



## What is God?

The Development of the Concept of God  
in the  
Bible and the Christian Science Textbook

**Max Kappeler**

**T**he most fundamental question in Christian Science is the eternal question: What is God? In the year 1907 Mary Baker Eddy answered this question in her Textbook, "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures," as follows: "God is incorporeal, divine, supreme, infinite Mind, Spirit, Soul, Principle, Life, Truth, Love." (465:9) This is the most momentous sentence ever written. How did this vitally important definition of God ever come to be written? To understand this, let us look briefly at the long quest for the meaning of God, of which this is the culmination.

### **Development of the concept of God in the Bible**

For thousands of years mankind has sought an answer to the question: What is God? In all religions this search has been at the center of spiritual endeavor. From earliest times man has felt intuitively that there must be some reality beyond the visible, a governing power to which man and the universe are subject, and he gave it the name "God." But how was man to conceive of

God? The most varied views of Deity evolved. Human characteristics, both good and bad, were used to describe God, so that God came to be re-garded by the more literally-minded as a super human being. The ancient cultures of China, India, Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Rome, the Americas, and Africa all wrestled with concepts of Deity, attempting to describe God through various names and functions. Unfortunately, in their degenerate forms, these cultures fell prey to polytheism, separating each distinct aspect of God into a multitude of deities. The gods of such pantheists were seen as more powerful but often less moral than mortals, warring with each other and holding men at their mercy.

It was in the context of, and in contrast to, such a pantheistic belief that the Judeo-Christian religion emerged. This religion was distinct in its efforts to free itself from polytheism and gradually to become monotheistic in its conception of God. At first Israel was taught that it must have but one God, whereas other nations had many. Only much later, especially in the time of Deutero-Isaiah, do we find the



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declaration that in reality there is one God and one God only for all nations. But what kind of God is this? Does God have only one nature or only one function? And how could God, including its nature and functions, be expressed in words? The concept of God was not defined clearly from the start—once and for always—but underwent a continuous development, traceable through the various biblical documents.

In the Old Testament, God was at first called Jehovah or Jahweh. Jehovah is the Israelites' ancestral God, the God of their fathers, the God of the covenant, Israel's guide and Lord. Jehovah is "the Lord our God," "my God," the God who manifests itself in the deeds of men. This corresponds to God's nature as Mind. Specifically, it conveys the tone of the parent Mind, which manifests itself as a powerful guide, governing its creation.

The Jehovistic document was followed by the Elohist and Priestly documents, in which the name Elohim is used for God. Elohim is the creator of all things, the one and only true God. Everything is created spiritually by God, as stated in the first record of creation, free from evil, matter and any form of error. With Elohim, a dematerialized, more spiritual concept of God is established, bringing with it a more spiritual conception of man. Whereas Jehovah is regarded as a personal God, Elohim reveals itself to man through dreams and angelic messengers. The religious and moral elements of Deity find expression in Elohim. These characteristics of Elohim point to the nature of God as Spirit.

Later, when Moses asks the name of God, thus requesting a definition of the divine identity, he receives the answer: "I Am that I Am." This answer describes the immutable identity of God's being. God is that which God is; God is today what it has always been, and in the future God will always be what it is now. God reveals itself as always the same; its identity never changes. Moses recognizes God as Soul, as the immutable essence of the identity of true being.

From the beginning of the fourth thousand-year

period of biblical history onwards—that is, from the time of the first and second books of Samuel—God reveals itself also as the Lord Sabaoth, the Lord of hosts, as that which governs all and exercises absolute authority. Nothing whatsoever can escape the universal government of God. This points to the nature of God as divine Principle, governing all ideas imperatively and apodictically.

In the New Testament, three further names for God are introduced by Jesus: God is the eternal Father, Life; God is Truth, and God is Love. God is at once: Father, Son, Mother. God is clearly interpreted "as divine Principle—as Life represented by the Father; as Truth, represented by the Son; as Love, represented by the Mother." (S&H 569:1)

Thus we can see from this brief survey that the concept of God in the Bible revealed itself step-by-step in the order of Mind (Jehovah), Spirit (Elohim), Soul (I Am that I Am), Principle (the Lord Sabaoth), Life (Father), Truth (Son), Love (Mother)—an order which corresponds to the definition of God in the Christian Science textbook. (S&H 465:9)

### **Development of the concept of God in the Textbook.**

Although Mary Baker Eddy declared that she discovered Christian Science in the year 1866, we must realize that this does not mean that the entire Science, the full system of Christian Science in all its detail, was revealed to her in a flash. On the contrary, only after a life-long quest and continuous development was she able to present her discovery clearly and unequivocally in the Textbook. Her definition of God, for example, changed virtually from year to year, until it acquired its final form as late as 1907. Let us consider this specific aspect of her development more closely.

From her study of the Bible, Mary Baker Eddy knew that Spirit, Life, Truth and Love are the Scriptural names for God (see S&H 275:12). However, her revelation expanded this concept of God by adding the terms Mind, Soul and Principle



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to the scriptural definition, in keeping with her own scientific age. In fact, she used the term Soul for God in the first edition of the Textbook (1875) far more extensively than in any of the later revised editions. The term Mind as a name for God first appeared in the second edition (1878). Indeed, up to 1890 several other terms were used for God, such as Intelligence, Wisdom, Substance.

But how did Mary Baker Eddy finally arrive at the seven synonymous terms for God? Martha H. Bogue, who attended Mary Baker Eddy's Class of 1888, made the following comments: "Science is not God except in the sense of Omniscience, all Science, but it is the manifestation of God. God is individual. He is All and in all. She [Mary Baker Eddy] said when the magnitude of the infinite began to dawn upon her, she could not see how God could know Himself, but when she saw that He was All and in all, she knew that He knew Himself. She said at times she would have to wait and could not go further, and then one of the terms for God would come to her and she would go on, and so she knew that every term was given to her through inspiration."

The use of the synonymous terms for God presented the students of those days with considerable difficulties. Mrs. Bogue continued: "When she [Mary Baker Eddy] first commenced teaching, it was impossible for her to give her students these terms and have them in any way comprehended or apply them; she could only talk to them on the lowest plane of healing the sick. That thirty of us nearly all understood them at once, showed the wonderful advance Christian Science was making and the universal education through this work." Mrs. Bogue also recorded the great importance Mary Baker Eddy attached to the synonymous terms for God: "Upon the truth of these terms for God rests the basis of the Science; in fact they are the Science." Another student, Fannie L. Pierce, who attended the November Class of 1888, noted: "Upon the Truth of these terms for God, rests the whole structure of Christian Science." (Mis.Doc., pp. 61 and 84). This last note

is of great importance, for, as we shall see, the Science of Christian Science rests on a scientific understanding of the seven synonyms for God.

Another student made the following highly significant note: "Mrs. Eddy said if we were really conscious of the meaning of the synonyms of God, this would heal every case." (Coll., p. 212) From this we see that the definition of God through the seven synonymous terms is fundamental for both the theory and practice of Christian Science.

It is equally important to see just how Mary Baker Eddy used these synonymous terms in her definition of God. Here again we find a gradual unfoldment, from her early use of only a few of the synonyms to her final use of all seven, arranged in a very definite order. The following synopsis makes this clear, showing how the answer to the question "What is God?" in the chapter "Recapitulation" evolved throughout the various editions of the Textbook.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> edition (1875) and 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (1878), the chapter "Recapitulation" did not yet appear, although the short treatise "Science of Man" (1876), which later formed the basis of "Recapitulation," did exist. Here we find:

*Question:* What is God?

*Answer:* Jehovah is not a person. God is a Principle.

*Question:* What is Principle?

*Answer:* Principle is Life, Truth and Love, Substance and Intelligence.

From the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (1881) to the 15<sup>th</sup> edition (1885), the corresponding passage reads:

*Question:* What is God?

*Answer:* Jehovah is not a person. God is Principle.

*Question:* What is Principle?

*Answer:* Life, Truth and Love, substance and intelligence.



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From the 16<sup>th</sup> edition (1886) to the 34<sup>th</sup> edition (1888), we find:

*Question:* What is God?

*Answer:* God is the Supreme Being, Divine Principle.

*Question:* What is Principle?

*Answer:* Eternal Life, Truth, Love, Substance, and Intelligence.

Here “Substance” and “Intelligence” are used as terms for God, while the nature of God as Spirit (substance) and Mind (intelligence) is not yet included in the definition.

From the 35<sup>th</sup> edition (1888) to the 48<sup>th</sup> edition (1890), we read:

*Question:* What is God?

*Answer:* God is Supreme Individual Being, Divine Principle, Eternal Mind.

*Question:* What is Principle?

*Answer:* Life, Truth, Love, Soul, Substance and Intelligence.

Now, for the first time, Mind and Soul are included in the definition; Spirit, on the other hand, is still missing, except for the reference to its nature as substance. The change comes in the following editions.

There was no 49th edition.

From the 50<sup>th</sup> edition (1891) to the 403<sup>rd</sup> edition (1906), the passage reads:

*Question:* What is God?

*Answer:* God is divine Principle, supreme incorporeal Being, Mind, Spirit, Soul, Life, Truth, Love.

For the first time the definition of God includes all seven synonyms, though they do not yet appear in their final order. An article by Mary Baker Eddy (Christian Science Sentinel, October 1902) on the subject of capitalization also belongs to this period. Substance and intelligence are no longer used as synonyms for God and are accordingly not capitalized. In this article Mary Baker Eddy writes:

“Christian Science is not understood by the writer or the reader who does not comprehend where capital letters should be used in writing about Christian Science.” (My. 225:8) The capitalized terms that the Textbook uses are the 7 synonymous terms for God (Mind, Spirit, Soul, Principle, Life, Truth, Love), the 4 divine modes of operation (Word, Christ, Christianity, Science) and the 4 levels of Science (Science itself, divine Science, absolute Christian Science, Christian Science).

From 1907 to the final edition of the Textbook (1910), the passage reads:

*Question:* What is God?

*Answer:* God is incorporeal, divine, supreme, infinite Mind, Spirit, Soul, Principle, Life, Truth, Love.

This definition marks the summit of Mary Baker Eddy’s long struggle for a scientific clarification of the concept of God. It took forty years for the true meaning of God to emerge. For today’s student, only the last edition of the Textbook is definitive and relevant. Even so, a comparative study of the earlier editions is of great value in tracing the spiritual evolution of Christian Science, as an early article in the Journal (April 1891) emphasized in regard to the then most recent (50<sup>th</sup>) edition. Nonetheless, in the year 1908 Mary Baker Eddy wrote the following notice: “What I wrote on Christian Science some twenty-five years ago I do not consider a precedent for a present student of this Science.” (My. 237:5)

Excerpt from Max Kappeler’s book  
*The Seven Synonyms for God*, pp. 1-6  
Kappeler Institute Publishing, USA 1984

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## **What is God?**

**as defined in the Christian Science textbook**

**“The Structure of the Christian Science Textbook—Our Way of Life”**

**“GENESIS”**

**Max Kappeler**

This class presents an in-depth insight into the question: What is God? The presentation is based on “Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures” by Mary Baker Eddy, Chapter XV “Genesis.” Part I gives an analysis of “What God is” as seen from the standpoint of the “first record of creation.” Part II presents an analysis of “What God is not,” as seen from the standpoint of the second record of creation. Part III shows the Science of God (Life) versus material theories of evolution. In this way, the universal law of unfoldment given in the first record of creation uncovers the step-by-step development of a false belief in the second record of creation.

The inadequacy of belief soon comes to light, until we finally witness the total self-destruction of all that is unlike God. It is by studying and pondering this presentation by Max Kappeler many times over the years—bringing ever-higher insights to the subject “What is God”? This class is available in audio and video, in its newly upgraded digital format.

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*Illustrative materials for this class is found on page 7 of this newsletter*

**Overview of the Bible's Layout  
in the Light of the 7 Synonymous Terms**

	<b>Days of Creation (1<sup>st</sup> Record)</b>	<b>Adam-Story (2<sup>nd</sup> Record)</b>	<b>1000-Year Periods</b>
<b>MIND</b>	1. light—intelligence, creative power	1. mist—ignorance	1. Adam-record of creation, Adam to Enoch—awakening (c. 4000–3000 BC)
<b>SPIRIT</b>	2. firmament—onliness of spiritual reality, separates real from unreal, understanding	2. Adam formed of dust and breath, 2 trees—duality, impurity	2. Noah—turning away from material beliefs, purity, understanding (c. 3000–2000 BC)
<b>SOUL</b>	3. dry land, seed within itself—definiteness of spiritual identity, which defines all things rightly	3. Adam in garden (body), names every creature, no helpmeet—corporeal identity, false identification	3. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Judges—going the way from sense to Soul (c. 2000–1000 BC)
<b>PRINCIPLE</b>	4. sun, moon, stars—Principle's system governing the universe; scientific metaphysics demonstrating spiritual power	4. deep sleep of Adam, Eve made from his rib, the misinterpretation of the serpent—mesmerism, division, atomism	4. Samuel, kings, prophets—true government through prophecy; Principle's system interpreting itself and governing the universe (c. 1000 BC–1 AD)
<b>LIFE</b>	5. teeming, abundant fish and fowl (soaring in the firmament)—fullness, multiplication, exaltation of spiritual life	5. serpent tempts Eve, who eats from tree of good and evil; nakedness—demoralization, downfall, lack	5. Jesus, the apostles, Paul, the spreading of Xty, Revelation—laying down a mortal sense of life for newness of Life as Spirit (c. 1–1000 AD)
<b>TRUTH</b>	6. every living creature: animals and man—spiritual consciousness, spiritual manhood and dominion	6. Eve cursed, Adam cursed to till the ground, Cain kills Abel—mortal manhood, error self-destroyed	6. pioneering scientific consciousness, understanding being through scientific methods (vs. blind faith) (c. 1000–2000 AD)
<b>LOVE</b>	7. creation finished, rest—fulfillment, peace, the perfection of integrated being	7. Cain flees from God's presence and dwells in Nod—error excluded as nothingness	7. reign of divine Science, fulfillment of the Bible's design, bringing in the millennium

## The Main Ideas Characterizing the 7 Synonymous Terms for God

MIND	SPIRIT	SOUL	PRINCIPLE	LIFE	TRUTH	LOVE
creator	unfoldment	identity	government	multiplication	consciousness	completion
parent Mind	separation	naming	interpretation	fullness	standard	rest
cause	good	sinless	relationship	exaltation	dominion	peace
basis	reality	unchanging	absolute	eternal	affirms	universal
power	strength	exchanges	imperative	everlasting	heir	fulfillment
action	worship	transforms	demonstrates	existence	Christ	salvation
manifestation	reflection	freedom	impersonal	father	manhood	perfection
ideas	likeness	never "in"	proof	love	son	mother
wisdom	purity	anything	fundamental	individuality	health	holiness
intelligence	understanding	satisfaction	spiritual power	provides	remedy	glory
guidance	baptism	spiritual	indivisible	method	ideal	all-inclusive
law	order	understanding	unity	indestructible	form	plan
will	nature	safety	system	deathless	uncovers	impartial
control	birth	spiritual sense	harmony	being	destroys	gives all
influence	fruits	rule			victor	forgives all
Mind-healing	substance	joy				
medicine	the only	bliss				
All-in-all		balance				
mortal mind	flesh	physical senses	personal sense	death	error	fear



## **What is God?**

**as defined in the book:**

*“The Bible in the Light of Christian Science, Vol. I”:*

**“GENESIS”**

**Max Kappeler**

This presentation of “What God is” and “What God is not”—explained in Volume I, “Genesis”—is derived from the method of interpreting the Bible as a whole through divine categories based on the nature, essence and wholeness of God as given in “Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures” by Mary Baker Eddy (465:10). The result of this method of interpretation reveals the spiritually scientific definition of God.

It is by studying and pondering Max Kappeler’s writings/recordings over years brings higher, deeper understanding into the subject “What is God”?

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