

UNITY SPIRITUAL CENTER

It's not a religion... It's a way of life

How Unity Fits Into World History

By Terri M Zajac

This is a brief discussion of how our history fits into the context of world history in the western tradition of philosophy and theology over the past 2500 years. We're always building on the work of those who came before us. If there's anything that we've learned in Unity, it is that everything is connected.

So imagine a human form that represents humanity.

We'll call the right leg – the Biblical Tradition.

The Hebrew Bible, the story of Israel and its relationship with its God.

We'll call the left leg – the classical tradition of thought going back to the ancient Greeks five hundred years before Jesus. And especially my three favorite fellows: Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. You'd be amazed at how much of what you may believe today on a whole variety of subjects derives from these three guys.

Socrates – who started the whole idea of questioning everything we believe in...a tradition carried on by our own founders the Fillmores.

Plato – came up with the idea of metaphysics, although his student Aristotle actually coined the term. Metaphysics - the quest for true being beneath, behind, above, or within - the idea that there were deeper truths and higher realities to be grasped by the inquiring, contemplative mind came from Plato. He looked for the forms, the essences of ideas that we can see in our mind's eye or understand with our mind but not see in the physical world.

There was also a wonderful philosopher of antiquity named Plotinus who saw the universe in terms of a deep underlying unity which he called The One and identified it with Plato's idea of the good. That sounds slightly familiar huh?

So we have the left leg the hugely influential philosophy of the ancient Greeks and the right leg the Old Testament – the Hebrew Bible.

We can call the torso Christendom or the Middle Ages. Of course Christendom was based on the early Christian church which had emerged from a belief in Jesus life, crucifixion and resurrection. With Constantine in 312 AD Christianity became the religion of the western world.

All through the Middle Ages there is this moving, fitful dance between faith and reason. Faith – believing in what you were told by the religious authorities, and reason based on emerging science and people who chose to think for themselves. There was the Catholic church that became the center of power and authority, but there were also philosophers all along the way like Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas, and Meister Eckhart, and all kinds of mystics, who tried to synthesize the word of the Bible, Jesus' deepest teachings, and the metaphysics of the Greeks. The idea we have in Unity today of synthesizing teachings from a variety of sources is not new.

Then we have the right arm which we can call the Protestant Reformation where guys like Luther and Calvin tried to reclaim the power of the biblical word from the Catholic church. And the Left



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Arm which we can call the Renaissance where there was a return to the humanistic and secular ideals of the ancient Greeks.

The head of our body is modern times, the last few hundred years where life and thinking has changed so dramatically. From these modern times we look down at our body which is rooted in history. However now, man is freer to think, to choose, to use his mind, and to question old ideas and faith in an attempt to know God better. In modern times we have the freedom of spirit, a freedom from authority, especially religious authority. No one is to tell us what to think.

It was in this modern time, resting on this body of history and on a wave of religious experimentation in America in the spirit of freedom that the New Thought thinkers of the 19th century came into being. I hope in your study of metaphysics that you'll read about the different varieties of new thought. It must have been an exciting time to be alive and interested in metaphysics, Charles and Myrtle Fillmore were part of the wave. They pioneered a wonderful concept - Christian metaphysics – practical Christianity that was based on propositions about theological and metaphysical truths that could be demonstrated to be true in a person's personal experience. Not just because some religious authority told them so.

Charles Fillmore's approach to metaphysics and religion was based on the scientific. He and Myrtle were pragmatists. They believed that concepts about God and metaphysics must be consistent with observations of science and the spiritual experiences of people of all faiths. The Fillmores proved their beliefs to themselves.

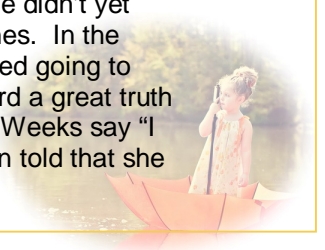
I'm very fascinated by philosophy and metaphysical history so I tend to get waylaid by the ideas of the Fillmore's more than what happened. But that is partly why I love Unity so much. It provides somewhat of a structure to explore metaphysics but tremendous freedom within that structure.

In a nutshell, here's what happened. A guy named Charles Fillmore was born in a log cabin in Minnesota in 1854. At ten he was severely injured while ice-skating. It left him with a right leg four inches shorter than his left one. This would turn out later to be somewhat of a blessing. He had to work out of necessity but he deeply wanted an education. Charles had a friend whose mother tutored him and Charles asked to sit in on the tutoring sessions. The friend's mother had been educated at Oberlin College in Ohio so she taught the two boys what she had been taught at Oberlin. At about the same time, a woman named Mary Caroline Page who preferred to be called Myrtle was studying herself at Oberlin College. So Charles and Myrtle were actually getting almost the same education although they didn't know each other.

Charles went off to seek his fortune in the Oklahoma Territory and eventually ended up in Denison Texas where he met his life's love, Miss Myrtle Page, who had moved there from the north because of health problems from her tuberculosis. They met in a literary club. When Charles first saw Myrtle delivering an original reading at the club, something within him said "there's your wife, Charles."

They married, moved to Colorado where Charles set himself up in real estate and insurance. Then business circumstances changed and they ended up in Kansas City, Missouri with two little boys, one of which was named after Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The dampness of the Middle West was not good for Myrtle and she became ill. She didn't yet have the spiritual awareness she would later have so she tried all kinds of medicines. In the spring of 1886 it looked like she wasn't going to make it and she and Charles started going to every health oriented lecture given in the area. It was at one of these that she heard a great truth that stirred her soul and changed everything. She heard a metaphysician, Dr. EB Weeks say "I am a child of God and therefore I do not inherit sickness." All her life she had been told that she had inherited tuberculosis from her parents and that she would die prematurely,



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Myrtle took this new truth within her and talked to her body for weeks, for months, and she began to improve. She closed herself up in a room next to an empty chair which she said was for the spirit of Jesus Christ and she studied the Gospels. She studied and took to heart the parts about healing. She declared that she was healed and that Charles was too, and they began a period of intensive prayer and study. Charles' own health improved although he was still somewhat skeptical. Myrtle came to believe that she was a child of the one whole and perfect mind, and that she was created to express the health that God is. Charles decided that he would take charge of his own life and go directly to God. He said if there was anything at all to prayer it had to be a two way proposition. He sat in silence some time each day for months before a breakthrough. Then he began to receive guidance. They had both received an illumination. Over time through prayer, Charles was able to lengthen his damaged leg.

They were guided to publish a magazine called Modern Thought. Modern Thought Devoted to the Spiritualization of Humanity from an Independent Standpoint. From the beginning it was open-minded and interested in Truth with a capital T in all its forms. They participated in other New Thought associations but eventually began their own Unity Society of Practical Christianity.

In December of 1892 they boldly wrote and signed a document which they would live for the rest of their lives called the Dedication and Covenant.

This is what it said:

“We, Charles Fillmore and Myrtle Fillmore, husband and wife, hereby dedicate ourselves, our time, our money, all we have and all we expect to have, to the Spirit of Truth, and through it, to the Society of Silent Unity. It being understood and agreed that the Said Spirit of Truth shall render unto us an equivalent for this dedication, in peace of mind, health of body, wisdom, understanding, love, life, and an abundant supply of all things necessary to meet every want without making any of these things the object of our existence. In the presence of the Conscious Mind of Christ Jesus, this 7th day of December A.D. 1892.” (signed) Charles Fillmore Myrtle Fillmore

It's interesting to me that this idea of a covenant comes straight from the Hebrew bible – the covenant was the structure of the relationship between the Israelites and the Lord God. It was a set of promises and commands that bound the two together like lord and vassal or husband and wife. So we see here in this very important act of faith on their part, how they were influenced by that right leg of history. Interestingly, this covenant was discovered only after the Fillmores had died. They kept it secret but they lived it their whole lives.

The first few years of the Unity movement was dedicated largely to the development and expansion of a prayer ministry called Silent Unity, the publication of Unity magazine and Wee Wisdom, a magazine for children, and set up a Sunday school and classes for teaching Truth, and publishing a very important book called “Lessons in Truth” by Dr H Emilie Cady.

They began holding lectures and services trying to avoid conflicts with established churches. The Fillmores never meant to start a church, but to provide a place for spiritual education for all people regardless of their creed.

From there the Unity movement expanded, outgrowing buildings in Kansas City and eventually winding up on the beautiful property that is now Unity Village about 45 minutes from Kansas City. Unity's worldwide ministries of prayer, publishing, education and retreats help people of all faiths apply positive spiritual principles in their daily lives. Literally millions of people around the world call Silent Unity every year for prayer support. Millions of little Daily Word magazines are published monthly. And nearly a thousand Unity churches and centers thrive worldwide.



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I highly recommend that you read about Myrtle in this wonderful book *Myrtle Fillmore, Mother of Unity*, and read some of Charles' writings in this great book: *The Essential Charles Fillmore – collected writings of a Missouri Mystic*. And the *History of Unity* by James Dillet Freeman.

Their stories are fascinating and their impact on our lives and the world is profound. And all they did was do what we're doing here. They studied and prayed and looked within as deeply as they could and took action on what they learned. Most importantly to me, they had courage. I've drawn on that courage many times in my life.

