

PART II
THEOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF UNITY

INTRODUCTION

THE SOURCES OF UNITY'S THOUGHT

The philosophy of Unity is a syncretism of mental atmosphere of American cult-life during the last decade of the nineteenth century. The Fillmores, in the first issue of Modern Thought, set this as their ideal: "Modern Thought hopes to perpetuate its existence by showing the good in all religions and all philosophies."¹ Mr. Fillmore, at least, was determined not to confine himself to any sect, creed, or dogma.² Whether they "borrowed the best from all religions,"³ as Mr. Fillmore thinks, may be arguable; certainly they laid hold on all the "isms" of the day, as well as other sources, to augment their thinking. The more apparent sources of Unity's thought are: New England Transcendentalism as represented by Emerson, Christian Science, Hinduism, Theosophy, Rosicrucianism, Spiritualism, New Thought, popular science, and the Bible.

The first and most abiding love of the Fillmores was New England Transcendentalism, especially as it came to them through the mind of Ralph Waldo Emerson. This was in their blood before they had any direct contact with Christian Science. In the early eighties of the past century they named their first-born son Lowell and their second, Waldo. Emerson's essays on "Heroism," "Love," "History," "Self-Reliance," "Compensation," "Spiritual

¹Charles Fillmore, "Our Mission," Modern Thought, I (April, 1889), 10.

²See Unity, XXXIX (July, 1913), 1.

³Unity, LIX (Oct., 1923), 404.

Laws," "Friendship," "Prudence," "The Oversoul," "Circles," "Intellect and Art"¹ caught their attention. Modern Thought, first issue, appeals to all students of metaphysics to make a study of Emerson. "His writings contain the essence of all the higher thoughts that are now being so lavishly given to the world through Christian Science, Metaphysics, Theosophy, and the various systems of soul culture."² This interest in Emerson has never lagged; he stalks across the pages of almost every one of their books and appears frequently between the covers of their magazines. He is ever with them; the most recent number of Unity³ carries a thought from his scintillating mind.

A second and quite influential source of their thinking was Christian Science. This cult gave hope to them at the darkest moment of their lives. Through its ministry Mrs. Fillmore was "healed" of her tuberculosis. From her first contact she became an enthusiastic devotee of Christian Science, and she finally won from Mr. Fillmore an acknowledgment that it was "an epitome of the best features of the ethical and religious systems of the past."⁴ They adopted that name in 1890 for their growing magazine, and only the policy of exclusion set up by Mrs. Eddy kept them from moving from their originally announced desire to cater to the good in all religions into the mold which she had set up.

¹See Modern Thought, I (April, 1889), 8 (editorial).

²Ibid., p. 8.

³See Unity, XC (May, 1939), 20.

⁴Christian Science Thought, II (June, 1890), 8 (editorial).

Because of this, while they sold her Science and Health and quoted from her other writings, they followed her from afar, becoming disciples of Emma Curtis Hopkins and Ursula Gestefeld, both renegades to the founder of the movement. Undoubtedly Christian Science gave Unity its basic pattern: its metaphysical idealism, its nomenclature, its emphasis upon the primacy of health, its insistence upon the practicability of its methods, its attempt to give its system standing and respectability in the community by appeal to Scripture--all these are direct contributions of Mrs. Eddy through the above-mentioned teachers, her former pupils.

A third source of Unity is the occult literature coming from the East, especially Hinduism. The leading editorial in the second issue of Modern Thought is introduced by Emerson's poem "Brahma." The writer looks directly toward the East.

The East is the storehouse of a spiritual life of which we do not, and cannot, in our present material thought environment, but in a limited degree comprehend. The Christian religion has answered our needs up to the present age, but the evolution of the spirit has created a demand for a religion of broader scope, and we turn to the lore of India, for lack of a better system nearer home.¹

The magazine, in its third issue, begins to carry a translation of "The Legend of Krishna and the Origin of Brahmanism," from the French of Edwin Schure; and this is continued through seven issues. Such ideas as "God is good--God is all," "the divinity and innate goodness of the soul," "reincarnation," "every religion . . . is a travelling to the same goal," "God is Father-Mothers," "believe nothing until you experience it"² are basic in

¹Modern Thought, I (May, 1889), 8 (editorial).

²See Swami Vivekananda, "Hinduism," The World's Parliament of Religions (Chicago: The Parliament Publishing Co., 1893), II, 968-978.

Hindu philosophy and play a real part in the thought of Unity and Christian Science. When Swami Vivekananda settled in America after the World's Fair of 1893, Unity became much attached to him, quoting and selling his literature.¹

However, the Fillmore knowledge of the occult East was for the most part not direct but came through Theosophy. The writings of Madame Blavatsky, H. S. Olcott, A. P. Sinnet, W. J. Colville, John Hamlin Dewey, Percy Gregg, and J. D. Buck--all connected with this movement--were offered for sale by Modern Thought in its early issues, and a large section of W. J. Colville's Spiritual Therapeutics is quoted.² In an early editorial Mr. Fillmore accepts the chronological scheme of Theosophy, the idea of the spiritualization of our planet, and of knowledge gained through the "Spiritually Illumined."³ Such articles as "Occident and Orient,"⁴ "Karma Action,"⁵ and "Incarnation and Reincarnation"⁶ come from this theosophic school of thought. The most influential of this group, so far as the Fillmores were concerned, was John Hamlin Dewey, who styled himself a Christian Theosophist. His book, Christian Theosophy, was favorably reviewed in Modern Thought⁷ and was offered as a subscription prize in developing the circulation of the magazine. As we shall show

¹See Unity, VII (June, 1896).

²See Modern Thought, I (July, 1889), 1.

³Ibid., p. 8.

⁴Ibid. (Aug., 1889), p. 11.

⁵Ibid., p. 7.

⁶Ibid. (March, 1890), p. 3.

⁷Ibid. (April, 1889), p. 15. ⁸Ibid. (Nov., 1889), p. 11.

later, his attempt to explain that the life and teachings of Jesus, metaphysically interpreted, were in accord with the experience of the sages of the East had a deep influence on Mr. Fillmore's publication, The Twelve Powers of Man.

Fifthly, the Rosicrucian influence on Unity is noticeable, especially in the writings of F. B. Dowd. Mr. Dowd's book, The Temple of the Rosycross, found a deep response in the soul of Mr. Fillmore.¹ From it he got the "Winged-Globe," the permanent symbol of Unity. The one idea of Dowd's that most definitely took hold of Mr. Fillmore was his attitude toward the problems of sex. Dowd's thesis was that all sin sexual--"all diseases spring from the mind, and a fallen, reversed, perverted and monstrous love nature."² Mr. Fillmore quotes this in his editorial favoring that position, September, 1889³; he also uses Dowd as his chief authority a month later in his article "Elixir of Life."⁴ This article calls for sex continence. There is a close parallel between other ideas in this book and ideas later expressed by Mr. Fillmore, for example: immortal life is here on earth;⁵ regeneration of the body comes about through uniting it consciously with Divine Mind⁶; the soul is located back of the stomach⁷; and the teachings of Jesus apply wholly to this life.⁸

¹See Modern Thought, I (Nov., 1889), p. 11.

²F. B. Dowd, The Temple of the Rosycross (3rd ed.; Chicago: F. B. Dowd Publishing Co., 1897), p. 93; see also p. 117.

³Charles Fillmore, Modern Thought, I (Sept., 1889), 8 (editorial).

⁴Modern Thought, I (Nov., 1889), 8.

⁵F. B. Dowd, op. cit., p. 76.

⁶Ibid., p. 71

⁷Ibid., p. 115.

⁸Ibid., p. 76.

For twenty years Mr. Fillmore was directly interested in Spiritualism. Unity clearly shows evidence of this interest. The first issue of Modern Thought has an article by George H. Brooks, a Spiritualist.¹ Mr. Brooks declares that healing can best be done by sending thought to the particular part of the body in which the difficulty is lodged, an idea later stressed by Mr. Fillmore. On the subject of Spiritualism there was a difference of opinion between Mr. and Mrs. Fillmore. She declared: "I have never seen a Spiritualist who was satisfied. He is always searching for greater proof; Christian Science can give him that proof for it takes nothing for granted but reasons from cause to effect."² Mr. Fillmore sought to include his spiritualist friends in the early circle of the magazine's writers, but under her leadership he steadily moved away from that position. Yet their influence has lingered. He still believes their testimony that mediums actually contact departed spiritus but thinks that such spirits, since they did not have sufficient wisdom to retain their own bodies, can have no greater wisdom than they had in the flesh. He objects to dabbling in Spiritualism because he thinks it weakens man's control of himself. The ideal of the individual is the I AM control of his own thoughts and forces; so he should not let a medium break that control. Mr. Fillmore has been pushed to defend himself against the charge of teaching Spiritualism repeatedly; it is the only "ism" against which he has felt impelled to write a definite charge.³

¹Modern Thought, I (April, 1889), 6.

²Myrtle Fillmore, "Why Should They Conflict," Modern Thought, I (June, 1889), 6.

³Charles Fillmore, Concerning Spiritualism (Kansas City: Unity School of Christianity).

The history of Unity has been closely interwoven with the whole New Thought movement. Along with most New Thought leaders the Fillmores openly acknowledge their indebtedness to P. P. Quimby, especially as his thought was interpreted by Warren Felt Evans. In his first year as an editor Mr. Fillmore espoused the body-mind theory of Evans against that of Mrs. Eddy.¹ Later he declared that Mr. Evans' seven volumes were "the most complete of all metaphysical compilations."² Unity has twice been officially connected with the New Thought organization; and there has been an almost constant exchange of publications and speakers between the Homes of Truth of the west coast, Divine Science of Denver, Unity of Kansas City, and the New Thought Centers located largely in the East. Charles B. Patterson published a biographical sketch of Mr. Fillmore in Mind in 1902.³ The names of Henry Wood, Ralph W. Trine, Charles B. Newcomb, and Abel L. Allen grace the Unity publications. For almost forty years Horatio W. Dresser has contributed articles to Unity. Elizabeth Towne, editor of Nautilus, has visited Unity at Kansas City and made her contribution to its growing literature. One of the more recent stars in the New Thought firmament is a Divine Science leader, Emmet Fox of New York. He has an article in the current April, fiftieth anniversary, number of the Fillmore magazine. And Unity seems to have published all of the poems of Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

¹Modern Thought, I (June, 1889), 4.

²Unity, XXVIII (May, 1908), 283.

³See Unity, XVII (Aug., 1902), 69.

Unity is ordinarily classed with New Thought. It differs from it at two points: first, was there a "fall" of man; and second, how much emphasis should be put on the body? Most New Thought teachers emphasize a steady progression of the race from the animal level; Unity teaches a "fall." Unity gives more emphasis to allegorizing the teachings of Jesus and trying to apply them directly to the body of man. New Thought and Divine Science leaders are more general in their teachings at this point and are rather critical of Mr. Fillmore's mental treatment of the body-brain centers. They speak of Unity as being "body-conscious" and as having a decided materialistic tinge.

While denying any real need for science and its technique as a way to knowledge, Mr. Fillmore has kept his ear tuned to the popular scientific presentations of the period. Darwin and cosmic evolution, Edison and his phonograph appear in Modern Thought at its beginning in an editorial discussion the then acute conflict between science and religion concerning miracles. The writer attributes the conflict to the "degeneracy" of the church and assures his readers that the gulf between science and religion will soon be bridged as people become aware of the power of mind to manipulate matter.¹ Mr. Fillmore has searched popular scientific writings for usable statements to support his position and then lifted them from their context with little regard for the purposes of the writers. In a recent explanation of Unity's

¹See Charles Fillmore, "Science and Religion," Modern Thought, I (April, 1883), 9.

thought, he has so quoted eight scientists--Brady, Weiss, Lodge, Jeans, Crile, Osborn, Eddington, and Russell.¹ No attempt to apply scientific tests or principles to the problems with which he deals--health and prosperity--is made by him. Science has furnished much of his recent terminology.²

The final source of Unity's thought is the Bible, especially Genesis, the four gospels, the writings of Paul, and Revelation. Since Unity claims to be primarily a rediscovery of the technique of Jesus as it is related to the matter of healing, this is to be expected. Unity goes further in the use of the Bible than Mrs. Eddy in Science and Health, who confined herself largely to a few chapters in Genesis. For almost its entire history, Unity has offered a weekly metaphysical interpretation of the International Sabbath School Lesson. Like Mrs. Eddy, however, Mr. Fillmore is attracted almost magnetically to the Genesis story, which he calls the "world's best known and least understood allegory."³ No Unity leader has made a systematic presentation of any book of the Bible save Genesis; the school has published a large, metaphysical dictionary of the Bible in which it seeks to set forth "in simple language the inner, eso-

¹See C. S. Braden (ed.), Varieties of American Religion (Chicago: Willett, Clark and Co., 1936), pp. 141-154.

²The following suggests Mr. Fillmore's use of science: "The scientists tell us that the ether is charged with electricity, magnetism, light rays, X-rays, cosmic rays and other dynamic radiations; that it is the source of all life, light, heat, energy, gravitation, attraction, repulsion . . . science gives to the ether all the attractions of heaven without directly saying so." Charles Fillmore, Prosperity (Kansas City: Unity School of Christianity, 1938), p. 12.

³Charles Fillmore, Mysteries of Genesis (Kansas City: Unity School of Christianity, 1936), foreword.

teric meanings of Scriptural names."¹ We shall discuss their attitude towards the Scripture as we deal with their theory of knowledge and its application to the above-mentioned sources.

¹Metaphysical Bible Dictionary (Kansas City: Unity School of Christianity, 1931), preface.