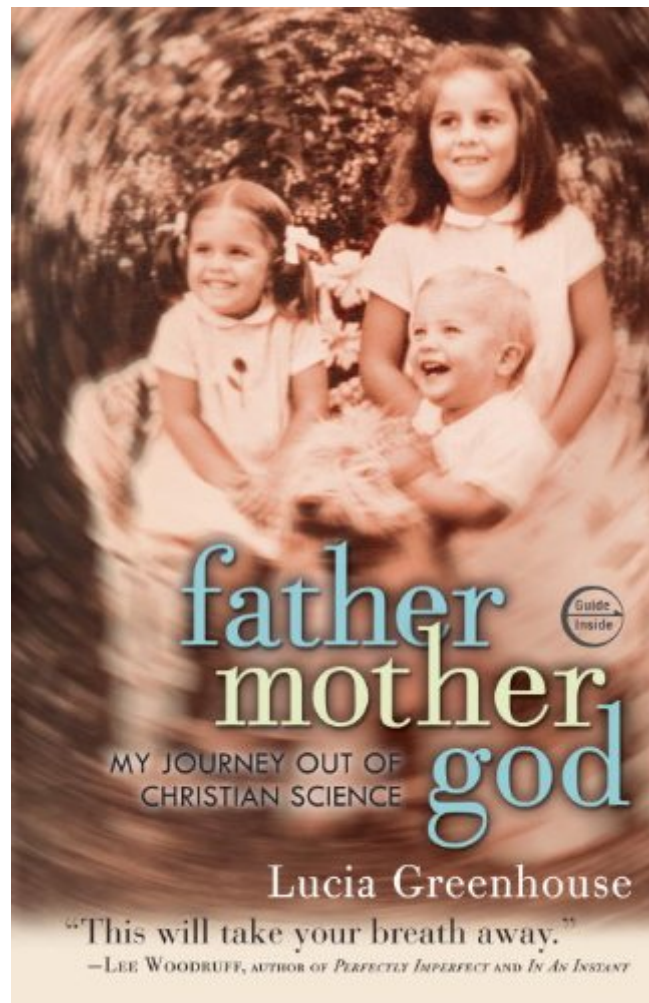


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Fathermothergod: My Journey Out Of Christian Science



Synopsis

Lucia Ewing had what looked like an all-American childhood. She lived with her mother, father, sister, and brother in an affluent suburb of Minneapolis, where they enjoyed private schools, sleep-away camps, a country club membership, and skiing vacations. Surrounded by a tight-knit extended family, and doted upon by her parents, Lucia had no doubt she was loved and cared for. But when it came to accidents and illnesses, Lucia's parents didn't take their kids to the doctor's office--they prayed, and called a Christian Science practitioner. In *Fathermothergod* is Lucia Greenhouse's story about growing up in Christian Science, in a house where you could not be sick, because you were perfect; where no medicine, even aspirin, was allowed. As a teenager, her visit to an ophthalmologist created a family crisis. She was a sophomore in college before she had her first annual physical. And in December 1985, when Lucia and her siblings, by then young adults, discovered that their mother was sick, they came face-to-face with the reality that they had few--if any--options to save her. Powerless as they watched their mother's agonizing suffering, Lucia and her siblings struggled with their own grief, anger, and confusion, facing scrutiny from the doctors to whom their parents finally allowed them to turn, and stinging rebuke from relatives who didn't share their parents' religious values. In this haunting, beautifully written book, Lucia pulls back the curtain on the Christian Science faith and chronicles its complicated legacy for her family. At once an essentially American coming-of-age story and a glimpse into the practices of a religion few really understand, *Fathermothergod* is an unflinching exploration of personal loss and the boundaries of family and faith.

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Customer Reviews

Lucia Greenhouse's discussion in the last chapter of her memoir about the ambivalence and struggle which led to her final choice to go to publication struck a powerful chord with me. Her story is extraordinarily personal, and yet it represents the conflict between conviction and compassion which I sincerely believe is a universal part of the human condition. I have a small amount of experience with Christian Science, as several of my older relatives were devotees of this religious philosophy. I remember early conversations between my own parents about this. I recall being told that one of my mother's cousins had suffered unduly as a teenager because a small facial blemish, which could have been easily corrected, was ignored for years. This eventually resulted in an inferiority complex that prevented her from dating, and she remained single all her life, though my mother believed she would have been exceptionally suited to be a wife and mother. This, as Greenhouse so powerfully discusses, is the true cruelty of the coercive nature of Christian Science. I am not prepared to deny the reality of healing by faith or miraculous divine intervention. I AM a skeptic where it comes to assertions that these healings can be "produced" by the willful determination of humans, or that prayer should be substituted for common-sense procedures such as minor surgery, vaccination, treatment of infections, and so on. I understand that modern medicine can be equally doctrinaire and coercive at times, and that doctors often exhibit a refusal to admit their fallibility. The appropriate balance, I believe, would let medicine do what it can, and rely on prayer to support its efforts.

This book tells the horrifying story of the illness and tragic death of the author's mother, her father's involvement, and her family's attempt to deal with it all. People who have been exposed to Christian Science and had difficulties with it will really find lots to identify with in this book, and will recognize familiar situations and patterns. The author writes vividly about the terrible result when beliefs like these are carried to an extreme. Those who are unfamiliar with Christian science may not realize that this family did carry things to an extreme. Mary Baker Eddy actually stated in one edition of her

main book that people who are not successful with spiritual healing could get medical attention, at least to calm to symptoms so that they can more easily pray for further healing. Also, many Christian Scientists do celebrate birthdays, do get eyeglasses, and do even go to the dentist regularly though they may not use numbing medications. There are many variations and gradations in the ways people practice. The author does not mince words in describing her experiences as a child and adult. Her writing is powerful and quite melodramatic at times, but definitely hits home. It is so unfortunate that in our attempts to make sense of life, we humans sometimes do things that hurt, confuse, neglect, and even endanger those we love, and when the ego (desire to succeed at all costs) blinds us to the true facts of a situation, things can get completely out of control. It is tragic and horrible that this woman died, and it is horrible that others have died, including children. This book is not easy to get through, but does give a valuable perspective on a confusing and disturbing subject.

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