

Nineteenth Century Christian Mystics

In the American colonies during the 1730s and 1740s a large portion of the population participated in what later became known as “The First Great Awakening.” This movement continued and augmented the Protestant path started by Martin Luther by placing less emphasis on ceremony and ritual and by spurning most hierarchy in the church and giving individuals a more personal experience of their religious beliefs. It fostered introspection and a commitment to higher personal morality making this new approach to religion fit well with, or rather help to create, the independent spirit being cultivated by the colonists in American. The people felt that they were creating something new and better.

After the American Revolution and the signing of the Constitution in 1789 a Second Great Awakening began and lasted through the first half of the 19th century. This primarily Protestant movement further promoted enthusiasm and emotions while rejecting more reasoned approaches to religion. During this era the supernatural gained foothold on individual thinking in a way that rejected rationalism and the deism of the Enlightenment – the philosophy that had held sway over most of Europe in the 18th Century.

Many traditional Protestant sects flourished during this second period, which saw a profusion of circuit riders and revival meetings. Methodist made the biggest gains in memberships, with Baptist coming in a close second. In addition to the growth of established churches several new movements appeared, including the Adventists, the Holiness Movement, and the Mormons. The Holiness Movement formed by splitting from mainstream Methodism, but the Adventists movements and the Mormons both blazed new paths and created institutions with belief systems that varied in significant ways from all existing established churches. These groups, the Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses from the Adventist movements, and The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, the formal name of the group commonly called the Mormons, had one thing in common - charismatic leaders - Ellen White of the Seventh Day Adventists, Charles Russell of what became Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Joseph Smith of the Mormons.

To this trio of pioneers I need to add one more leader and denomination, Mary Baker Eddy and Christian Science, or First Church of Christ, Scientist. This church didn’t have its roots in the Second Great Awakening, but arose somewhat later than the other three. However, when speaking of mystical and spiritual leaders of the 19th Century who fostered new Christian movements, Mary Baker Eddy and her First Church of Christ, Scientist must be in that conversation.

Joseph Smith

Chronologically Joseph Smith and the Mormon Church come first within this group of four. Smith’s life story stands apart from the other three of this group in several rather significant ways. He experienced more dramatic, detailed visions that glorified him and the movement he led. Others had significant visions, but none as grandiose as Smith’s. He authored works considered new cannon by his followers. All of the others wrote significant works that inspired and led their flock, but none of these works were elevated to level that Smith’s held and still holds. Smith possessed a singular ambition to create a church

like no other, one with divine guidance and mandate. His aggressive, some would say obsessive, tactics employed in that quest led to his death at the hands of a mob incensed by his zeal and drive to control those around him to do his bidding in an effort build what he called Zion. All of the others lived to old age and died of natural causes.

Smith was born in Vermont, but moved with his working class family to the town of Palmyra in western New York at an early age. At the age of seven he suffered a bone infection that caused him to need crutches for three year. A significantly different childhood existence plays a role in all four of these religious leaders, as you will see. Another noteworthy feature of Smith's upbringing concerns the belief system of both of Smith Parents and his maternal grandmother. These caregivers of Smith held strong religious beliefs that deviated from most mainstream ideas. They reported having visions that they believed communicated messages from God.

The fever of the Second Great Awakening and its competing revival meetings caused Smith to wonder which religious message held the truth. Smith claims that when he prayed for guidance in this regard he experienced a vision of two persons, God the father and his son Jesus. The figures told Smith that although the messages of the existing churches contained partial truths, none of them were the true church, but that he, Smith, would establish the true church if he stayed true to God's guidance.

This vision, which came at the age of fifteen, had little impact at the time, since when he told a preacher about it he was ridiculed. His church creating days lay yet in the future. Meanwhile the Smith family endured hard times and in an effort to help financially the teenage Smith tried to augment the family's income through treasure seeking with a "seer stone," a practice popular with some at the time. This practice earned him a trip before a magistrate in court for the practice of "glass looking," although no charges were levied. It appears that this treasure seeking mindset mixed with his religious fervor to produce a unique result.

Smith tells of a second vision that played into his treasure seeking side. He claims an angel, named Moroni, led him to gold plates buried in a hill near his home. According to Smith it took four appearances of Moroni before Smith finally uncovered the location of the plates, which the angel told him not to show anyone. According to Smith's account he translated the writings on these plates, which supposedly consisted on reformed Egyptian language, into what became known as the *Book of Mormon*. The translation took place as Smith sat behind a curtain using some special gear akin to a seer stone and a vest of some sort, also to have come from the angel. A scribe took dictation as Smith spoke.

Of course most people outside of the Mormon Church find Smith's story hard to believe, but in anticipation of doubters Smith did eventually show what he claimed were the golden plates to eight men, or at least eight men wrote that they saw the plates. Of those eight, one person had a vested interest in seeing that the efforts of Smith's translation produced fruit. Martin Harris, one of the witnesses, had mortgaged his farm to finance the publication of the *Book of Mormon*. To explain the lack of plates to other people Smith claimed that Moroni took the plates and disappeared to heaven once he had completed the translation.

Although the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints has many other “selling points,” the *Book of Mormon* represents the cornerstone of the church. Members of the church appear to accept Smith’s account about the golden plates, however most non-members dismiss the account as the work of a con artist. The non-member point of view holds that either the eight witnesses collaborated in the ruse or Smith showed them metal objects that he had fabricated for the purpose of legitimizing his story. But even if you dismiss Smith’s golden plates as non-existent or self-made tom foolery, you still have to account for the *Book of Mormon*.

Mormons look at the *Book of Mormon* as supporting evidence for the mystical origin of the plates. Certainly, to me at least, it does not seem logical to claim that Smith authored the *Book of Mormon* by simply sitting down and reeling off the narrative to a waiting scribe who sat on the other side of a curtain. Yes, the curtain could serve as a prop to keep the scribe from seeing that Smith did not look at plates to ascertain a text to translate. But it stands beyond reason to think that Smith could consciously dictate such a work. However, we know of cases where people go into a trance and speak from some place beyond their conscious minds and out comes a book. The author Jane Roberts, and her series of books sold as coming from a voice from “out there” known as Seth, comes to mind.

The conventional wisdom on works of literature stemming from persons in a trance attributes these volumes to unconscious processes of the brain. However, doing so begs the question of how an unconscious mind accomplishes such a task. Others rely upon a more Jungian model to explain Smith’s work. That is, they point to the collective unconscious, or perhaps a collective source of higher consciousness, as the source. In this viewpoint, a person somehow “opens” themselves up to the energy or force that pervades our collective consciousness. Of course, if you don’t believe that such an energy or force exists then that argument fails to convince.

Whether the *Book of Mormon* came from Smith’s unconscious or a higher collective consciousness, it doesn’t mean that the *Book of Mormon* tells a true story. Joseph Smith’s penchant for digging for treasure combined with his religiosity to lead him to seeing a vision of a buried treasure that held a deep religious significance. Since Smith’s belief system hinged firmly on the story of Christ in the New Testament, he connected his buried treasure craze with the Bible via the story of a lost tribe of Israel that comes to the new world. The unconscious or the collective unconscious that generated this tale made it believable enough that it inspired people to follow the person who channeled the story into existence.

Smith ruled his church at times in a cajoling manner but at other times with the force of a dictator. When splits threatened he would try to mend the differences and keep his flock together. However, he did not tolerate opposing views, or those who challenged his authority, or tried to usurp any of his prophetic powers. When others claimed visions he told them that only he had prophetic powers. When others voiced their disagreements too vociferously, which happened often in the church’s early years, Smith silenced them, usually by ousting them from the congregation.

Smith’s aggressive proselytizing resulted in legal problems on a number of occasions. Rather than facing a court or standing trial for his arrests and warrants he chose to run away from the problems. After

being arrested for disorderly conduct in New York he fled to Ohio. A warrant issued against him for bank fraud in Ohio caused him to leave for Missouri. In Missouri after a band of his followers engaged in a military conflict with the Missouri militia Smith found himself in jail on the charge of treason. He managed to escape to Illinois, likely with inside help. In Illinois he fled when faced with charges of polygamy and perjury. However, this time he returned and gave himself up voluntarily, after which the charges were upped to treason and a mob stormed the jail where he was held and killed him.

Despite the rocky, tragic road traveled by Smith he managed to create a church with a set of guidelines like no other. Most of this original doctrine came through a second book that Smith dictated while in a trance state, called *Doctrine and Covenants*. He set up a lay priesthood that continues to this day, consisting of non-paid men. Virtually all Mormons hold some priesthood title and volunteer at some point in their church life for one of the many positions that keep the church running in an orderly fashion.

Smith's second book delineates a hierarchy of existence for human souls, beginning with existence prior to arrival on earth dubbed the "pre-existence." After of life's journey on earth ends, a person has three options for continuing into the next world. One can transition to the terrestrial world, the telestial world, or celestial world. When you examine this arrangement you can see something very similar to some non-Christian belief systems. A pre-existence resembles reincarnation in concept. A person going to a terrestrial world suggests a return to terra firma, our known terrestrial world, in other words reincarnation. A telestial world trip fits what some, including Paramahansa Yogananda and others, describe as what happens after death and before reincarnation back to earth. It involves an existence in spiritual form only. The celestial kingdom coincides with the traditional Christian concept of heaven. However, Mormon doctrine adds a twist. Heaven, or the Celestial world, does not represent the ultimate end and resting place. No, indeed, Mormons believe that man can continue his growth in this world and then in heaven until he develops into a God with a world of his own. Yes, *his* own. The woman will be a partner of that but it will be the man's world with a man as the God.

Mormons have simple unadorned meeting places where they welcome everyone. They also have a small number of temples that are all built to specifications delivered by Joseph Smith. The number of floors and the kinds of activities to take place on each floor have been set by Smith's visions. While the glory and splendor of these temples are legendary by most accounts of those who have been in them, only those who pass scrutiny and receive a temple recommendation from their lay bishop can enter. In these temples some of the most idiosyncratic Mormon acts take place, including baptism for the dead and the sealing of marriages for eternity.

Upon reaching the age of eighteen each Mormon youth gets encouragement to leave on a two-year mission to help spend the church and further build Joseph Smith's vision of what the church should become. Smith instilled from the beginning that his church had a global mission of establishing the "true" church. He coined the term "stakes of Zion" for each of the far-reaching congregations he established, believing that his vision of theocratic rule on earth depended only on time.

Whatever you think about Smith's legacy and the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, you cannot deny his lasting and ongoing impact on society in America. In 2015 *Smithsonian* magazine portrayed Smith as the most influential religious leader in the history of the United States. From state governors and a presidential candidate to the church's almost five million members in the United States (and fifteen million members worldwide), Mormons have earned respect from their non-Mormon neighbors, not necessarily for their beliefs, but at least for their upright families and positive contributions to their communities.

Ellen Harmon White

Although Ellen Harmon experienced vivid dramatic visions which led to the formation of a new church with unique doctrines, few other similarities exist between this prophetic lady and the founder of the Mormon movement. Harmon did experience a youth that set her apart. Her cross to bear as a child came in the form of bullying, rather than an extended illness. Being the object of stronger children's ridicule and abuse led the rather small child to turn inward, setting up a tableau well-suited for spiritual endeavors. Additionally, Harmon worked for her hat-making father, exposing her to compounds containing mercury, a known (but not at that time) neurotoxin. Whether this caused neurological damage that the brain compensated for in a manner that created visions later in her life, one can only speculate.

In 1839, when Harmon was twelve years old, her family became followers of William Miller and his Millennial movement. Harmon recalls this time as being "converted." By reading the Bible and interpreting it as though it held secret messages, Miller claimed, or rather prophesized, that Christ would return to earth in 1843. When the predicted date in 1843 came and passed without the appearance of Christ, Miller moved the date to the spring of 1844. The date again passed without event, prompting Miller to adjust the date to the fall of that year. When this third prediction also failed, Miller's followers ceased to believe in his prophetic powers.

However, the Millennial movement did not die, thanks to Harmon and her visions. Shortly after Miller's second date in 1844 passed Harmon had her first vision, a vision of the Advent people, as Miller's followers were known, traveling a high dangerous path towards the city of New Jerusalem, or heaven. She kept this to herself at first, until a second vision ended with the command to "make known to others, what I have revealed to you." She then told James White, a fiery preacher of the Millennial movement. White believed her visions came from God and encouraged her to continue relating her visions to him and others to whom he brought her message. He married her two years later.

Some of Harmon/White's earlier visions served as clarification of Miller's prophesized 1844 return of Christ. These visions convinced White and her husband of the veracity of the date Miller had established, but that Miller had called for the wrong event. The new interpretation claimed that 1844 marked the beginning of a cleansing of heaven dubbed "investigative judgment." White concluded that this process would take place over an indeterminate number of years after which Christ would return to earth.

Over the two decades following her first vision, Harmon/White developed a large following. She, with the encouragement of her husband, preached to local groups from the Methodist church and others. Her husband published accounts of her visions in his periodical *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*. During this period many of her visions occurred in public and generated much interest. Rather unbelievable claims about these visions circulated among the population causing greater and greater interest. People claimed that this small eighty pound woman commanded superhuman strength during visions. She purportedly held an eighteen pound Bible in an outstretched arm for thirty minutes during one vision. Others claimed that she ceased respiration, stopped breathing during the visions that lasted up to three hours. Harmon/White says that during visions she saw nothing of her surroundings, although her eyes remained open. Instead she says she saw a bright light at the beginning of a vision and then witnessed angels and/or Christ and the many places to which these beings would transport her.

In Battle Creek Michigan Ms. White, her husband, and Joseph Bates formally organized the church with a membership of 3,500. The church accepted Ms. White's visions as prophetic and she occupied a central role in the church and established many of the church's traditions, including a focus on health and struggle against racism. Before the civil war White advocated for the abolishment of slavery. She preached full equality of all races. In the area of health White advocated vegetarianism and many of her followers adhered to this strict dietary regimen. In fact, the formation of the cereal company Kellogg, of Battle Creek, has a connection to the church. We can thank Seventh Day Adventists for the tradition of cereal for breakfast supplanting a meaty one. This focus on healthy eating and living in general can explain why members of this church live, on average, about 5-7 years longer than the general population.

Compared to Joseph Smith Ellen Harmon White lived a peaceful existence free from confrontations and public chastisement. Although her visions influenced the teachings of the church, she had less influence in the governance and politics of the organization. Some of her policy ideas for the church met with resistance. When White tried to get the church to move in a more Christ-centered format, church leaders sent her as a missionary to Australia. Apparently this move did not bother White, as she helped the church there to grow and establish Avondale College.

Kenneth Samples wrote in the *Christian Research Institute Journal* that "No Christian leader or theologian has exerted as great an influence on a particular denomination as Ellen Whit has on Adventism." White is the most translated English non-fiction writer of all times. These facts help explain why she made the 2015 *Smithsonian* list of 100 most influential American's, coming in at sixth on the sub-list of most influential religious leaders. This distinction seems justified when you look at the eighteen million world-wide members of the church and its two colleges, one medical school, and numerous hospitals, academies, and publishing houses.

Charles Taze Russell

Unlike Smith and White Russell came from a well-to-do background. The childhood of Charles Russell stands out as unusual through the fact that by age twelve he wrote business contracts and ran stores for

his father's haberdashery businesses. Russell never experienced visions and thus cannot be classified as a mystic, but like Smith and White, Russell was a prolific writer that influenced the growth and development of a unique movement, his being the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Russell showed an interest in religion and Bible study while young. At the age of twenty-four he came across the teachings of Nelson Barbour which stated that Christ would return to earth not in physical form but spiritual form only. Russell sold his five stores for the modern day equivalent of about \$7,000,000 and financially backed Barbour publication, *Herald of the Morning*. Russell and Barbour predicted that the rapture, i.e., Christ's harvesting of the faithful to live in heaven with him, would take place in 1879. When that failed to happen, Russell and Barbour parted ways due to disagreements in scripture interpretations and why their prediction failed. At this juncture Russell began to publish *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*. Russell claimed that the idea of the rapture was not based on scripture, but rather on tradition. He maintained that Christ's presence did return and that the rapture was not supposed to have happened and never will happen.

Russell incorporated the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society in 1884 and recruited thousands to distribute the tracts/papers he published. This organization did not function as a church. Russell did not want to establish a new church, but only wanted to publish his ideas and his interpretations of the Bible. In 1903 newspapers began to publish sermons written by Russell. By 1912 Russell was the most published Christian author in the United States.

Many of the beliefs held by Russell conflicted with those of mainstream Protestant churches as well as the Catholic Church. For example, he didn't believe in hell. He maintained that there would be a heavenly resurrection of 144,000 of the righteous, with the remainder of people waiting in death to be resurrected back to earth. He did not accept the traditional view of the Trinity. Rather he claimed Christ received his divine status as a gift after dying on the cross. The Holy Spirit, according to Russell, was not a person, but the manifestation of God's power.

Russell died in 1916 in the middle of the First World War, believing that the war was the beginning of Armageddon and a gradual deterioration of civilized society into anarchy. He believed that God was calling the Jews back to Palestine where they would eventually establish the center of government once God's kingdom on earth prevailed over the anarchy. With this belief came the corollary that Jews did not need to convert to Christianity.

In 1931, Joseph Rutherford, Russell's successor at the Watch Tower Society, formed Jehovah's Witnesses. Many of Russell's belief became part of the core of this church; however, Rutherford changed some of them. This philosophy change and Rutherford's poor leadership, as evidenced by his adultery, drinking, and penchant for luxury, caused several splits in the Watch Tower Society. However, Rutherford overcame these setbacks and the church grew in the last half of his presidency.

Charles Russell's influence still holds much influence over the approximately twenty million worldwide Jehovah's Witnesses. They still believe in the imminent dissolution of the world's government, which they say are run by Satan. Millions of the Witnesses still go door to door handing out tracts warning of dire consequences to those who fail to heed the message they espouse. Jehovah's Witnesses believe

that their beliefs alone hold the truth and that their church is the one chosen as God's vehicle for bringing his rule to the earth. Jehovah's Witnesses eschew interactions with mainstream culture and prefer to keep company with fellow members. A Pew study of religion and society found that Jehovah's Witnesses had the lowest percentage of college educated persons, the highest frequency of prayer, Bible reading, and church attendance, and the highest rated opposition to abortion, homosexuality, and same sex marriage.

Mary Baker Eddy

Mary Morse Baker, born in 1821, endured a particularly difficult childhood and early adult life. Her father delivered severe punishments to his strong-willed daughter. She reportedly would go into catatonic states for hours in response to her beatings. She apparently also suffered from an eating disorder during adolescence. Eddy herself wrote that she suffered from indigestion as a child and would follow a regime of eating only once a day. One can look at the physical abuse and the indigestion and make a likely connection.

Mary Baker's father kept her from school, but it did not keep her from learning. Her brother, a bright youngster who later became a member of the US Congress, tutored her. At age seventeen she passed entrance exams and entered Sanbornton Academy, where she became a top student. She married at age twenty-one and bore a son after her husband died in the first year of the marriage. She returned to the home of her parents, but four years later her mother and her lawyer fiancé died within a short period of each other. When her father remarried he made it clear that he would not support his daughter and her child. This left Mary in a depressed state and unable to work which prompted the authorities to remove her child because she could not provide for the boy.

She married Daniel Patterson five years later, in 1853, with the understanding that the new husband would allow her son to return. When the second husband backed down on his word she left him and lived with friends, going from place to place. When her strong-willed nature rubbed her benefactors the wrong way, spats with the woman of the premises resulted, causing her eviction.

In 1862 Mary Patterson became a patient of Phineas Quimby who practiced faith healing through hypnotic treatments. Quimby taught that his methods were the same as those used by Christ to heal the sick, as reported in the New Testament. Quimby gets credit for establishing the New Thought movement and many claim that Mary Baker Eddy's ideas came directly from Quimby. However, Eddy refutes Quimby's hypnotic methods, although she does utilize his basic philosophy of healing. She claimed that hypnotism, while initially successful, causes more problems than it fixes.

Quimby's treatments restored Mary Patterson's health. Even after Quimby died she used the techniques she had learned to restore her health after a fall left her temporarily paralyzed and had doctors saying she would never walk again. Her quick recovery from this serious accident provided impetus for her desire to spread the word about the technique she had begun to call Christian Science. During the next few years Mary Patterson tried to distinguish her Christian Science from spiritualism. Some accounts claim that she acted as a spiritualist at this time by contacting her dead brother and other deceased

persons. However, she maintained through her later years that she only attended séances in order to find people willing to listen to her about her Christian Science.

Eddy divorced Patterson in 1873 and published her most famous work, a book entitled *Science and Health*, two years later. In 1877 she married Gilbert Eddy, who died a year later. Her book went through many editions until her death. From the 24th edition through the 33rd edition of the book, which became known as *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, Eddy wrote that Christian Science shared much with Vedanta philosophy. Others have pointed out the close relationship between these two religious philosophies, although all references to eastern religions have been absent from Christian Science literature since the late 1880s.

In 1879 Eddy wrote the bylaws for and established a new church she called the Church of Christ, Scientist “to commemorate the word and works of our Master [Jesus], which should reinstate primitive Christianity and its lost element of healing.” Two years later she founded the Massachusetts Metaphysical College, where she taught around 800 students during the next seven years before closing the college. In 1882, she changed the name of the church to its present form, The First Church of Christ, Scientist.

In 1889 Eddy wrote an article entitled “Malicious animal Magnetism” in which she decried the practice of using mental powers to destroy another person’s health. She had accused a number of persons of this “crime” and actually sued a former student, Daniel Spofford, for practicing malicious mesmerism on one of her unhealed patients. The case became known as “The Second Salem Witch Trial,” but was thrown out of court before any trial. In later years a paranoid Eddy claimed that 50,000 people were projecting evil thoughts her way in an attempt to kill her.

The practice of The First Church of Christ, Scientist that sets it apart from other churches is its healing methods. Members of the church can become certified prayer healing practitioners by taking a two-week twelve lesson course based on the last edition of Eddy’s book *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. After successfully completing this course the members can advertise and charge for their prayer healing services, which typically cost between \$25 to \$50 per session and take place over the phone or the internet.

The First Church of Christ, Scientist belief in mental healing stem from the principle that everything is mental, physical reality is just an illusion. They hold life, truth, and love as the only reality. The church’s website claims that it is based on “a few brief tenets, rather than creed or doctrine.” However, when examining these six tenets it sounds very much like the doctrine of other mainstream Christian churches with a mental twist to give it a unique flavor. Their beliefs include: 1) the Bible is a sufficient guide; 2) acceptance of the elements of the Trinity, God the Father, Jesus his Son, and the Holy Ghost; but no claim for the divinity of Christ or the three-person aspect of the Trinity that most all other Christian churches do; 3) the forgiveness of sin and understanding that evil is unreal, but belief in sin is punished as long as belief lasts; 4) salvation through Jesus, as demonstrated through Christ’s healing the sick and overcoming sin and death; 5) crucifixion and resurrection served to uplift faith to understand eternal Life, the allness of Soul and Spirit, and the nothingness of matter; 6) promise to watch and pray for that

Mind to be in us which was also in Christ Jesus, i.e., follow the Golden rule and be merciful, just and pure. Christian Science claims to be mainstream Christianity, but other Protestant sects see them as cult-like due to “allegorization” of basic theological terms.

One principle adhered to by members of The First Church of Christ Scientist has saddled some with legal problems. The refusal to seek medical help for illness and instead rely solely upon prayer has brought charges that members’ children were denied equal protection under the law. In 1972, 128 children in a Christian Science school in Connecticut contracted polio, four partially paralyzed. In 1985, 128 children in Christian Science school in Illinois contracted measles and three died. Over 50 cases between 1887 and early 1990s exist where Christian Science adherents were charged after adults and/or children died of treatable illnesses without medical care. Between 1980 and 1990 seven parents were prosecuted, with four convictions, of which two were overturned. The reason given for overturning the ruling was that the couple reasonably believed that they could cure child with prayer. In 1995, a father sued the church after his ex-wife, a Christian Science follower, failed to provide medical attention to a treatable illness that resulted in the death of his son. His suit was successful and he was awarded \$1.5 million. However, an appeals court found that the judgment forced the church to “abandon teaching its central tenet” and was thus unconstitutional.

Mainstream Christianity views the First Church of Christ, Scientist as not a true Christian church and most non-members view their eschewing of medical intervention for illness as unwise at best, and unconscionable at worst. However, the publications from the church have earned a respected reputation in the secular world. The periodical *The Christian Science Monitor* has been awarded seven Pulitzer Prizes since its first publication in 1908. The church has a lovely architectural marvel for its headquarters in the upscale neighborhood of Back Bay in Boston, but its days of glory, if ever there were any, have seemed to have passed. Membership in the church in the United States peaked in the 1940s. Then over 10,000 members had prayer healing certification. Now that number is less than 1,000 with an equivalent decline in overall membership.

Conclusion

The nineteenth century embodied a uniquely fertile time for the introduction of new Christian-based sects in the United States. Conditions in the United States at that time stood at a “Goldilocks” time for mystics and their visions. During prior centuries new ideas could not stray too far from the established ones. By the end of the nineteenth century the analytical approach of humans fostered by Darwin and then Freud made it much less likely that spiritual visions would find acceptance among the greater population. In the hundred years after gaining independence the country accepted bold new ideas in the spirit of American Revolution. As a nation we were indisputable innovators, intoxicated with a new found freedom that allowed those with the boldest fresh religious proposals to gain traction and flourish.