

21. Prayer Services

According to Stark and Finke, people won't commit to a church unless people pray. The form of prayer is irrelevant; what matters is that people have faith or hope that there is a personal God who hears. They write:

Prayer builds bonds of affection and confidence between humans and a god or gods... Prayers may be silent or spoken out loud, impromptu or regular, formulaic or spontaneous, mandatory or voluntary, and they may express need, praise, hope, joy, or even despair ... But, in all cases, prayers are meant to be heard ... prayer is ostensibly a manifestation of a personal tie with the transcendent ... and constitutes an act of faith or hope that it will reach its mark.¹⁶⁷

How Unity leaders once talked about prayer.

*On Wings of Truth*¹⁶⁸ is a video produced by Unity sometime in the 1990s. Segment 8 is about prayer, as described by several leading Unity ministers. None of these Unity leaders make any mention of the language or the words we use in prayer. There is no caution about talking to God. On the contrary, Sharon Poindexter and Jim Rosemergy use very traditional language in these clips: "Praying, often, for me is my talking at God, talking

to God" (Poindexter); "Through prayer, we give ourselves to Spirit, and we are then like the clay that the Father can then work with" (Rosemergy).

Prayer is not about the words we use, and it is not about the language. *What matters in prayer is not what we say but who we become.* It's about the consciousness from which we pray, and the character expressed. As Jesus said to the Pharisees, your language is irrelevant.

The following are audio clips from several other highly regarded Unity ministers. You may click through to the footnote for their references.¹⁶⁹ They show that our founders taught that we ought to pray to God from a consciousness of God's good. Unity teaches that you and I are a Christ, an expression of God and that we should call God forth through that expression. Calling God forth is talking to God.

♦ From Myrtle Fillmore: You remember the spiritual inspiration that Paul had, an inspiration that is also ours as we claim the light, power, and love that is God's expression through us. If the spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies through his spirit that dwelleth in you ...

♦ From James Dillet Freeman: I wrote this when my first wife was dying and I went to pray in the Silent Unity Prayer Room and as I prayed I heard a voice, an audible voice like mine is now. I'm always listening for an inner voice but that morning I heard a voice that was not mine. And this is what the voice said to me. Do you need me? I am there. ...

♦ From Martha Smock: When we pray in the name and through the power of Jesus Christ, is it the mere

¹⁶⁷ Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: explaining the Human Side of Religion*, University of California Press, 2000, p.109

¹⁶⁸ *On Wings of Truth*. <https://www.truthunity.net/video/on-wings-of-truth>

¹⁶⁹ *Do You Belong Around Here?* <https://www.truthunity.net/the-human-side-of-unity/do-you-belong-around-here>

pronouncement of the name that heals, that transforms, that blesses? No, it is what we experience when we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus said 'where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them. When even one person prays in the name of Jesus Christ he invokes the living presence of the loving Christ. We're not alone when we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, he is with us. His presence and power are with us and the power that is of God flows through us...

- ♦ From May Rowland: If you feel disturbed, restless, and perhaps fearful, this is the time to listen to that ever-present one within you saying "Be still and know that I am God" ... Feel and realize that this is God talking to you. A great peace and calm will come over you and you will be assured that God is looking after you. Feel the presence in the quietness of your own soul then you will feel his presence always. You will always feel his presence with you and about you.

- ♦ From Eric Butterworth: What this says is, in its simplest possible terms is while you may be involved in praying to God, the ultimate reality is God is praying for you. Understand that? The Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom, the Allness has but one intent as far as you're concerned, that is to perfect itself and to express itself in and as you. ... This is why I say so often, "don't pray to God but pray from the consciousness of God ... Be still and know that ... God is present, not absent ..." and I allow that infinite process to do its perfect work ... it has no other intent as far as I'm concerned except to heal me, to guide me, to direct me ...

- ♦ From Ernest Wilson: That prayer is not only asking, you see, but more deeply it is knowing, knowing God as our unfailing supply and support. ... Eric (Butterworth) says prayer is not a position, but a disposition ... it is not flattery, but a sense of oneness. It is not asking, but knowing. It is not words, but feeling. Feeling is the secret. It is not will, but willingness. So, ask, believing that you have received, said Jesus, and you shall have it.

So it's fair to say that Unity is known to most of the world as a prayer movement and ministry. As such, our

worship can be characterized most often as prayer worship. That's a good thing. *But we have a problem...*

Unity's new language and criticism of praying to God.

At some point, Unity's teachers began to focus not on the consciousness from which we pray but on the language used in prayer. The implication is that what produces power in prayer is not consciousness but language. As I explain below, this shift in focus from consciousness to language has left many people feeling inadequate and unwelcome in Unity, sensing that they don't fit in because the language they use in prayer isn't good enough.

When I was learning to become a Licensed Unity Teacher, I found that students were often "asked" to "rephrase things," and they were then asked, "Do you feel the power?" No one dared to say "No, I don't," but many felt frustrated, inadequate, and had lost their ability to freely pray in a Unity setting. I once asked an instructor if Charles Fillmore "would pass muster" in the class. The reply was, "No, not if he were in the class today."

We are all too aware of how restricting language puts up cultural barriers. We need to tear them down. It is easy to find ourselves judging the speaker's culture instead of their consciousness when we are critical of people's language. So the point I am making in this section is that criticizing language often shows intolerance of culture. Conversely, just as we should be tolerant of other cultures, we should be tolerant of how others speak. We must be able to look through the

cultural context of words to see the consciousness from which one speaks.

I do not know of any denomination that is critical of people for how they pray, *except Unity*. That “you can get in trouble today in Unity for praying to God” was once conveyed to me by a well-known, highly-respected Unity minister.

I don’t think this new focus on precision encourages “a manifestation of a personal tie with the transcendent ... and constitutes an act of faith or hope.” I don’t think that precision “builds bonds of affection and confidence between humans and a god or gods.” Precision discourages prayer. Precision is the intellect driving the heart-centered process of prayer. It doesn’t work, at least for prayer.

Jesus warned the Pharisees that their words, however grand, were no substitute for a pure heart. We need to reconsider what we’re doing today. Here’s how the wheels come off when we emphasize precision over consciousness:

She was a sweet, country gal in her early-20s ... married to a Marine stationed in Iraq at that time. Although raised Baptist, she attended the rural Unity church because that’s where her brothers and sisters attended; her family was important to her. She came to a Unity training in the Austin area, a five-hour drive from home, because she was new to Unity and wanted to know more. I don’t know what she wrote in her paper. I suspect it had a fair amount of evangelical language because evangelical language is all she knew. Regardless

of what she may have written, I was told later that when the paper was graded and returned to her, it came with many comments about her use of evangelical language and a question, “*Are you sure you belong in Unity?*”¹⁷⁰

“Are you sure you belong in Unity?” So much for unity. So much for oneness.

Here’s my point: this woman’s use of language reflected her culture, not her consciousness, and not her maturity or character. But someone who graded the paper chose to be the judge of her consciousness, maturity, and character, and, by extension, her culture as well, all because she chose to use evangelical language.

I can’t think of many things more cruel than judging someone for their use of language. If it is true that “Prayer builds bonds of affection and confidence between humans and a god or gods,” then I don’t see how we can build a thriving Unity movement when people are criticized for their language in prayer. It seems to me that when we do that, we are really asking, “do you belong around here?”

We need to stop editing out our foundational teachings.

The intolerance to diverse language isn’t limited to only prayer. The language used in our foundational Unity texts is also being challenged. The pretense for the changes refers to changes in historical context and the evolution of language.

¹⁷⁰ Private conversation from another attendee in the class.

But I believe that the underlying purpose is a challenge to consciousness. The fact is that many in Unity think they've "moved beyond Fillmore" to a more enlightened state of thinking. Their solution is to "update" the Fillmore text with words more to their liking. Here is a likely example.

The following passage was once the Preface to lesson #8 in *Lessons In Truth, The Secret Place of the Most High* by Emilie Cady.¹⁷¹ She wrote,

In the progress of these simple lessons some may object to the language as being too "orthodox," — too much of the religious side of the question. I use Scriptural terms simply because I prefer them; but it is all essentially one and the same thing. It is not Mental Science or Christian Science as such, that you want. It is not so-called "Orthodox" teaching that you want. It is not any ism, for each is but one side of the truth. It is truth we are after: and at the centre of all these various forms of presenting the truth the thing itself is One. So let us be big enough and broad enough, no matter on what side of the truth we have thus far been seeking the Light of the world, to put away all prejudices, all the limitations which the mere form of words may heretofore have made in our minds, and be open to all there is for us.

Unfortunately, some Unity editor removed this entire passage from *Lessons in Truth*. You won't find this passage by Emilie Cady in any of today's Unity

¹⁷¹ Emilie Cady's *Garden of the Heart*. <https://www.truthunity.net/books/emilie-cady-lessons-in-truth-study-edition-8>

publications. Sadly, the current edition of the *Complete Works of H. Emilie Cady* has removed her preface to *The Secret Place of the Most High*.

This passage indeed has a historical context that is not well understood.¹⁷² Then, as today, readers tend to come from one of three theological camps: New Thought "mental scientists," Christian Scientists, and orthodox Christian church congregants.¹⁷³ In this case, Emilie is quite specific in defending herself for using orthodox Christian language. The unknown Unity editor has removed Emilie's defense. That is a shame because a footnote could easily have remedied the editor's objection.

That Emilie Cady wrote this preface indicates the underlying problem: people will object to the consciousness they think the text conveys and then attempt to change the text with the pretense of correcting old-fashioned language or historical relevancy.

So is this editing or censorship? You be the judge. My opinion is that we may assume that Emilie Cady's critics are still with us. And their methods are to remove entire sections from *Lessons in Truth* that they find objectionable. That is why anyone who wants to understand what she has to say and to follow her simple lessons will need to read her original writings, untouched by 125 years of editing.

¹⁷² The difference between Mental Science and Christian Science. See *How Unity Got a Transcendent God*. <https://www.truthunity.net/audio/philip-white/background-of-new-thought-6>

¹⁷³ I refer to these camps as Universalist Unity, Fillmore Unity and mainstream Christians.

Tweaking texts of old books may seem to be an irrelevant issue. But I believe it is vitally important because such changes affect the perceived stability of the Unity message and movement. The concern I have previously raised — the need to garner confidence and commitment in membership — is seriously weakened when a movement constantly edits the message in its foundational texts.¹⁷⁴

Mysticism is nonverbal.

The problems I have highlighted above — criticizing language in prayer and unnecessary editing of foundational texts — indicate that the Unity movement has become far more metaphysical than mystical. As Eric Butterworth said, “we are often over read and under done.”

Metaphysics, the understanding of God, is a verbal endeavor; mysticism, the experience of God, is nonverbal. There is no controversy about language in mysticism because language, in mysticism, does not exist. Here is something that has convinced me this is so: something found on the inside cover of a groundbreaking book, *Mind in Motion* (2019):

How do we think? The natural answer is: with words.
Everything from ancient philosophy to the theory of
evolution is assembled and transmitted through

¹⁷⁴ The solution I offer is publishing “study editions” of the foundational books with original texts and numerous footnoting. See the *Lessons in Truth Study Edition* as an example.

language. But our ancestors did not speak. Neither do infants. Yet they still think. So if we can think before we have language, then what are our thoughts really made of? ... In *Mind in Motion*, psychologist Barbara Tversky makes the groundbreaking case that movement and our interactions in space, not language, are the true foundation of thought.

Let’s remember that much of Jesus’ ministry was nonverbal — he healed more than he taught, and he roamed the Galilean hillside as he taught. It just may be that our capacity to experience spiritual things is found in movement and interactions in space, not in language. If that is true, all our criticism of language is misguided, at least when considering our experience of God.

I once wrote that Unity’s most important spiritual discipline is thinking, not prayer.¹⁷⁵ And I followed it up with a post that said that spiritual understanding begins with infant bonding long before a child has developed verbal skills. All this is to say that thinking and *spiritual* understanding are preverbal.

I have thought a great deal about what this means for how we treat nonverbal people. There have been three occasions in my life when I regularly visited children who were too mentally disabled to speak. Because they were nonverbal, they appeared subdued and quiet. But I saw them come alive on Sunday mornings when the local Baptist church sent a band and a preacher. Their coming to life made me ask, *Do we not all pray?*

¹⁷⁵ *The Most Important Spiritual Discipline in Unity (It’s not prayer)* <https://www.truthunity.net/books/emilie-cady-lessons-in-truth-study-edition-2>

Further, we have all evolved from a common mother who emerged somewhere in the African savannah. Her name is Eve in the Bible, but the closest remains we have found of her have been named Lucy. Lucy was little more than three feet in height. She had no weapons and little strength. She was preverbal.

I don't know how, but somehow Lucy and her tribe were able to survive amidst predatory animals in the African savannah. I would like to believe that her survival, like ours, rested in a capacity to bond — with her family and the world around her, and, maybe with the tremendous spiritual power we know as God. Again, I don't know how she survived, but when I saw her remains in Houston a few years ago, the same question arose within me, *Do we not all pray?*

That may be why Emilie Cady has chosen to write about places we go on our spiritual journey that are nonverbal — a place free from the constraints of words and language — such as *The Secret Place of the Most High*, where we find safety, we meet God and discover Truth.

It is also why I find the new emphasis on language so problematic. The Unity movement does not need advanced metaphysics. What Unity needs is authentic mysticism — the experience of Jesus Christ who is here now, raising us up to a higher place where the Holy Spirit pours out its inspiration upon us.

We need to be tethered to the historic Christian faith.

Our metaphysics may differ from mainstream Christianity, but we share a common mystical experience

with mainstream Christians. The question I wish to raise now is whether the new orthodoxy of language we have chosen for our metaphysical discussions does not alienate those with whom we share the mystical experience of God. If so, does that matter? Do we need to remain tethered to the historic Christian faith? I believe so for several reasons:

First, it opens the door to those who have left the mainstream Christian church. What do you think the sweet, Baptist country gal, who put too much evangelical language into her paper, did when she got home? Most likely, she walked out of Unity, along with her extended family, and returned to the church where she was not judged for praying to God.

Second, it extends an embrace of fellowship. Unity has two frontiers: those who have left the mainstream church for whatever reason and those who are attracted to Fillmore teachings but have chosen to remain in their mainstream church. The second frontier is where the Fillmores focused their movement in the early years. We must keep relationships with that frontier open and cordial.

Third, it keeps Unity connected to Christianity as a church or sect instead of an untethered cult. I do not know how Unity can detach itself from the historic Christian faith and remain stable as a religious movement. Doing so would be shifting from sect to cult, as described in Insight 14, *Rational Choice in the Religious Marketplace*. Charles Fillmore was ambivalent about becoming a sect, but his insistence on the "Jesus Christ standard" drew the line on becoming a cult.