

# Unity School of Christianity

## *History, Beliefs, Practices*

**Identity:** A religious body that is generally classified as one of the Mind Science groups along with Christian Science, Religious Science, New Thought, and various aspects of the New Age Movement.

**Founders:** Charles Fillmore (1854-1948) and his wife Myrtle Fillmore (1845-1931).

**Statistics:** Exact statistics are difficult to obtain, since Unity reaches far beyond its actual membership to many who are not affiliated with the organization through its literature and advertising. In the early 1990's membership estimates were: 70,000 members in almost 600 congregations, along with 115 study groups, in the U.S.; 60 congregations in 15 different countries internationally, especially in Europe.

**History:** The movement known as Unity was founded in 1889 by Charles Fillmore, an unsuccessful and nearly bankrupt real estate agent. Fillmore was physically crippled and his wife Myrtle was a sickly woman who also contracted tuberculosis. The Fillmores moved from New England to Kansas City, MO in 1884. Myrtle converted to Christian Science. She became convinced that her illness was an illusion and claimed total healing with the words: "I am a child of God and therefore do not inherit sickness." Charles, on the other hand, was attracted to the Occult and Spiritualism, fascinated also with Eastern religion, particularly Hinduism and its doctrine of reincarnation. When both Fillmores finally converted to Christian Science, they blended their ideas into a harmonious religion known as "Unity." However, they were also influenced by New Thought—which actually had a more significant impact upon them than Christian Science. New Thought did not treat sin and sickness as illusions, but regarded them as real. By the early 1920s the growth of Unity far exceeded its rivals in the Mind Sciences. By 1950 an entire Unity Village was built just outside of Kansas City, MO, where its present day headquarters is located. The core members were originally known as the Society of Silent Help and are now called "Silent Unity." Silent Unity conducts activities such as prayer, counseling, and correspondence 24 hours a day. The Fillmores originally taught that Unity was not a denomination and people did not have to disaffiliate with their own church bodies to become part of the organization. However, as early as 1903 Unity established a policy for ordination of its ministers and in 1921 published a Unity Statement of Faith. Following the Fillmores' death and to the present, leadership of the organization has continued through the family.

**Texts:** The Bible. *Daily Word*; *Wee Wisdom* (publication for children); *Unity*; *Progress Weekly Unity*; *Good Business*.

### **Beliefs and Practices:**

- Unity aims to teach people how to gain spiritual healing, health, and prosperity.
- In contrast to Christian Science, Unity believes that sin and sickness are real—though these are not natural to the body and to health. Unity embraces medicine and doctors (unlike Christian Science).
- Truth is available in every religion.

- *God* is a “Principle, Law, Being Mind, Spirit, All Good, Omnipotent, Omniscient, unchangeable, Creator, Father, Cause and Source of all that is.”<sup>1</sup>
- *Jesus Christ* – The second member of the Trinity is a “principle revealed in the creative plan.” Unity distinguishes between the person, Jesus, and the “Christ,” which is the spiritual aspect of this second person of the Trinity.
- *Holy Spirit* – The third member of the Trinity is the “executive power” that carries out the creative plan. The Holy Spirit creates a desire toward holiness in a person.
- *Man* – There is no qualitative distinction between Jesus who has the “Christ-principle” and others possessing it as well. The goal is for a person to realize the “Christ-consciousness” within. Unity believes that “all people are inherently good.”<sup>2</sup>
- *Salvation* — Salvation is the state reached when a person has passed through a series of stages in order to realize full “Christ-consciousness.”
- *Sin* – Unity’s doctrine of sin is quite ambiguous. Like sickness, sin is real. But because it is unnatural within the mind, it is not real to the person who denies its existence.
- *Church* – Unity expresses appreciation for other churches and insists that a person can remain a member of his or her own church and at the same time join Unity. However, Unity does believe itself to be the most viable of alternatives.
- *Sacraments* – Baptism, according to Unity, is a symbolic act: “Baptism by water represents the cleansing of the consciousness, spiritual baptism signifies the inflow of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is a mental and spiritual process that takes place within the individual as he or she aligns with the spirit of God. Spiritual communion takes place through prayer and meditation in the silence.” The Lord’s Supper is also symbolic: “The word of Truth is symbolized by the bread or body of Jesus Christ. The conscious realization of God-life is symbolized by the wine or blood of Jesus Christ. Unity practices communion by appropriating, or partaking, of the spiritual energy represented by these elements.”<sup>3</sup>
- *Authority* – There are no exclusive creeds or dogmas. The Bible is widely quoted but not believed to be the exclusive source of authority.
- *Reincarnation* – “Generally, Unity teaches reincarnation as a step toward immortality.”<sup>4</sup>

## *A Lutheran Response*

The Holy Scriptures, which in Lutheran theology are regarded as the only rule and norm for teaching, teach that all human beings are conceived and born in sin, inherently lacking in righteousness and inclined toward sinful thoughts, words, and deeds (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:12; Eph. 2:1-3; Rom. 8:7). At the same time, the Scriptures teach that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). “For the wages of sin death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). This Jesus, our Redeemer, is not—as in Unity—a divine “principle,” but the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, who became incarnate and in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily (Col. 2:9).

Further, the Scriptures teach that human beings are saved by grace “through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not of works, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). The Bible knows nothing of humans achieving levels of “Christ consciousness” through methods of self-reflection or moral achievement. Moreover, the good news (Gospel) of salvation is that eternal life is available only in and through Jesus Christ, who said of Himself, “I am the way, *the truth*, and the life...(John 14:6). While elements of truth are certainly present in other religions, especially with respect to the Moral Law, God’s saving grace becomes ours only through faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:16). The third *person* (not a principle or merely a power) of the Triune God, the Holy Spirit, creates such faith in the hearts of those who hear the Gospel (1 Cor. 12:3; Rom. 10:17).

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<sup>1</sup> *Metaphysical Bible Dictionary*, (Lees Summit, MO: Unity School of Christianity), 1962.

<sup>2</sup> [www.unityworldhq.org/basic\\_teachings.html](http://www.unityworldhq.org/basic_teachings.html)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.unityworldhq.org/discover\\_faq.htm](http://www.unityworldhq.org/discover_faq.htm)

<sup>4</sup> *Encyclopedia of American Religions* (Gale Research, Inc., 1993), 690.

The New Testament clearly teaches that Baptism and the Lord's Supper are divinely instituted "means of grace" through which God imparts the blessings of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation earned by Jesus Christ on the cross (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38-39; John 3:5-6; Rom. 6:3ff.; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 5:26; Titus 3:5-7; 1 Pet. 3:21; Matt. 26:26-28; 1Cor. 10:16; 11:23-26).

Lutherans regard reincarnation as contrary to what the Scriptures teach concerning death ("man is destined to die once...." Heb. 9:27) and the resurrection of the body (1 Cor. 15:42-44), and the Good News that God has declared us righteous through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:22-24)—freeing humans from all need to attempt a "purification of the soul" through their own efforts.

## ***For Further Reading***

Bach, Marcus. *The Unity Way of Life*. Unity Village, MO: Unity Books, 1972.

D'Andrade, Hugh. *Charles Fillmore: Herald of the New Age*. New York: Harper and Row, 1974.

*Dictionary of Christianity in America*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990, 1204-1205.

Lewis, James R. *The Encyclopedia of Cults and Sects and New Religions*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998.

Simmons, John K. "The Forgotten Contribution of Annie Rix Miltiz to the Unity School of Christianity," in *Novo Religio* Vol 2, No 1. 1998.

## ***Links and Websites***

[www.unityworldhq.org](http://www.unityworldhq.org)

[www.unity.org](http://www.unity.org)

[www.unityworldhq.org/silentu.htm](http://www.unityworldhq.org/silentu.htm)