

## *The Nature of God*

The third section of what is known within the Unity ordination process as “credo” looks at what we understand to be the nature of God. Before I begin, however, I need to stake out a perspective that may be new to what you have learned about metaphysics in Unity. In some sense, this entire credo succeeds or fails on whether my perspective is an accurate analysis of metaphysical thinking. It will come up time and again in the remaining insights. This perspective is about the difference between Metaphysics and Mysticism.

### *Metaphysics.*

The language other metaphysical Christians and I use in talking about God and the nature of God is the language of metaphysics, at least from the perspective of western tradition. It may be a surprise to many, but what we know in Unity circles as metaphysics did not originate with the Fillmores nor from any source in New Thought. And it may genuinely surprise others that metaphysics also did not develop from the teachings of Judaism or Jesus.

The true origin of metaphysics is from the classical Greek philosophers, the same source from which we have our current understanding of the nature of medicine, geometry, and ethics. That is to say that the metaphysics we use in Unity is as fundamental to the Western understanding of God as the Hippocratic Oath is to

medicine, or the Pythagorean theorem is to geometry, and as is the concept of virtue to our understanding of ethical living.

### *Authority in Christian metaphysics.*

By choosing to use the language of metaphysics when talking about God, we give our theology a specific authority, or grounding. Authority in religious matters can be a real problem. In science, we have no difficulty recognizing that authority rests with proven truths. But in the world of religion, we still tend to look for authority in churches and traditions, which evolve. By doing so, we tend to find our authority in the opinions of theologians, who change their explanations even more rapidly. Let me stress that there are no external authorities in metaphysical religion. I will repeat that several times — *there are no external authorities in metaphysical religion.*

The advantage of grounding our beliefs in the classical western metaphysical tradition is that we, unlike nearly all other Christian denominations, do not proclaim that neither our teaching nor our teachers are “privileged.” We do not claim that what we say is true because the Bible says so. Nor is what we say true because the Church says so, nor the Pope, nor Billy Graham, not Martin Luther, John Calvin, or Thomas Aquinas. Not Augustine, Origin, Tertullian, or Clement. Not Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Not the Apostle Paul, not even Jesus.

Instead, we begin our spiritual claims by asking, “Do you believe in geometry, in medicine, in ethics?” In other words, we start with a level playing field in our discussion

about the absolute reality of things. This is vitally important to us in postmodern, post-Christian culture because it grounds our beliefs not in “what we confess” and certainly not in “what we feel.” Instead, our beliefs are grounded in what has been brought to western civilization — modern medicine, advanced science, and democratic government. In other words, it may be rightfully claimed that Greek metaphysical teachings about the ultimate reality of God are the counterpart to much of our modern understanding of life. That is where I begin when I teach Unity classes.

### *Mysticism.*

So much for metaphysics. But there is another language we often use (inappropriately) when speaking *about* God: the language of mysticism. Mystical language should be used when talking about our *experience* of God; it is not appropriate to use mystical language when speaking about God *per se*. The following section, *Humankind's Relationship to God*, is entirely devoted to our *experience* of God, and in that paper, I will use mystical language, specifically the language of Emilie Cady.

As I will explain in that section and throughout this credo, mysticism, rooted in our experience of God, is as close to authority as we will get in metaphysical Christianity. To some extent, we place our authority and trust in our *experience* of God when studying the teachings of Jesus, the Bible (metaphysically interpreted), the Church (as experienced by others), and other

authorities validated by experience. Does my experience of God seem to be confirmed by the knowledge of God described by Jesus? Does it seem biblical? Is it in alignment with others in my church? These are valid questions, and the authority I use to talk about them can only be mystical language.

## 7. *God as Meta-Narrative: Mind, Idea, Expression*

A narrative is a story that explains how something works or why something happens. An example is the theory of evolution, which describes how life has come to its present state. There are some narratives, however, that we use to make sense of the big picture of all we know about our world. They are meta-narratives. Such narratives describe our understanding of the cosmos, of all that is.

Until a few hundred years ago, the most prominent meta-narrative in the Western world was Creation, Sin, Judgment, and Redemption. This story — that the world we know is of the providence of God, who created the heavens and the earth; that we who have been given dominion disobeyed God's commands; that God has judged humanity, so our lives are difficult; that God is merciful and offers forgiveness — shaped the worldview for much of society.

It's nearly impossible to overstate the importance of this meta-narrative. Four simple words provide an overview of the Old and New Testament, give structure to Evangelical testimonials, serve as categories for theological writing and, in a most subtle way, remind us each moment of our present state of consciousness. It is what we know today as a meme, a short and simple phrase that structures our entire sense of reality.

Many people find this meta-narrative no longer makes sense. New understandings have challenged the story behind each word. The problem is that no alternative meta-narrative has emerged to take its place.

This insight offers a new meta-narrative based on metaphysical understanding and modern thinking: Mind, Idea, and Expression. All I know about God, the cosmos, and what I am experiencing, internally and externally, can be understood through the metaphysical Christian meta-narrative of Mind, Idea, and Expression: *God-Mind*, emanating divine *Ideas* which are *Expressed* into the manifest world we know so well.

### *How the metaphysical meta-narrative came to be.*

The metaphysical meta-narrative originated with classic Greek thinking. The early Greeks attempted to distinguish what is real from what is false, what is true from what is an appearance, and what is eternal from what is temporary.

For the Greeks, the meta-narrative, or the basic explanation of Reality (all that is), begins not with God, nor with matter, but with Ideas (capitalized because ideas are foundational spiritual entities). Ideas contain the “essence” or “pattern” of Life Expressions. When we observe the shape or behavior of something in the material world, we also observe the essence that underlies it.<sup>60</sup> So the original meta-narrative conceived in classical Greek thought is Idea and Expression.

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<sup>60</sup> If you are a metaphysician, you will *understand* the essence. If you are a mystic, you will *experience* the essence as well.

But a question arose about whether Reality is a meaningless combination of unrelated events or if Reality has a purpose. Is there order and purpose in life events, or is life chaotic and without meaning? To answer the question, some early Greeks talked about a “first cause.” They declared that there was an unknown, transcendent First Cause, known as *Nous*, who emitted the Ideas that ultimately shape what we know as life expression. The Jewish and Christian faiths associated *Nous* with the notion of a transcendent, loving, and moral God, described in mystical language. This led to our modern understanding of God as loving and acting according to principle. The result was a new meta-narrative: God-Mind, Idea, Expression.

Metaphysical Christians added one last twist to the evolution of our present meta-narrative: the immanence of God, or, as we say in Unity, *the spark of divinity within*. In the Vine and the Branches parable,<sup>61</sup> Jesus taught that he and the Father are one, the kingdom is within, and all we do is through our unity with God. Metaphysical Christians understand that God’s mind and our mind are one, so God-Mind in our meta-narrative has come to us as Mind, Idea, and Expression.

These three words form our new understanding of all that occurs and exists. For a Christian metaphysician, Reality is that which emanates from the mind of God. Because it includes Ideas as well as Expression, it is also the first cause in all processes in a world that works based on cause and effect. Reality is capitalized because it,

<sup>61</sup> *John 15:1-7*. <https://www.truthunity.net/web/john#15>

alone, *is*, and everything else is said to “exist” or be “expressed.” God is understood as the first cause of our meta-narrative of Reality. As Emilie Cady said, “God *is*, man [and everything else] *exists*.”<sup>62</sup>

Let me describe several ways this modern understanding of the nature of God appears to me and in my life.

### 1. *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

Jesus declared that the Father sent him and that he (Jesus) would send us the Holy Spirit. This means that there is a progression of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That progression corresponds to a progression of Mind, Idea, and Expression. Early Christian writers quickly recognized and adopted the progression, not as Mind, Idea, and Expression but as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Orthodox Christian theologians have not acknowledged this metaphysical origin of the Trinity, the central Christian doctrine. They would benefit from doing so because many have found that the meta-narrative of Mind, Idea and Expression offers a perfectly rational *understanding* of the most incomprehensible Christian doctrine: God is of one essence in three persons.

Further, this metaphysical *understanding* supports a mystical *experience* of the Trinity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are nouns. Mind, Idea, and Expression are nouns but are also a process of God’s providence that may be

<sup>62</sup> *Lessons in Truth, Statement of Being*. <https://www.truthunity.net/books/emilie-cady-lessons-in-truth-study-edition-1>

experienced. So the metaphysical narrative solves the most confusing Christian doctrine and provides a pathway for Christian practice.

## 2. *God as Principle, God as Presence, God as Grace.*

There is a long-standing controversy in metaphysical circles about “God as a principle.” It is taught by some that God is Principle and that any other understanding is embedded and childish theology. I disagree. And so does Emilie Cady.<sup>63</sup>

That I may experience Jesus Christ as a loving *personal presence* is not only valid but *may be the only objective of the Christian faith*. Likewise, I can *experience* the grace of the Holy Spirit in expression without understanding God as operating impersonally as a principle. The Jesus I understand and also experience said to let the little children come unto Him. And, as Eric Butterworth famously said, quoting Meister Eckhart, an early metaphysical Christian, our only obligation to God is to allow God to be God in us<sup>64</sup>.

Because metaphysical Christianity detaches the metaphysical understanding of God from the mystical experience of God, I can allow God to be God, that is, a Being which I may fully *experience* as a personal presence and as a carrier of grace and, at the same time, fully *understand* as a principle.

<sup>63</sup> *Lessons in Truth, Statement of Being*. <https://www.truthunity.net/books/emilie-cady-lessons-in-truth-study-edition-1> Paragraph 23.

<sup>64</sup> Eric Butterworth, *Practical Metaphysics*. Lecture 8, Demonstration. <https://www.truthunity.net/audio/eric-butterworth/practical-metaphysics/demonstration>

## 3. *Silence, Thinking, Affirmations/Denials.*

Unity and other metaphysical religions teach three primary practices of Prayer: Silence, thinking, and affirmations and denials. These practices correspond to our understanding of God as Mind, Idea, and Expression.

*We communicate with God-Mind through Silence* because God-Mind is transcendent and, to a large extent, unknowable (unintelligible) to human understanding. Silence is an appropriate response to that which cannot be directly known or understood.

*We engage with divine ideas using thinking*<sup>65</sup> because divine ideas are formative, numerous, and fluid. They do not desire to be grasped or worshipped but instead engaged by our mind's activity so that truth is revealed. Thinking engages divine ideas. Many, if not most in the millennial generation, are exploring science and technology in the same way that Charles Fillmore did so many years ago. Perhaps they will discover that their spiritual unfoldment has been influenced as much by their innovative algorithms as meditation.

*We collaborate with God in Expression through our affirmations and denials* because the expression of God in the world is often a very human and iterative process of trial and letting go. We stay committed to this collaboration with God by repeating affirmations and denials, holding thoughts in mind until God's perfect expression is manifest.

<sup>65</sup> *Lessons in Truth, Thinking*. <https://www.truthunity.net/books/emilie-cady-lessons-in-truth-study-edition-2>

#### 4. Oneness, Wholeness, Prosperity.

Three great affirmations from Hypatia Hasbrouck's *Handbook of Positive Prayer* have profoundly influenced my understanding of Mind, Idea, and Expression. They are:

- ◆ My mind and the Mind of God are one.
- ◆ With Godlike thoughts, I think into being a Godlike world.
- ◆ I send forth only thoughts of good and good returns in overwhelming measure.

To me, these affirmations state as clearly as possible my understanding of the oneness of God, the wholeness of God, and the prosperity of God. I use them to structure my daily prayer practice. They provide me a framework for calling into consciousness the providence of God.

#### 5. Bondedness, Play, Maturity.

The meta-narrative of Mind, Idea, and Expression is also a meta-narrative for the progression of life.<sup>66</sup> It goes something like this:

(1) *Bondedness*: we are not born in sin; instead, we are born in bondedness. The first order of business for a newborn baby is to know to whom it goes to get its needs met. The same is true for the newborn metaphysical Christian. To whom do we go to get our needs met? We

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<sup>66</sup> *Why I am a Metaphysical Christian*. <https://www.truthunity.net/unity-and-christianity/mark-hicks-why-i-am-a-metaphysical-christian>

go to God, and we do so by aligning our minds with the Mind of God. Without bonding, we find that life is always a struggle. Our job as metaphysical Christians is to align with God just as a baby will align its attention with the parent.

(2) *Play*: we grow as Christians through imagination and trusting playfulness rather than by will and understanding. Childhood is a time of play and exploration. Metaphysically, play is trying on divine ideas to find the one representing the true essence of who we are.

(3) *Maturity*: eventually, we grow up, and, at that time, will and understanding guide our personal development, leading to mature self-expression.

All people understand the narrative of bondedness, play, and maturity regardless of culture, education, or worldview. It is why I am a metaphysical Christian.

#### 6. Omnipresence, Omniscience, Omnipotence.

All of the above shows how the meta-narrative of Mind, Idea, and Expression provides a new understanding of three well-known theological terms. God-Mind is *omnipresent*, everywhere present, open to bonding at all times with all humanity and all creation through the practice of Silence and stillness. God-Ideas are *omniscient*, all-knowing, available to heal and to make whole all things through our processing of divine ideas in our thoughts. God in Expression is *omnipotent* — all-powerful — making manifest our likeness and image of God though affirming what is true and denying error.

### *Meta-narrative as the Providence of God.*

In summary, the work of the Christian metaphysician is to establish a unity of the human mind (using the meta-narrative) with the Providence of God. One faces God (Oneness or Bondedness), relaxes the soul enough so it can receive direct inspiration from God-Mind (which is known as truth and is why Unity people refer to themselves as “truth students”) in the form of divine ideas (Play) and, using the thought process of the human mind, cause the expression of divine ideas into the physical world (Maturity). The quality of our physical world, as we experience it, is mainly based on the purity of our metaphysical work.

### *A favorite prayer of Charles Fillmore.*

Charles Fillmore often used a prayer that he most likely learned from Emma Curtis Hopkins, the woman who taught him and Myrtle Fillmore:

Jesus Christ is now here, raising me up to that place where the Holy Spirit pours out its inspiration upon me.<sup>67</sup>

This prayer embodies the process of how to pray to God. And it does so metaphysically. I include it here because it not only builds on the metaphysical Christian understanding of God as Mind, Idea, and Expression but

<sup>67</sup> *Unity Prayer Guide Jesus Christ Is Here Now.* <https://www.truthunity.net/tracts/unity-prayer-guide-jesus-christ-is-here-now>

also because it is functional. The prayer has three phrases.

1. *Jesus Christ is now here.* Charles would sometimes replace this phrase with the well-known affirmation, “We are now in the presence of pure being.” Both phrases convey that the process of prayer begins with a consciousness of the oneness of our mind with God-Mind. We do so by calling on God by name.

The calling of God’s name is also found in Hypatia Hasbrouck’s affirmation, “My mind and the mind of God are one.” We are to understand that it is the nature of God to be available to all people of faith by aligning the human mind with God-Mind. The process begins with God-Mind.

2. *Raising me up to that place.* God’s nature is to be accessible to humans in prayer by shifting our attention from daily life to another place. That place is upward. The Psalmist calls us to look *upward* into the hills; Emilie Cady calls us to find the secret place *most high*, and it is for St Luke, the *upper room*. The process of prayer, metaphysically understood, is a raising of consciousness. God is not perceived in ordinary moments of our life. Instead, God’s nature is to engage human beings when human consciousness has been raised.

What goes on in the upward place of consciousness is affirmed by Hypatia Hasbrouck’s affirmation: “With Godlike thoughts, I think into Being a Godlike world.” Metaphysically, “Being” is an aspect of God that exists but is not yet expressed. Regardless, the process does not rely on language. It depends on consciousness, which must be raised.

3. *Where the Holy Spirit pours out its inspiration upon me.* The final phrase of the metaphysical prayer conveys that when humans are raised in consciousness, God's nature is to operate as a principle, pouring out inspiration without limits.

It is important to note that human experience is changed, not human conditions.<sup>68</sup> Hypatia Hasbrouck affirms that experiences are changed when she declares that "I send forth only [thoughts of] good and good [experience] returns in overwhelming measure."

### *Metaphysical Christianity as a "return to the sources."*

I have claimed that we are entering the 3rd era of Christian history, which I call the era of metaphysical Christianity. If so, the seeds of that era will be traced directly back to Renaissance humanism. The Renaissance occurred at the peak of Catholic excesses in Rome and the early stages of the Protestant Reformation. The Renaissance was a "rebirth" of art and culture, and Renaissance Humanism brought that rebirth to church doctrines. Its best-known advocate was Erasmus of Rotterdam.

Protestants were not the only ones who reacted negatively to Roman Catholic extravagance. Many within the church were calling for reform. Their motto was *ad Fontes*, which in Latin means "to the sources." The sources, for them, were Plato and Aristotle and the whole of the Greek philosophical foundations from which

<sup>68</sup> That is the point I made in *Insight 6: Transforming Evil into a Greater Good*.

Christianity grew in the Mediterranean. They were Humanists, "a philosophical stance that emphasizes the individual and social potential and agency of human beings [that] consider human beings as the starting point for serious moral and philosophical inquiry."<sup>69</sup> The Renaissance, or rebirth, was, for them, the rebirth of the potential of the human being.

If you search "*ad Fontes*" or "back to the sources," you will see writings by Catholics who will talk about returning to early church writers or writings by Evangelicals who will talk about returning to the scriptures. Everyone wants to go "back to the sources." However, there is little agreement about what those sources may be, nor much agreement about what is reborn by returning to them.

Metaphysical Christianity does not go back to the church's authority, nor how a particular church may interpret the Scriptures. Metaphysical Christianity, like Erasmus and other Christian Humanists, goes back to the sources of western civilization.

### *Is Christian metaphysics relevant today?*

The fundamental problem facing Christianity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is *irrelevance*. Or, to put it in words that Phil White might use, "is Christianity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century functional?" I sense that 2.3 billion Christians — one-third of the world population — are not rejecting Christianity. Instead, they are just looking for a better

<sup>69</sup> Wikipedia, *Humanism*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humanism>



meta-narrative. We, too, should not be walking out of Christianity. Instead, we should reclaim Christianity with a new name — Metaphysical Christianity.

The God meta-narrative and metaphysical prayer are also relevant because we are now in a post-Christian era. In the past 50 years, much of what has been received from traditional Christian theology and Greek metaphysical thinking has been called into question, not only about the nature of God but also about medicine, science, and ethics. This is known in postmodernism as “deconstruction” — rejecting the received teaching without replacing it with anything new.

There are signs that a new understanding of metaphysics may emerge, particularly in Christian Metaphysics. Unity is an early form of this emerging understanding that will play out over several hundred years. Our task is to remain true to our metaphysical and Christian roots while the world mindset evolves away from Evangelicalism.

Evidence that a new understanding of Christian metaphysics may be emerging comes from what we see in Barnes & Noble, which I mentioned in the Introduction. The proportion of Christian books to metaphysical books in Barnes & Noble is a good indication of what has been true for two millennia — approximately 35-40% of the “religious” population (those who seek spiritual resources and are free to do so privately, without social stigma) look to some form of metaphysical teaching for their spiritual nourishment.

The 2.3 billion Christians in the world are not looking for a school or a denomination, and they have their desire

for interesting ideas and social justice fulfilled by secular associations. As things settle down, they will do what Christians have always done in times of great faith challenge — they will “return to the sources.” There, just beyond the racks of books about medicine, science, and ethics, they will find the shelf of books devoted to the eternal meta-narrative of Christian metaphysics, that God is Mind, Idea, and Expression.