective and very well written. I especially enjoyed the history of the church and the biographical section about Mrs. Eddy. While a Scientist I was never able to get through her authorized biographies because I just couldn't believe them. This one feels real to me. The church has revised its way of dealing with children, (My state COP rep is telling the Scientists in my area that she only will treat a child for 24 hours, after that she tells the parents to take them to a doctor), but there is still lots of pressure on adults to stay the course even if CS isn't helping them. This is a very interesting read and I highly recommend it.

Great read for ex-Christian Scientists. Very well-researched and informative.

Caroline Fraser's book is definitely worth reading. I believe that she helps point out some of the issues with the Christian Science Church, particularly its closely-held archives. However, it's important to remember that all major religions have their share of "failures," or people who feel the religion let them down. I find that Fraser has brought out some much needed information on this religion, and that her book is worthwhile from that standpoint. But it's also important to read more than just this book to gain a better understanding of this controversial religion. I am a former CS who will always be influenced by the religion, no matter what I do. What strikes me the most from reading this views is that a balanced approach to this and other works on CS is vital. That way, each person can make his or her own judgment about what is, without doubt, an extremely unusual and thought-provoking religion.

I first began reading about other people who were raised in this church when I got Barbara Wilson's book, "Blue Windows." There seem to be so many of us out here -- who were raised in Christian Science, and have turned away from it. Caroline Fraser's book is somewhat long -- she could have deleted a lot of the church history -- and left it to Gillian Gill's remarkable biography of MBE. What makes Fraser's book unusual and unique is the incredible amount of information she shares about what went on in the church from the 1970s on. The one really humorous piece I found was the temporary take over of the annual meeting in 1969 by a Black activist. You can bet none of us in "the Field" ever heard about that until now. Fraser's book also is very saddening in that there were many good people out there who tried to do what was right, and their children paid the price. I grew up with severe deformities that were never addressed in this religion. I prayed for a cure -- my cure after years of teasing, name-calling (including some by children in the Christian Science Sunday School) and misery came when I began earning enough to afford plastic surgery. And I was criticized for taking that road by some members of my parents' church. I know some of the people mentioned in this book -- and unfortunately, the comments by practitioners who refuse to pray for anyone who has accepted medical care are real. I once called a practitioner for help, and was told to wait until the next morning. I fainted that night, and was hospitalized by my school. I was a third-generation Christian Scientist who worked at The Mother Church. I remember an elderly lady with a large growth hanging down the length of her cheek. Like most of us raised in this religion which does not allow us to attend health classes, I did not know what it was. Years later, I realized

cancer was eating its way through her face. I lost a parent to this religion -- a parent who died in a hospital of massive organ failure because finally -- it became impossible for them to bear the pain any longer. Fraser's book will not please everyone, but I believe that a church that relies so much on "Truth" should not be afraid to open its archives to the truth -- whether it's pretty or not. Isn't that what science is based on -- considering all factors? Fraser's book was the final wake up call for me. After almost 20 years, I am going to sever my membership in this church.

This was much more to wade through than expected, but the author is a journalist and obviously really wants to present her information in an informed and documented manner. I learned alot about the church I was brought up in. If you're looking for a really complete history, as well as documented evidence of the suffering and damage which can go with being the child of "true believers," this will do it.

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