

## *Ministry as Worship Consciousness and Skills*

The following three insights look at worship from the perspective of a metaphysical Christian. The language we use in metaphysical worship is different from the language we use in metaphysical education. In education, we use the language of metaphysics. In worship, we use mystical language, the sacred language of relationships, the language of “I-Thou.”

### *How worship drives confidence and commitment.*

In Insight 14, *Rational Choice in the Religious Marketplace*, I listed two *human* factors — confidence expressed by the spiritual leader and confidence expressed by the congregants — that drive religious commitment. These two factors are related to education and the understanding obtained through metaphysical study.

But there are four more (superhuman) factors that drive religious commitment.<sup>159</sup> These factors are related to worship and are mystical in nature. I offer these as evidence of the importance of mystical experience in ministry. Here they are, along with how I see them being expressed in metaphysical Christian worship:

1. *Confidence increases to the degree that people have mystical experiences (a sense of contact with God).* Mystical experiences are experiences of God active in our life. If God is remote, unreachable, or not concerned, then we have no mystical experience of God and there is little reason to place confidence in the ministry. Charles Fillmore “went to headquarters.” Emerson called upon intuition. Metaphysical Christians refer to these mystical experiences as Spiritual Baptism.

2. *Confidence increases to the extent that people participate in religious rituals. This is a form of exchange.* Rituals build faith. Rituals carry us into a mood (emotion), activating the limbic system. Metaphysical Christians often refer to these rituals as Spiritual Communion.

3. *Confidence is strengthened when prayer builds bonds of affection with God. This is a form of exchange.* Like rituals, prayer has a mood (emotion). When metaphysical Christians gather for worship, they typically call their services Prayer Services.

4. *Confidence increases to the degree that miracles are attributed to the worship experience. Miracles get the benefit of the doubt compared to magic and science because God could be saying “no.”* In metaphysical Christian circles, gatherings for healing and other miracles are called Healing Services.

These four factors are, for me, an informed way of identifying what is truly essential in worship, particularly for the metaphysical Christian. Stark and Finke are saying that religious confidence (and commitment)

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<sup>159</sup> Stark and Finke. *Acts of Faith*, pp.106-113

increases with: our mystical experience and contact with God, our ritualistic communion and engagement with God, our conversations with God in the form of prayer, and the extent to which we attribute healing miracles to these experiences, engagements, and prayers.<sup>160</sup> The expression of these factors in metaphysical Christian worship are Spiritual Baptism and Spiritual Communion (Insight 20), Prayer Services (Insight 21), and Healing Services (Insight 22).

What is distinct about these forms of worship is that they offer an experience of engagement with God as a benevolent presence. These four forms of metaphysical worship build on the experience described in Insight 10, *Benevolent and Engaged or Distant and Benign?* That is to say, God is here now, experienced through the Christ within, raising us to a place where the Holy Spirit pours out its inspiration upon us.

<sup>160</sup> Stark and Finke (2000), *Confidence and Risk*. Mystical experience (p.110), religious rituals (p.107), prayer (p.109), miracles (p.109).

## 20. *Spiritual Baptism and Communion*

Baptism and communion are the two primary rituals found in the Christian church. Both have to do with church membership: baptism is performed when one becomes a member, and communion is given regularly to sustain one's membership in the church.

But these rituals also represent a spiritual dimension of one's "membership," not only with the community but also with God. That dimension is mystical in experience and metaphysical in meaning. Unity and other metaphysical Christian movements focus on these spiritual dimensions of baptism and communion and typically leave the practice of these rituals to the established churches and their explanations.

This means that metaphysical Christians typically participate in the water baptism and eucharistic celebrations of Catholic and Protestant churches but understand and experience these celebrations in unique ways. Those understandings and experiences are known as *Spiritual Baptism* and *Spiritual Communion*.

### *How Spiritual Baptism was once practiced in Unity.*

To illustrate how we might understand and experience spiritual baptism, here is how Unity Chapel in Kansas City introduced Spiritual Baptism in the 1930s:<sup>161</sup>

<sup>161</sup> *A Manual of Special Unity Services* (1937) <https://www.truthunity.net/books/a-manual-of-special-unity-services>

The simple form of spiritual baptism given here is used at Unity Chapel in Kansas City the fourth Sunday of each month in connection with the induction of new members. The minister announces that new members are to be received and invites them, as the chairman reads their names, to come forward and stand facing him to receive spiritual baptism. The minister briefly welcomes them into membership in Unity Society, concluding his re-marks as follows:

Here is the order of service that was used:

MINISTER. In Unity we do not make use of water in baptism, as did John of old, but prefer instead to follow the example of Jesus, whose form of baptism John foretold (Mark 1:7, 8): "There cometh after me he that is mightier than I, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I baptized you in water, but he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit."

The account of Jesus' baptism of His disciples is found in the 20th chapter of the Gospel of John, verses 19 to 22: "When therefore it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the mist, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had said this, he showed unto them his hands and his side. The disciples therefore were glad, when they saw the Lord. Jesus therefore said to them again, Peace be unto you: as the Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit."

So, in His blessed name, we invite you to receive that Holy Spirit. Will the congregation kindly rise, and repeat for these our new members, this charge:

"In the name and through the power of Jesus Christ, receive ye the Holy Spirit."

Let us repeat the statement first aloud and then silently, three times.

The music of hymn No. 295 (Unity Song Selections) is played softly while the minister leads the congregation in repeating the blessing. Then the soloist or choir sings the words of the hymn while the minister, new members, and congregation stand silent. At the conclusion of the hymn, the minister says, "Amen," and the new members and the congregation are seated.

*Baptism is not complete until we are raised up.*

What is alluded to is that the baptism of Jesus is a raising up of another person to a place where they can receive the Holy Spirit. Baptism begins with a cleansing process of water, but baptism is not metaphysically complete until the regeneration of the Holy Spirit is understood and experienced. You can read more about this in the *Metaphysical Bible Dictionary* entry on Baptism<sup>162</sup>, which reads in part,

So water baptism symbolizes a cleansing process, the letting go of error. It is the first step in the realization of Truth. [But] Spiritual baptism is positive, a taking on, an affirmation... Then there come into our mind ideas

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<sup>162</sup> *Metaphysical Bible Dictionary*, Baptism. <https://www.truthunity.net/mbd/baptism>

direct from the Fountainhead, and we see everything in a new light. This baptism of the Holy Spirit quickens the whole man.

So the first thing the metaphysical Christian needs to know about baptism is that it is a two-step process and, most important, baptism is not complete until the second step is taken – when one's consciousness is raised up. This is an essential difference metaphysical Christians have with the typical understanding and experience of baptism in mainstream Christianity. Recall Insight 1, *Three Tenets of the Metaphysical Christian Tradition*: “we are not saved by confession, rather we are saved by transformation.”

*The body is baptized just as much as the soul.*

But there is more to the process of baptism than a raising of consciousness. The *Metaphysical Bible Dictionary* entry continues:

when the mind has received words of Truth the way is open for the healing power, which is called the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of wholeness, to *descend further into the body consciousness*. This outpouring, or inpouring, of the Holy Spirit is the second baptism.

Take note of the phrase “to descend further into the body consciousness.” The second thing the metaphysical Christian needs to know about baptism is that the body is baptized just as much as the soul. One of the greatest tragedies in the 2000-year history of Christianity is the

abandonment by mainstream Christianity of the importance of the body and the body's appropriate state of health and wholeness. One problem with westerners' interest in eastern religion and New Age spirituality is the perception that the body is an illusion. The body is not an illusion, and it is not evil. My body is precious, and so is yours.

*How do we spiritually baptize others?*

We, as metaphysical Christians, need to know the third thing about baptism. As followers of Jesus Christ, we baptize others all the time.

Charles Fillmore reminds us that [Jesus] “told his followers that when they went to that upper room in Jerusalem, they would receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit *with power*.”<sup>163</sup> He continues,

A prayer treatment by an experienced spiritual healer is a baptism, with power proportioned to the spiritual understanding of the healer. The lowest method of imparting spiritual baptism is by the laying on of hands and prayer. The highest is realizing the Holy Spirit presence and its expression through the power of the word. Jesus began His ministry by doing the former, but at the end He sent His word and healed by means of it.

What this means is that each person I meet at any time and any place is being baptized by my understanding of

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<sup>163</sup> Charles Fillmore, *Atom-Smashing Power of Mind*, pp. 66-67. <https://www.truthunity.net/books/atom-smashing-power-of-mind-63-69>

what that person truly is. If I can recognize the Holy Spirit's presence in you and everyone I encounter, I am doing the work Jesus has called me to do. When we express that understanding, we use the language of "I-Thou", which is mystical language.

*Spiritual Communion in the metaphysical Christian tradition.*

Think about what the Last Supper might have been like for Jesus. He was out of time. He was about to be betrayed and arrested. This moment was his last opportunity to tell his disciples what he was all about. It just may be that a spiritual insight came to him as he broke off a portion of bread. If so, he expressed it in such a profound way that the six words he spoke have come to be the heart of every liturgical celebration for over two millennia:

Take, eat, this is my body.

To get a deeper understanding of these words, I did what most Christians do: I went to the Bible and read the passages where these six words of the institution of the Last Supper are found.<sup>164</sup> The Metaphysical Bible Interpretations for Luke 22<sup>165</sup> makes four points, but pay special attention to #2:

<sup>164</sup> Matthew 26:26-30, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:14-23, I Corinthians 11:23-26

<sup>165</sup> Metaphysical Bible Interpretation of Luke Chapter 22. <https://www.truthunity.net/mbi/luke-22>

1. *The physical elements of the Lord's Supper, bread and wine, symbolize substance and life.* The essence of wine and bread is behind the physical elements: spiritual life and spiritual substance.

2. *Spiritual life and spiritual substance can only be appropriated when the recipient spiritually discerns them.*

3. *Jesus himself could take no part in eating the physical bread and wine* because, as outer symbols, they were inadequate to the spiritual appropriation of life and substance for someone in his spiritual consciousness.

4. *The disciples had not yet been raised to spiritual consciousness; therefore, they needed the outer representation to lead them to the inner realization of the substance and life that the bread and the wine symbolize:* "Do this in remembrance of me." As their faculty of spiritual discernment was raised (through their twelve powers), so was their (and our) capacity to appropriate spiritual life and spiritual substance.

Point #2, that spiritual life and spiritual substance can only be appropriated when the recipient spiritually discerns it, is a radical teaching. If it's true, all the theological debates about what happens when bread and wine are consecrated go out the window. Nothing will happen when the bread and wine are consecrated. Whatever does happen occurs when the bread and wine are appropriated.

If our consciousness is raised up, then a Spiritual Communion takes place. If our consciousness is low, then we get bread and wine. What changes the bread and wine to the body and blood of Jesus Christ depends on the

recipient's consciousness; it does not depend on the ecclesiastical authority of the priest. It is you and I — our power of spiritual understanding — that allows spiritual substance and spiritual life to be appropriated by the soul and thereby bring life and substance to the body. Metaphysical theology doesn't get any better than that.

Furthermore, the ordination of the priest and the authority of the church that the priest represents are irrelevant. This opens up a whole new perspective on the nature of the body of Christ. Is it about ordinations and clergy? Or is it about *receiving* — appropriating — the body and blood of Jesus Christ?

In other words, there is a direct linkage between the words of Jesus: *take, eat, this is my body*, and Charles Fillmore's teaching on regeneration of the body. As Charles writes in this article:

Appropriation of the bread and wine comes through affirmation of spiritual substance and spiritual life ... God invites us all to this spiritual banquet, and the Father himself will be our companion in the joys of the divine communion. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with me."<sup>166</sup>

When I attend a communion service, regardless of the denomination and regardless of the authority of the celebrant, my mind is focused on spiritual discernment of

the presence of Jesus Christ. And when I hear the words "take, eat, this is my body," I call to mind the words of Paul that were the favorite of Charles Fillmore: *Christ in you, the hope of glory*.

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<sup>166</sup> *Take, Eat, This is my Body*. <https://www.truthunity.net/unity-and-christianity/take-eat-this-is-my-body>