

Christian Way: Former Christian Scientists for Truth—Through Jesus Christ by Linda Kramer

The Christian Way ministry began in 1979, four years after founder and director Carolyn Poole left Christian Science. While the Christian Science Church would soon begin a steady decline, it had enjoyed decades of growth and success. Christian Scientists were pleased to count a number of Hollywood celebrities and high-ranking government officials among their ranks. For example, Bob Halderman and John Ehrlichman were two of President Nixon's closest advisors. In a *Moody Monthly* article, Poole stated:

> The religion is called 'Christian,' but there's mystery behind the façade. People are impressed by the dignity and refinement of its adherents. Its edifices are grand, and its "reading rooms" well appointed. Its newspaper is known for its journalistic excellence. Its members company with kings….
> These nice, quiet, law-abiding people are deceived. It is imperative that Christians stop having a "hands off" attitude toward Christian Scientists. With love, we must show them who Jesus Christ really is and what he has done. (*Christian Science: Cult for the Cultured*, a pamphlet reprinted from the October 1981 edition of *Moody Monthly*)

Among its activities, Christian Way reached out through pamphlets, a quarterly newsletter, and radio interviews with some of the leading Christian apologists of the time. These 1980s interviews of Walter Martin, David Hunt, Todd Ehrenborg, and D. James Kennedy, together with testimonies from Christian Way members, became part of a tape series that Christian Way eventually began offering for free to Christian Scientists and those trying to reach them for Jesus Christ. Carolyn Poole and Elaine Dallas also shared their stories in Latayne Scott's 1993 book, *Why We Left a Cult*. Carolyn Poole, Nancy Kind, Elaine Dallas, and Stanley Myers are prominent names from this era.

Christian Way went through a time of dormancy when Carolyn became ill with a fatal disease. Mike Benjamin felt called to maintain the ministry, and in 1993 Carolyn turned the operations over to him. Mike was a former fourth-generation Christian Scientist, serving as an Assistant Pastor at Calvary Community Church in Phoenix, Arizona.

Christian Way became primarily an online-based ministry, establishing its first website in 1996 and replacing it with an expanded site in 2002.

Finding former Christian Scientists who had become Bible-believing Christians was difficult before the internet became widely available in the 1990s. Christian Way provided several avenues for connection with its new online presence. Former CS-Christians were invited to join a private prayer list, complete with “get acquainted” information about each other and a weekly opportunity for prayer updates. Dale Lewis maintained the list while Linda Kramer kept track of the get-acquainted information. The prayer list was active for several years and was helpful in forming a sense of community.

In addition, the Christian Way website hosted discussion forums from 2002-2016, where people discussed a myriad of topics and found a sense of connection. Alan O’Neal and Linda Kramer co-moderated the forums, allowing people to post under pseudonyms since the forums were open to everyone—including, as it turned out, some Christian Scientists and Church officials. Over the years, hundreds of people contacted Christian Way by phone and email seeking help and advice. Linda Kramer, Dale Lewis, and a few others answered the mail and ministered to those seeking help and information.

Mike Benjamin retired in 2018 and the Christian Way ministry closed. Linda Kramer maintains the website (christianway.org) as an ongoing source of information. For those seeking connection, the Christian Way site now directs people to the Fellowship of Former Christian Scientists at ffcsministry.org.

Notes of Thanks from Former CSers:

- *I loved Christian Way and read the comments every day. At one point, I timidly and tentatively sent a question about the possible diminishment of Jesus in CS. Someone named John answered me, agreeing with my view. I will always be grateful that he answered my question thoroughly and at length. The diminishment of Jesus in CS was one of the first red flags as I slowly questioned some of the CS teachings.*
- *Carolyn Poole and I wrote back and forth at least once. I still have some old newsletters.*
- *My sister-in-law turned me onto this as she had left CS years before I did. I found it helpful, though I had not yet (re)accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior, so I saw, at the time, the emphasis of that site was hard to take. Also, since I thought "I was just fine," I didn't understand some of the anger on the site. I do now!*
- *As Co-Moderator of the Christian Way Forums, I participated in hundreds of threads that provided opportunity for free and open discussions of issues associated with living in CS, departing CS, recovery from CS, and learning to live outside the CS lifestyle. These discussions got me thinking about questions like:*

How could those of us who left be prepared to assist CSists as the Mother Church continues to crumble? How will CSists cope with the vacancy? Who will be available for them?

- *I think I met someone from Austin in that group, and we talked and met and eventually did some evangelism at the CS church.*
- *I knew Carolyn Poole well and helped run her booth at a few Evangelical conferences in Boston. I was also very active in the Christian Way (site) Forums.*
- *As a new ex-Christian Scientist, I appreciated the articles, personal stories, links, and other resources.*
- *When I first left CS, I did not know anyone else with that experience. But then I heard about a "Christian Way" ministry founded by Carolyn Poole. I contacted them and was thrilled to receive several cassette tapes of radio broadcasts that Christian Way had conducted. I remember hearing Carolyn Poole's testimony and being moved by it and hearing interviews she conducted with Dave Hunt, which were helpful. It was so encouraging to know others like me had left CS, and it was very encouraging to know there was a ministry reaching out with resources. It was a pleasure to interact with Mike Benjamin and send him a copy of the Principia Alumni Directory, which I understand he used to contact people who might still be in CS. Eventually, the forums sponsored by Christian Way began. It was encouraging and helpful to interact with so many through those forums and to hear other people's stories. I learned from the wisdom of the moderators and some who had been out of CS longer than I had. Not all the participants were ex-CS; some were still in CS. I'll never forget when one person made a truly outlandish comment, and moderator Linda Kramer wrote: "Gimme a break." Although I usually like detailed, point-by-point rebuttals, Linda's reply struck me as the perfect response in this instance regarding a truly outlandish comment. It inspired me later to form my responses to truly outlandish comments. I was very sorry when the forums were eventually discontinued but am grateful to Linda Kramer for maintaining the Christian Way website with its resources.*
- *I briefly corresponded with Christian Way after leaving CS in the mid-1980s. In the mid-1990s, I began volunteering with the ministry as it emerged from a few years of dormancy and moved to the internet. For many years I managed the website, co-moderated the discussion forums, and corresponded with people who wrote to Christian Way seeking help with spiritual, emotional, physical, and family issues related to CS. God used my efforts not only to help others, but also to mature my own faith and biblical knowledge. The work also helped me find a true and peaceful freedom from CS baggage that had troubled me for years—and prompted me to write a book,* Perfect Peril, *to address issues that repeatedly came up in the correspondence I was answering.*

CHILD, Inc. (Children's Healthcare is a Legal Duty, Inc.) by Linda Kramer

CHILD was founded by Rita and Doug Swan after their son Matthew's horrific death under Christian Science care. Active 1983-2017, CHILD endeavored "to protect children from harmful religious and cultural practices—especially faith-based medical neglect—through public education, research, legal action, and a limited amount of lobbying" (http://childrenshealthcare.org, 2017). Much of CHILD's activity involved trying to undo religious exemptions and legislation that had been lobbied into place by the Christian Science Church.

CHILD hosted a yearly support group meeting for former Christian Scientists. Those who gathered held widely differing religious and political views, but they found important connection through their shared Christian Science background. New attendees told their stories, and many found a deep sense of relief in finally being with others who could understand. The CHILD meetings gave members an opportunity to "keep tabs" on the Christian Science Church as it tried in vain to mainstream itself under the leadership of Virginia Harris in the late 1990s and early 2000s. They also provided comic relief in the form of games and spoofs—a fun way to blow off steam while dealing with some profoundly serious issues.

Note of Thanks from a Former CSer:

- *CHILD held an annual support group meeting for many years. At these meetings I found people who understood the damage caused by growing up in a religion that makes people contort their emotions to fit the CS view of reality. It was both refreshing and heartbreaking to hear people's stories, and it validated my own experiences and emotional struggles. These meetings helped me identify much of the sense of betrayal and grief that I was experiencing and were an important part of my emotional healing process.*

Three books by former Christian Scientists, published 1998-1999

By Linda Kramer

Three former Christian Scientists published books about Christian Science in 1998 and 1999—an unusual number of publications at the time:

- *God's Perfect Child: Living and Dying in the Christian Science Church*, by Caroline Fraser
- *Blue Windows: A Christian Science Childhood,* by Barbara Wilson
- *The Religion that Kills*, by Linda Kramer (Linda hated the title and changed it to *Perfect Peril: Christian Science and Mind Control* after her publisher went out of business.)

These three books complement each other well and, a quarter century later, are still "go to" books for people struggling to understand and recover from their CS backgrounds. *God's Perfect Child* offers a detailed and unsparing history of the CS Movement. *Blue Windows* does an outstanding job conveying how it feels to be CS child. *Perfect Peril* helps people understand how CS trapped them and their loved ones in harmful thinking patterns.

The Ananias Website for Ex-Christian Scientists

by John Andrews

The Ananias.org website was established in 2001 as an informational and networking resource for individuals who have left Christian Science to follow Jesus Christ. The way it occurred was a striking example of God's providential design intervening in our lives to override one's own purposes and accomplish His.

I had begun slowly making my way to the Cross and out of CS in 1980, at age 36. Finally, in the fall of 1992, I resigned my Mother Church and branch church memberships, and in the spring of 1993, I was baptized at St. Gabriel's Episcopal Church in Denver, with a priest named Father John Andrews officiating. (Never say God doesn't have a sense of humor.)

Over the next five years, as a writer, I produced a few short statements contrasting CS with the Gospel to share with family or close friends who were puzzled or concerned about this new path I was taking. But I hadn't yet gone public about my conversion, and I remained generous—to a fault—in expressing appreciation for Mary Baker Eddy's lifework.

As things stood in 1998, it could not have been said that I had yet taken hold of the challenge to be "always ready to give an answer for the reason of my hope in Jesus" (I Peter 3:15). But that was about to change.

Doing a Favor

My father passed away in June 1998, and after the memorial service in Denver, my cousin Susan Andrews Williams, visiting from Santa Barbara, California, asked for a favor. Her close friend, Debbie Gans, faced a marital crisis as a result of her husband, Carl, having renounced CS and become an evangelical Presbyterian. Both my cousin and Debbie regarded their unloving attitude toward Christian Science as deeply unfair; my cousin, seeing a welcome contrast in my milder approach to the church we had all four grown up in, asked if I would be willing to talk with Carl about the whole thing.

I'd never met Carl Gans, who attended Principia five years behind me, although I knew of him as a superb distance runner. After getting a law degree, he became a practicing attorney in Santa Barbara, and it was by the persistent, winsome efforts of an office colleague that he agreed to undertake an intensive study of the book of John and, at last, gave his life to Christ. Not long after Susie put us in touch, we became bosom friends. Instead of him diluting his views about the dishonesty of CS, as his wife and my cousin had hoped, soon it was me sharpening *my* views and seeing past the sentimental blind spots I had clung to about Mrs. Eddy. (God's sense of humor was at play again).

We felt a divine call to work together on apologetics, and some of our first projects were to co-author an open letter answering the question we had both heard so often from CSers: “What happened to you?” As Carl said, the truest and simplest answer we could give involved reframing the question. Not “what happened,” but “who happened?” The *who* is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That letter passed through several drafts, initially came out in print form to be shared with inquirers, and ultimately became the welcome letter for the Ananias.org home page, where it remains today.

The website’s name was suggested by the conversion story of Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9, where the perplexed but faithful disciple at Damascus obediently and bravely lets God use him to reach the blinded, bloodstained Pharisee—thereby initiating a mighty new chapter in salvation history. I have made his name a part of my daily prayer ever since: “Whose Ananias can I be today, Lord?”

Signers

Through the years, I have been the manager and editor of Ananias.org, contributing most of the copy. Carl Gans’s name still appears along with mine as a signer of the welcome letter, although Carl died of a heart attack in 2011. My friend David Petteys of Denver, a former Marine pilot, is also a signer. Another friend, Sonia Z. in Michigan, also lent her name for a while but was prayerfully led to take it down in deference to painful family issues. How often we’ve all heard versions of that story? Go in peace, sister!

Sometimes, the Ananias site has made use of long-form interviews to acquaint readers with fellow harvest workers. They are easy to find by clicking “Interviews” on the right side of the home page. Carl Gans is represented there with a three-part entry. So are Linda Kramer, Tom Stewart, Tanner Johnsrud, and yours truly.

Additionally, before Ananias was ever thought of, John Andrews and Carl Gans collaborated on a working paper entitled “Considerations for Evangelism Outreach to Christian Scientists.” It is included with the present document as an appendix. That was actually dated in July 1998, within the first few weeks of our work together.

Reviewing those memorable days, now more than a quarter-century ago, I am flooded anew with gratitude for the anointed disciple that Carl was. How joyous our reunion in heaven will be!

Publishing Company

While I didn’t know or intend it when writing and posting the thousands and thousands of words that now make up the Ananias archive, the website eventually became a sort of “workshop that never closes” for my ongoing personal journal of trying to follow Jesus more and more faithfully and trying to get Christian Science out of my system entirely.

One day, I decided several dozen of my best articles should also be available in print. My book *Discovering a Larger God: Life Lessons of a Former Christian Scientist,* practically wrote itself with the help of the copy-and-paste function on WordPress where Ananias is hosted.

"The Lord gave the word; great was the company of those that published it" (Psalms 68:11). Venturing away from the KJV—which I only do when forced to—some may use a less emphatic verb than *publish*. That's fine, let them. *Publish* was good enough for Handel and remains good enough for me.

This writer and all the beloved brothers and sisters in Christ who have participated in the Ananias endeavor for over two decades thank God for the privilege of working in his publishing company.

Notes of Thanks from Former Christian Scientists:

- *I am trying to remember how I found Ananias.org, but I do remember sending an email to which John Andrews graciously replied with such welcoming Christian love, which encouraged me greatly.*
- *Although I discovered it years after I left, John offered answers to questions about faith I did not know I had. These answers helped explain many life issues I'd had since leaving CS 1991-2.*
- *I found Ananias a vibrant resource for new and seasoned ex-Christian Scientists, offering interviews, book reviews, Bible Notes, and other relevant topics.*
- *Although I had already left CS before hearing about Ananias, learning about and contacting Ananias was helpful in my recovery. When I first left CS, I did not know anyone else who had had that experience. Then, when I learned about Ananias, I was amazed that Mark Gans, one of the original Ananias administrators, was the older brother of one of my Principia classmates and was rather famous in that community for being a phenomenal athlete. Similarly, John Andrews, another member of the Ananias team, was also very well known as one of the Christian Scientists who had worked in the Nixon Whitehouse. Seeing that I was not alone, but others had left CS as I had was highly encouraging. It was a joy to read the many well-written articles Ananias published and know I was not alone. When I reached out, I received a very encouraging and supportive response from Mark Gans. It was also great to read the extensive interviews that Ananias published with Tanner Johnsrud, which inspired me to continue my journey of recovery.*