

# Unity Church

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of Practical Christianity

## **New Age/New Thought - A Unity Perspective**

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In 1889 an American couple, Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, sought health by changing their ideas about God and themselves. They began publishing a little magazine and praying with people who subscribed to the magazine; they began teaching classes. Their ideas became a movement; the movement became Unity.

Today, millions of people throughout the world read Unity's magazines and books. Unity literature has been translated into many languages. Millions of people write and call Silent Unity for prayer. Unity churches and study groups, located in the United States and throughout the world, bring Unity students together to worship God, to pray and meditate, and to take classes in applying the Unity ideas in their lives.

We live in an age that has spawned and continues to spawn innumerable new religions and philosophies. In the public mind and some times in the minds of Unity students and teachers, Unity becomes confused with some of these new "isms," especially those that call themselves New Age and New Thought. Now may be an opportune time to ask what Unity is and perhaps to ask what Unity is not.

Questions that are frequently asked of Unity School of Christianity and of leaders of Unity centers are: Is Unity part of the New Age? Is Unity a New Age teaching? What relation does Unity have with New Thought and New Age organizations and churches?

First, what is Unity? In the words of Charles Fillmore: "Unity is a link in the great educational movement inaugurated by Jesus Christ. Our objective is to discern the truth in Christianity and prove it. The truth that we teach is not new, neither do we claim special revelations or discovery of new religious principles. Our purpose is to help and teach mankind to use and prove the eternal Truth taught by the Master."

Unity is usually classified as part of a broader movement called New Thought. However, Unity School of Christianity is not a member of the International New Thought Alliance. The teachings of New Thought organizations proclaim the divinity of humanity, but do not officially establish Jesus as the standard and authority. The teachings of Jesus are central to Unity.

The term "New Age" refers to a nonhomogeneous mixture of attitudes, beliefs, concerns, fads, and theories that constitute the thinking of a wide spectrum of people. It includes a new interest in ancient Eastern religions, yoga, and meditation; a revival of interest in spiritualism, but with the new name of channeling; and the practice of astrology, graphology, phrenology, palmistry, and numerology. For those who believe in reincarnation, the New Age includes the exploration of previous lives through past-life readings. Some New Age thinkers also study tarot cards, out-of-body experiences, Kirlian photography, automatic writing, healing with crystals, and much more.

All these widely differing attitudes, causes, and disciplines have become indiscriminately grouped together under the heading "New Age." The term embraces a kaleidoscope of interests, and in spite of the ancient practice of some, they are called New Age.

Unity has always felt that there are many roads to God. We believe that there is truth and spiritual help to be found in the scriptures of all the great world religions. We are glad that there are many different churches because human beings are at many different levels of spiritual understanding. The religious practices that help some to approach God and to unfold their spiritual potential might not be acceptable or useful

to others. We bless every religion and philosophy that helps people live God-centered, loving, productive lives.

One of the outstanding characteristics of Unity has been its willingness to free those who study its teachings to accept or not accept any element they desire. On the first page of *Lessons in Truth*, which has been Unity's basic textbook for most of its history, H. Emilie Cady tells the reader to take the teachings he or she may find useful and leave the ones that are not. We try to never debate our religious beliefs and practices with those who have different views.

However, the fact that Unity leaves one free to accept as much or as little as is helpful does not mean that Unity does not have a teaching; the freedom of the individual is a tenet of Unity's teaching. Although Unity feels that different teachings and beliefs may be helpful to different individuals, this does not mean that Unity accepts these different teachings as its own.

Some people have come to feel that any New Thought or New Age teaching or practice which they may find helpful is Unity and that Unity should allow other teachings to be taught in the name of Unity. This is not freedom; this is confusion.

Clearly, Unity is a Christian religion. Originally, Charles Fillmore simply called it, "Practical Christianity." He also described Unity as "primitive Christianity," by which he meant that Unity is the religion taught by Jesus and His disciples before there were churches with dogma and doctrine. Unity considers itself to be not the religion about Jesus Christ, but the religion of Jesus Christ.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Charles Fillmore had two divergent needs to unify. He wanted to make clear that Unity is a Christian organization, a religious movement, a Christian religion. But he also wanted to ensure that Unity was a response to the new scientific knowledge that was opening minds to greater understanding. As the new physics was throwing light on the nature of the material universe and releasing undreamed-of physical powers, here was a new

metaphysics throwing light on the mental universe and releasing undreamed-of powers of mind.

Unity has always taught that there is a spiritual science, a science of mind with its own laws as limiting and as liberating as the laws of the physical sciences. The purpose of most of Unity's textbooks has been to teach what these spiritual laws are and how to use them to cast off the bonds that false habits of thinking have imposed bonds of sickness, poverty, frustration, loneliness, and pain.

Connie Fillmore, president of Unity School of Christianity, has written, "These are the basic ideas that make up the Unity belief system:

1. God is absolute good, everywhere present.
2. Human beings have a spark of divinity within them, the Christ spirit within. Their very essence is of God, and therefore they are inherently good, also.
3. Human beings create their experiences by the activity of their thinking. Everything in the manifest realm has its beginning in thought.
4. Prayer is creative thinking that heightens the connection with God-Mind and therefore brings forth wisdom, healing, prosperity, and everything good.
5. Knowing and understanding the laws of life, also called Truth, are not enough. A person must also live the Truth that he or she knows."

These are Unity's well-defined teachings. Unity teaches the omnipresence of God, which implies the presence of God within all humankind. It teaches that God made each person to be perfect even as God is perfect. Unity teaches that the Christ indwells every individual, and that Jesus Christ demonstrated this for us. It teaches individual responsibility. Unity constantly and invariably directs the individual to the divinity within for greater spiritual understanding, solutions to problems; resolutions of conflict; spiritual, mental, and

physical healing, and greater demonstrations of the abundant life.

On the other hand, tarot cards, astrology, numerology, channeling, and healing with crystals -- the practices sometimes known as New Age -- which vest power in an outer agency or authority for help, advice, or direction for healing, are different from Unity. Unity always directs the individual to the Christ presence within that individual. This is not in any way meant to decry or belittle these various practices; it is merely to state that they are not the Unity way.

Unity interprets the Bible metaphysically. Briefly defined, metaphysics means "beyond the physical." In this case, it implies the reading of the Bible for its allegorical or underlying meaning.

While retaining the right to interpret the Bible metaphysically, Unity is firmly Bible-based. It does not place any authority on channeled sources. The Bible has withstood the test of time, and its teachings have been proven over the centuries by millions of people. Unity prefers to stay with proven methods and principles.

Unity's founders examined spiritualism, but for good, practical reasons decided to base their teachings exclusively on the study of the Bible. Their method of affirmative prayer and their reliance on the indwelling presence of the Christ rest upon biblical authority. Channeled material may have been helpful to many, but Unity does not teach or endorse it.

In some Unity centers or churches, you may hear Truth presented in such a way that you might think you were in a traditional Christian church, and in others Truth might be presented in strict scientific and psychological terms, with emphasis on positive thinking.

Unity does not have a creed that you must swear to or rites and practices that you must perform. Unity is more a teaching than a creed and more an attitude than a teaching. Unity is an open-ended religion. Unity does not feel that its teachings incorporate all Truth or final Truth; the search for Truth is as much a part of Truth as finding it. Unity's teachings are more a set of directions than they are a doctrine. They

are not fence posts that shut you in or shut you out; they are signposts that show you the way to Truth that you must ultimately find in yourself and for yourself.

If Unity has one cardinal teaching, it is that the true spirit of God, to which we all should turn and listen, is within us. The way to God is not through a channel or any other intermediary. You must make the quest for yourself and in yourself.

What then is the New Age and what is Unity's attitude toward it! The New Age is a potpourri of ideas, philosophies, doctrines, and practices that include everything from astrology and channeling to out-of-body and near-death experiences. It has attracted such a variety of people under its banner that it has become identified in the public mind with many unconventional beliefs and practices.

The "New Age" truly begins for any one of us when we are able to make the teachings of Jesus Christ work in our lives. This is not dependent upon time, the position of the planets, nor upon the teachings of other people -- on this or any other plane. It is an inner, spiritual journey that can be undertaken at any time. This is the "New Age" that Unity seeks to teach -- triumphant living which is available to us all.

Is Unity part of the New Age? Is Unity a New Age teaching? Unity certainly does not conform with many of the teachings that have been grouped under the name "New Age." But many thousands of individuals have found that by following Unity's teachings, they have entered a new age of rich, meaningful living.

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