

Christian Science and the Arts

A talk given by Nancy Mooslin on March 2, 2019

Christian Science and my work as an artist have been intertwined since the beginning, since early childhood. I had the privilege of being raised by Christian Science parents and attending the Christian Science Sunday School. I also identified myself as an artist at a very early age. It would be impossible for me to overemphasize the connection of these two facts about me or to separate how intertwined Christian Science and my work are for me.

As you all know Christian Science ties all the aspects of our lives together in a seamless way. Our professional life is as much influenced by our study and practice of Christian Science as is our personal life. The metaphysics of Christian Science inform my artwork, and my involvement in the contemporary art world is of value to me in my spiritual progress as a Christian Scientist. My artwork is a form of prayer, really, and prayer, as taught in Christian Science, is constantly informing and inspiring my work. It is striving for that “conscious, constant capacity to understand God” (*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, Mary Baker Eddy, 209:31-32).

The full quote takes on new meaning when applying it to art making. “Spiritual sense is a conscious, constant capacity to understand God. It shows the superiority of faith by works over faith in words. Its ideas are expressed only in ‘new tongues,’ and these are interpreted by the translation of the spiritual original into the language which human thought can comprehend” (*S&H* 209:31). Isn’t that wonderful to think of art as “new tongues,” as a new language that translates the spiritual in a way that human thought can comprehend? This is why I love art.

Everyone should feel this way about the work they do, but it seems especially clear for the working artist in any of the arts. I think we can all agree that creating a viable, beautiful, intelligent and meaningful work of art requires inspiration. The understanding that God, divine Mind, is the source of the ideas we express, that we need only look to the spiritual “beauty, grandeur, order” (*Christian Science Hymnal*, hymn 329) of God’s universe to find substance and meaning in our lives and work is the perfect creative motivator; it is what energizes me every day in my studio. The inspiration

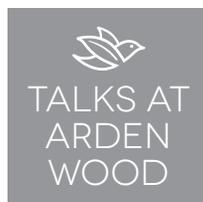
of divine Mind brings with it humility, joy, objectivity and commitment to the work. It prevents the work from becoming self-serving, which can be a real road block to an artist. Selfish thought is not a particularly receptive thought.

There is another side to being a Christian Scientist that is a little less obvious but has also helped me persevere as an artist. To a certain extent, a Christian Scientist is swimming against the current of mainstream assumptions and information. We choose a less accepted way of solving problems. An artist finds himself often in the same position of challenging accepted assumptions and practices. The effectiveness of Christian Science has given me the strength and conviction to

make art that is sometimes not understood or rewarded in some of the conventional ways that we seek validation. Of course, everybody has to deal with disappointments and work hard for opportunities. It just can seem a bit harder for artists because art is sometimes undervalued and overlooked. Christian Science teaches us that God has a place and purpose for each of us and has given us the ability to discover what this is and the guidance to make steady progress. The study of Christian Science keeps my work focused, on track, fresh, and fills me with gratitude that I am able to do work that is so satisfying and conducive to progress and that gives me a way to share ideas I find so valuable.

Volumes have been written about the importance of art in our world and in our lives. Art is the heartbeat of our societies. Art discovers and illuminates new ideas or new/old ideas; it records our world; it is an insightful, sensitive illuminator of our times—both the best and the worst. Art can be the conscience of society and is often prescient. Without the arts, a society dries up, stalls, falls backward. But this rarely happens because the arts are irrepressible.

Consider this quote from *Science and Health*: “Infinite Mind creates and governs all, from the mental molecule to infinity. This divine Principle of all expresses Science and art throughout His Creation, and the immortality of Man and the universe. Creation is ever appearing, and must ever continue to appear from the nature of its inexhaustible source” (*S&H* 507:24-28). Divine Principle expresses Science



(capitalized) and art throughout His creation—those two things. It's best to try to understand them both, don't you think?

I once heard a wonderful talk by Marshall Ingwerson, when he was editor of *The Christian Science Monitor*. He said that Mrs. Eddy started the *Monitor* because she wanted Christian Scientists to have their head in the game. In other words, she wanted them to understand the world in which we live, its problems and solutions, so that we could better support mankind in our prayers. Art has always been one of the best ways to understand societies and cultures. It is how we study and draw conclusions about empires and cultures in history, and it is one of the best ways to get below the surface of the world we live in today.

If you only leave here today with one idea, I would like it to be that efforts to see, understand and create contemporary art—the art of **your** time—are not only compatible with your study of Christian Science, but are also helpful to your spiritual progress. The history of art is a history of breaking down barriers—limited views of what art is or should be. Isn't that what Christian Science gives to mankind—a way to break through limited, artificial matter-based barriers of what Life is, what God is?

Art is expansive; it's constantly expanding thought and possibilities. Art helps put us on the right path, a path that leads forward, a path to and with God, a path of spiritual unfoldment. The arts help us find healing. With an open thought and heart, involvement in the arts will enrich your life's journey, and your understanding of the times in which you live will be enhanced.

God, as understood in Christian Science, is vital to a meaningful creative process. From Romans 11:36, we read: "Of Him and through Him and to Him are all things." This can be interpreted as God our source, guide, and goal for all we do in our lives and certainly for our chosen work. My work is the result of my need to catch glimpses of the kingdom of God. It propels me forward. And it is my hope that I can share these glimpses with others, share the inspiration that I receive from turning to God as my source, guide and goal.

"One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple" (Psalms 27:4). Doesn't that describe the purpose of art—to behold beauty and to inquire, study, and discover Truth?

But what about when, as a creative person, you feel uninspired or stuck? What do you do about that? The best solution to feeling stuck, blocked, uninspired is to just get

to work. It is much easier to hear divine Mind (the source of all ideas) speaking to you and guiding you if you are in work mode. In the studio, going through the motions, inspiration comes while working with the ideas that interest you and your desire to have these ideas elevated, purified, more selfless, more useful to others. Those are ideas from God. As I have learned to more consistently do this, I have found that I do not have many times of feeling uninspired. Rather, I am given more ideas than I can possibly execute! But that is OK because ideas sometimes need time to incubate, to allow the right ones for your work to come to the forefront.

Sometimes a more frustrating issue than feeling stuck is struggling with a painting or artwork that is not working, that makes you feel like you can't find a solution to the aesthetic problems you are working with. It is times like these when it is most important to be open to divine guidance, to know there is no such thing as a problem with no solution. When it happens to me, I need to let go of thinking I am clever and can figure this out and instead know that ideas have their own beautiful expression. "Let there be light is the perpetual demand of Truth and Love, changing chaos into order and discord into the music of the spheres" (*S&H* 255:3-6). We can rely on a step-by-step unfoldment. We are working within the framework of spiritual reality. This is where we stand, so we don't need to know exactly what is going to happen; we just need to take the next step and to trust the rest to God. Making art is a combination of discipline and spontaneity.

It is a natural and good desire to want more creativity in your life. Everyone is creative, expressed in "multifarious forms" (see *S&H* 477:20-22). Creativity has all kinds of elements; it's diverse; it takes many forms. First, recognize the creativity you are already expressing (Science and art) and cherish these expressions. Then you will find more opportunities for your ideas to grow and expand. Involving yourself in the arts can inspire more creativity because it is like everything—it requires devotion of thought and effort. Being part of the audience for art is a big part of that education, part of the discovery of the kinds of ideas that inspire you and help you find the right way to share them. Art is all about sharing.

And now I am going to share with you my creative journey. The truths and ideas found in The Bible and *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy have been an inexhaustible source of inspiration to me. These metaphysical ideas are the basis of my work that explores the relationship between music and visual art—the connection between color and pitch, measurement and meter, texture and timbre. Classical music seems inherently spiritual, incorporeal. It is "the rhythm of head and heart" (*S&H* p.213:26).

Music and math were very meaningful metaphors for Mrs. Eddy. To give just one of many examples: "Spiritual ideas, like numbers and notes, start from Principle and admit no materialistic beliefs. Spiritual ideas lead up to their divine origin, God, and to the spiritual sense of being" (S&H 298:20). "Harmony in man is as beautiful as in music, discord is unnatural, unreal" (S&H 304:14). Mrs. Eddy compares the science of music and math to the Science of being. "Spiritual teaching must always be by symbols" (S&H 575:13). I would like my paintings and sculptures to bring these same spiritual qualities to visual art. 🍃



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