

CLASSICAL  
CHRISTIANITY  
& UNITY

SALVATION  
AND THE  
WORK OF  
CHRIST

BY

JOSEPH  
WOLPERT



## *Introduction*

What follows was originally my Master's Thesis.

In the process of writing it several years ago I shared it with several people for their input and advice. I am particularly grateful for the advice and comments of my friend and colleague Reverend James Gaither for his helpful suggestions and to my wife Carolyn who reads everything I write—always with openness and care.

# **CLASSICAL CHRISTIANITY & UNITY**

## **SALVATION AND THE WORK OF CHRIST**

*by*

**Joseph Wolpert**

**Copyrighted 1993 by Joseph Wolpert  
P.O. Box 124  
Lee's Summit, Missouri 64063**

Unity Library & Archives  
1901 NW Blue Parkway  
Unity Village, MO 64065

# Introduction

What follows was originally my Master's Thesis.

In the process of writing it several years I ago I shared it with several people for their input and advice. I am particularly grateful for the advice and comments of my friend and colleague Reverend James Gaither for his helpful suggestions and to my wife Carolyn who reads everything I write - always with openness and care.

Unity School of Christianity has contributed a great deal of good to the world for over a hundred years now.

Perhaps its greatest asset has been its openness to all people and the opportunity that it presents and encourages in the way of people finding their own way.

But Unity School of Christianity is a "Christian" organization - a fact that some other groups and denominations within the spectrum of Christianity sometimes doubt.

It is hoped that this study will help not only them but students and teachers within Unity itself to begin to see just how closely Unity is to orthodox Christianity.

There are differences that I believe are healthy ones.

Anyone who has become a "*new creature*" as Paul would say "*in Christ*" never needs to fear other view points and must never fail to be willing to investigate them.

Our obligation always is to "*love one another*".

Joseph Wolpert  
July 30, 1993  
Lee's Summit, Missouri



# THESIS AND INTENT

**The** fundamental thesis of this study is that while the conclusions of classical Christian theology regarding the Christological and Soteriological aspects of Jesus Christ are correct, they have not been sufficiently explained by the traditional church. Part of the problem is that such definitions were arrived at in such a way to conform to tradition (both oral and written) that free opportunity was limited. The vocabulary of the outcome was predetermined. In addition, an adequate metaphysic (with appropriate language) was lacking to sufficiently explain such doctrines.

To support this thesis, illustrations and examples from the Bible and some Early Church Fathers will be quoted. Then, the Christological and Soteriological aspects will be presented separately. The Soteriological aspect will be addressed under the heading of "Atonement".

Finally, I will offer what I believe to be the "missing" explanations relying upon the thought of Charles Fillmore, co-founder of Unity (my own denomination and tradition).

## TRADITION AND THE EARLY CHURCH

**The** earliest Christian writings extant are the letters of Paul in the New Testament. But it is evident from him that an oral tradition existed - one which he received and was passing on. In I Corinthians we are told:

***"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve..."*** (I Cor 15:3-5)

What is important in this citation are the words "**what I also received**". To say that what follows is simply important to Paul may very well be an understatement because for him there was nothing any more important than the gospel. In his correspondence to the Romans he says:

***"For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God, for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'"*** (Romans 1:16-17).

The gospel was believed to be essential to salvation and therefore was to be protected and preserved.

**What, then, was the gospel that was preached?**

The basic apostolic kerygma derived from a study of early sermons found in Acts (1:16-25; 2:14-40; 5:29-32; 10:34-43) and a study of the Gospels can be stated as follows:

**Firstly**, God's promises in the Old Testament have been fulfilled (Acts 2:16-21; 3:18; 10:43)

**Secondly**, the promises have been fulfilled in the incarnation, life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 2:22-24; 3:13-15; 10:37-39)

**Thirdly**, Jesus has gone to be at the "right hand of God" as Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36)

**Fourthly**, Jesus will return. In the meantime, there is opportunity for repentance, receiving of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38-39; 3:25-26; 5:31; 10:43)

**And finally**, when Jesus returns, he will judge the living and the dead. (Acts 3:21; 10:42) (Menoud, p 867-868)

Implied within the apostolic kerygma is both the humanity and divinity of Jesus along with the fact that salvation comes through faith in Him. The humanity is implied with the fact that he was "born" and the divinity is implied because it is only through God that salvation can come.

Tradition, which *"...refers simultaneously to the process of communication and to its content"* (Pelikan, p 7) was just as important to the Apostolic Fathers as it was to Paul.

Clement of Rome writing to the church at Corinth around 96 A.D. implores Christians there to follow their bishop because of the continuity between him and the apostles and ultimately to Christ.

***"The apostles received the gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus, the Christ was sent from God. Thus Christ is from God and the apostles from Christ ... And so the apostles, after receiving their orders and being fully convinced by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and assured by God's word, went out in the confidence of the Holy Spirit to preach the good news that God's Kingdom was about to come. They***

*preached in country and city, and appointed their first converts, after testing them by the Spirit, to be the bishops and deacons of future believers. Nor was this any novelty, for Scripture had mentioned bishops and deacons long before. For this what Scripture says somewhere: 'I will appoint their bishops in righteousness and their deacons in faith.'*" (Petry, p 8))

The bishop is therefore both the recipient and guardian of the true tradition that is necessary for salvation. And, this is in keeping with "scripture" according to Clement.

Ignatius writing between 110 and 117 A.D. said in his letter to the Ephesians *"...we should regard the bishop as the Lord himself"* (Petry, p 9 ) because the bishop was entrusted with the true tradition.

When variations of the apostolic kerygma and its understanding began appearing at the end of the first century and the beginning of the second the idea of "**heresy**" developed. This was not because there were simply different understandings in themselves, but because salvation was deemed in jeopardy.

Heresies, such as Docetism, Ebionism, and Gnosticism, for example, forced the early church to solidify its position by the establishment of creeds, a canon of scripture, and the doctrine of Apostolic Succession to preserve the deposit of faith.

Roman Catholicism defended its emphasis on tradition until the Council of Trent (1545-63) when it finally decreed that the scripture and "tradition" were co-ordinate and equally important.

## **THE INCARNATION**

The Council of Nicea (325 A.D.) stated the doctrine of the Trinity by clarifying the relations among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It said that the three were of one substance "*homoousios*". However, it resolved nothing concerning the relationship between the divine and human aspects of Jesus Christ. This was to be left to the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.).

As was mentioned earlier, the Apostolic Kerygma implies both the humanity and divinity of Jesus. The Gospels affirm this. In Mark 15:39 and Matt. 27:54 we find - *"Truly this was the Son of God"*. In Luke 23:47 we find - *"Certainly this man was innocent"*.

The question for the church was and is - to what extent was the divine and the human in Jesus?

Tertullian (ca 200 A.D.) wrote: *"The Son of God was crucified; I am not ashamed because men needs be ashamed. And the Son of God died; it is by all means to be believed, because it is absurd. And He was buried, and rose again; the fact is certain, because it is impossible."* (ANF, Vol III, p 525))

The **"fact"** was not **"certain"** for everyone.

How can the Son of God die on a cross?

Docetists claimed that Jesus only **"appeared"** to have a physical body but that in fact he was a purely spiritual being. Of course, scripture affirmed that he was human because he ate, slept, and even wept.

Ebionism rejected the divinity of Jesus all together.

Others, called Adoptionists, focused on the humanity of Jesus to the exclusion of his divinity. He became divine only in the sense that God **"adopted"** him because of the exemplary life that he led.

Docetism, Ebionism and Adoptionism were all declared heretical by the early church because they did not conform with scripture.

Gnosticism rested on a secret oral tradition that had purportedly been transmitted by Jesus to followers during his forty-day appearance between the resurrection and the ascension. They acknowledged that the public tradition was legitimate but that there was more to it.

The conflict over this issue intensified following the decision at Nicea and it can be best understood by presenting the Christological views current at Alexandria and Antioch - the two great theological learning centers in the Middle East at that time. (The reference to Antioch or Alexandria as **"schools"** reflects a theological approach and attitude and not an actual school in the sense of a building, etc.)

Alexandrians had adopted a Logos-Flesh (or Word-Flesh) Christology. Their Christology began with the Johanne prologue which stated that *"...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth ..."* (John 1:14a).

In addition, Athanasius (c. 296-373), the champion of the Council of Nicea, had said *"The Word of God ... took a human body to save and*

***help men, so that having shared our human birth, He might make men partakers of the divine and spiritual nature.***" (Placher, p 80))

Apollinarius (c. 310- c. 390 A.D.) attempted to explain what this meant. In doing so, he brought all kinds of problems upon himself. He taught that Christ had a human body just like other humans have. However, he said that the Logos took the place of the human mind in Jesus.

Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350 - 428 A.D.) a leading theologian in Antioch strenuously objected to this teaching. He said that Apollinarius was contradicting scripture for one thing. After all, the New Testament clearly stated that Jesus ***"grew and became strong, filled with wisdom"*** (Luke 2:40). The Logos is impassible. The human mind is not. Consequently, this reference from Luke proves that Jesus did indeed have a human mind.

Apollinarius responded by modifying his original stance. He said that the human mind consisted of two levels - 1) a lower one that experiences emotions and 2) a higher one that consists of reason. It was the higher aspect of the human mind that was displaced in Jesus by the Logos.

Theodore said that wouldn't do either. The Antiochene theologian was concerned with salvation. He replied that Jesus Christ saved humanity by uniting divinity with humanity. If not all of humanity is effected then complete salvation is impossible. If Jesus was not totally human then total salvation was not tenable.

Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389) expressed this argument in this way - ***"If anyone has put his trust in Him as a Man without a human mind, he is really bereft of mind, and quite unworthy of salvation. For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved."*** (Placher p 81)

The Council of Constantinople in 381 condemned Apollinarius' view. But the problem still wasn't solved. It was Antioch's turn to initiate controversy.

Nestorius (d. c. 451), patriarch of Constantinople in 428, accepted the two-natures Christology put forth by Theodore at the Council of Constantinople (381) in which he said that Christ had two natures (*physeis*) in one person (*prosopon*). Exactly what Theodore meant by this is unclear, but essentially he was trying to recognize both the humanity and divinity of Jesus. If Jesus wept, slept or ate, it was the human nature of Jesus doing so. Wherever there were miracles, or forgiveness of sin - then it was the divine nature of Jesus. In addition, each nature could be treated as a "subject" with "predicates" from the other (*Communicatio Idiomatum*). With



this understanding, there was nothing wrong with saying that "Christ suffered". It is understood that the Logos of Jesus Christ is impassible and not subject to such.

Nestorius accepted all of this but he went one step further. He said because of this, it is wrong to call Mary, the mother of Jesus, "*theotokos*" ("bearer of God") because "being born" was something that happened to Christ's human nature and not to his divine nature. You could call Mary "*Christotokos*" or "bearer of Christ", however.

Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444 A.D.) objected. Nestorius had drawn such sharp distinctions between the two natures of Christ that it was difficult for Cyril to understand how they could be conjoined. Also, in terms of salvation, Nestorius' argument could be interpreted to mean that we are saved by a human being and not God. Consequently, a council met at Ephesus in 431 under the leadership of Cyril and Nestorius was condemned.

Cyril insisted on the *communicatio idiomatum* (the interchange of attributes) in dealing with the two natures but then he focused his attention on the oneness of Christ. This, taken to an extreme caused it's own problems after Cyril's death when Eutyches (c. 378 - 454) insisted that Christ had only one nature.

Dioscorus (d. 454), Cyril's successor as patriarch, took the offensive support of such monophysitism (one nature Christology) and presided over a council held at Ephesus in 449 and labeled the council of 431 the "**Robber Council**". He prevented any of his opponents from speaking during the debate and consequently stirred things up even further.

Finally, a council met at Chalcedon in 451. The decision reached rested in a significant way upon a letter or Tome written by Pope Leo I from Rome to the Robber Council which said in part:

***"Without detriment therefore to the properties of either nature and substance which then came together in one person, majesty took on humility, strength weakness, eternity mortality: and for the paying off of the debt belonging to our condition inviolable nature was united with passible nature, so that, as suited the needs of our case, one and the same Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, could both die with the one and not die with the other."*** (Petry, p 191)

Chalcedon (451) rejected Monophysitism and offered a statement which said in part:

***"Therefore, following the Holy Fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father, before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized IN TWO NATURES, WITHOUT CONFUSION, WITHOUT CHANGE, WITHOUT DIVISION, WITHOUT SEPARATION ... "*** (Bettensen, p 51)

## **THE ATONEMENT**

Again, early on, Jesus was viewed as a saviour or redeemer. This topic can be discussed under the headings of salvation, redemption, or the atonement. It is under this third heading that we will examine the issue.

Basically, there are three different views regarding the Atonement. As Gustav Aulen states in his classic treatment on the subject - ***Christus Victor*** *"Every interpretation of the Atonement goes back to the New Testament texts, and seeks to base itself upon them; it is difficult therefore, to read those texts without associating them with some pre-conceived theory."* (Aulen, p 16)

**The first one**, often identified with Irenaeus can be called either the "physical" or "mystical" theory. According to this view, the very act of Christ becoming man uplifted humanity and, in fact, changed what it meant to be human.

**Secondly**, there is the "ransom" theory. According to this approach, Jesus' death on the Cross was the payment of a ransom to the Devil in exchange for the Devil's freeing of humanity.

**The third theory**, sometime's referred to as the "substitution" theory. This theory focused on the saviour's sufferings as a "substitute" payment to God for the sins of humanity.

Regarding theory number one, Irenaeus picked up on an idea found in the Pauline correspondence in the New Testament where Christ is described as the "second Adam". Paul says, ***"For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive"*** (I Cor 15:22). The analogy here is that

since sin came into the world by one person (Adam), salvation comes through one man (Christ.) This theory as described by Irenaeus is referred to as "**re-capitulation**" which means a "**new head**". Christ becomes the "**new head**" or leader of a new race of people.

The "**ransom**" theory finds support scripturally in Mark 10:45 (also Matt 20:28) - *"For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* The "**ransom**" theory was explained in a variety of ways.

Adam had disobeyed God and therefore rightfully came under the jurisdiction of Satan. God being Just, He had to respect the rights of Satan and his jurisdiction of Adam's descendants.

But Satan had no rights over God. So when he tampered with Christ, Satan overstepped his bounds and God therefore emancipated humanity from his power through Jesus Christ. (Placher, p 70)

The "**substitution**" theory is based upon the notion that a debt was owed to God because of the sins of humanity. It must be paid. Jesus paid it for all of humanity.

Irenaeus' view is somewhat "**mystical**". The others have a more judicial view.

## **THE PROBLEM**

The question though is, *"Do these theories actually offer a reasonable explanation as to how Jesus saves?"* And this leads us back to our previous discussion on Christology - *"If salvation can come only through the divine and the divinity of Jesus is affirmed - "Has orthodoxy really explained how Jesus can be both fully human and divine?"*

The church seems to be basing its arguments syllogistically trying to hold to scripture and tradition. The argument seems to go something like this - *"We believe that Jesus is the redeemer. The redeemer must be divine. Therefore, Jesus is divine".*

Or, only the creator can redeem humanity and the world. The "**logos**" is the creative agency of God. Therefore, Jesus is the "**logos**" made flesh.

The church, in its final analysis says to its members *"These are mysteries - accept them on faith"*. But many people today have great difficulty doing so because of modern humanity's insistence on "**reason**". And many



Christians do not give the same authority to scripture and tradition as many clerics do.

So, are there reasonable and plausible explanations to our Christological and Soteriological questions?

Alfred North Whitehead once suggested that "*Christianity has always been a religion looking for a metaphysic*". (Whitehead, p 50) This doesn't mean that there have not been an ongoing attempt to provide "**metaphysical**" explanations for Christian doctrine and dogma. Of course there has. But whether they have been adequate or not is another question.

What is the criteria for an adequate metaphysic in these matters? How has the Church failed to meet the criteria? How does Unity meet it?

The criteria is twofold:

1) You must first begin with the nature of Being before addressing the Christological and Soteriological questions. The rubric of Classical Christian theology is and has been "**salvation**" and the tendency has been to adjust the metaphysics to suit the understanding of salvation. Salvation should be consistent with one's understanding of "**Being**".

The ground of Being in church thought has shifted from time to time. In Roman Catholicism,

Platonism provided the essential metaphysics until the Scholasticism of the Late Middle Ages replaced it with Aristotelianism. The early Protestant Reformation was fundamentally Cartesian in its metaphysic.

Today, in Protestantism there is not a universal metaphysic. There are Kantians, Hegelians, Cartesians, followers of Whitehead, etc.

2. An adequate metaphysics has to relate Christology and Soteriology to nature and the functioning of Human Consciousness. For this to take place, there must be a structure or model of consciousness that includes the function and operations of the mind, and takes into account all of the ways in which we receive data or information.

The position taken in this study is that an adequate metaphysic did not come on the scene until the last half of the nineteenth century with the inauguration of the "**New Thought Movement**" in this country and the subsequent founding of the "**Unity Movement**" by Charles and Myrtle Fillmore.

# **BACKGROUND OF UNITY**

**W**hat came to be known as Unity, for all extensive purposes began with the healing experience of Myrtle Fillmore (1845-1931). She had been a sickly child and suffered from tuberculosis well into adulthood. Mrs. Fillmore seems to have been born with an innate love for God and a desire to make the world a better place to live in.

In 1886, a doctor gave her only six months to live.

She had been searching for a means of religious expression that suited both her inclinations and her intuitions about God and humanity when she and her husband, Charles attended a metaphysical lecture in Kansas City presented by a Chicago-based teacher named Dr. E.B. Weeks.

During that lecture Dr Weeks spoke an affirmation which was to change Mrs. Fillmore's life - ***"I am a child of God and therefore I do not inherit sickness"***. Ever since a child, Mrs. Fillmore had believed that God was Good and that sickness, sin, and evil had not part in God. This affirmation served as a catalyst for deeper understanding and realization for her.

In her own words, Mrs Fillmore said regarding this experience:

***"I have made what seems to me a discovery. I was fearfully sick; I had all the ills of mind and body that I could bear. Medicine and doctors ceased to give me relief, and I was in despair when I found practical Christianity. I took it up and I was healed."*** (Freeman, p 47)

It took nearly two years, but finally, the ailments that had accompanied her all of her life were finally gone. And she never experienced any more than a nose "sniffle" until her death at the age of 86.

Charles Fillmore (1854-1948), seeing the transformation that was taking place in the life of his wife, decided that he wanted some of what she had found too.

A skating accident when he was around 9 years old had left an open sore wound on his hip and a leg that was almost four inches shorter than the normal one.

Grotesque medical practices in those days such as "bleeding", "cupping" and "leeching" made matters worse if anything, and he lived in constant pain.

Mrs. Fillmore seemed to have a natural faith. Mr. Fillmore needed to acquire his. He also needed to deal with what seemed to be an innate skepticism on his part. He once wrote concerning his early attitudes:

***"I noticed ... that all the teachers and writers talked a great deal about the omnipresent, omniscient God, who is Spirit and accessible to everyone. I said to myself, 'In this babel I will go to headquarters. If I am Spirit and this God they talk so much about is Spirit, we can somehow communicate, or the whole thing is a fraud.'"*** (Freeman, p 52)

At his death in 1948 at the age of 94, the shortened leg had grown over two inches and Mr Fillmore could walk without a leg brace, a built up shoe, and cane.

For both Fillmores, "**religion**" was an "**experience**". Both had discovered for themselves the importance the mind plays in disease and health. They both also discovered the importance of prayer in which they sat silently and simply listened and waited for the divine to be revealed to them. Charles spent between four to six hours a day in meditation. And as well read as he was, most of his views are purported to have come directly as the result of divine inspiration.

## **UNITY METAPHYSICS**

**Theologically**, Unity considers itself very much a part of Christianity. In the frontispiece of many Unity books is the following statement coined by Charles Fillmore stating what Unity is:

***"Unity is a link in the great educational movement inaugurated by Jesus Christ; our objective is to discern the truth in Christianity and prove it. The truth that we teach is not new, neither do we claim special revelations or discovery of new religious principles. Our purpose is to help and teach mankind to use and prove the eternal Truth taught by the Master."*** (Fillmore, Prosperity, see note)

The Bible is considered Unity's basic textbook. Jesus Christ is viewed as a redeemer, saviour, the epitome of what humanity should, could, and will be. Jesus is considered as the ultimate Master whose teachings are to be followed.

Philosophically, Unity falls within the tradition of Christian Idealism. To provide a brief discussion of Unity metaphysics, we will discuss the



categories of God, Man, and the Relationship between the two respectively.

## **GOD**

**R**elying upon Jesus' description of God during his discussion with the Samaritan woman in John 4 - ***"God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth."*** (John 4:24) This excludes any hint of anthropomorphisms of God except in poetic and metaphorical terms.

In addition, God is viewed as being Principle. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught that God ***"...makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust"*** (Matt 5:45). Couple this quote with Paul's statement that ***"... God shows no partiality"*** (Rom 2:11) and the scriptural authority for the notion of God as unchanging principle is highly reinforced. ***"The fundamental basis of practical Christianity is that God is principle"*** (Meyer p 30))

Philosophically, Unity is in tune with Neo-Platonic teaching that God is Divine Mind and that all that exists in the phenomenal world has its origin in archetypal or divine ideas in God Mind.

***"The real of the universe is held in the Mind of Being as ideas. The firstborn of everything in the universe is an idea in Divine Mind. In God Mind an idea is the eternal Word or Logos, the original, primary, or unlimited thought of Being. Ideas may be combined in a multitude of ways, producing infinite variety in the realm of forms. There is a right combination which constitutes the divine order."***(Ibid., pp 34-35)

In fact, this is how God creates - through ideation.

Looking biblically again, the creation described in Genesis 1 says: ***"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. 3 And God said ..."*** (Gen 1:1-3a)

In Unity thought, the only "creation" that can take place in which there are no "forms" is "thought". And just as an artisan can not make a table, chair, or nightstand without first having an appropriate "idea" in mind, so, the same is true for God.

***"Creation is the original plan of an idea in Divine Mind. In the creative process Divine Mind ideates itself. God creates and moves creation through the power of Mind, through His idea or word, the universal creative vehicle. The vehicles of Mind are thoughts (ideas). God is thinking the universe into manifestation right now. Creation takes place through the operation of the Logos. The creations of the Logos are always spiritual, permanent, and incorruptible. The creative processes of Mind are continually operative; creation is going on all the time, but the original plan, the design of Divine Mind, is finished. The processes of Mind enter into all creations. God is eternally in His creation and never separate from it. Wherever there is evidence of creative action, there God is. His avenues of expression run in every direction."*** (Ibid., pp 39-40)

## MAN

***Of course, God being eternal and perfect, God's ideas are also eternal and perfect including God's idea of "man" which Unity equates with the "Christ".***

***"Man is an idea in Divine Mind. He is the epitome of Being. Man is the apex of God's creation, created in His image-likeness. Ideal man is the perfect man, the Christ, the offspring of Divine Mind. Before there could be a man there must have been an idea of man. God, the Father, Divine Mind, had an idea of man, and this idea is his Son, the perfect-man idea, the offspring of God-Mind. This Son is the Christ, the only begotten of the Father. The Son, being the expressed image-likeness of the Father, is perfect, even as the Father is perfect. All that we find in Divine Mind we find in its offspring."*** (Ibid., pp 43-44)

Important to understanding Mr. Fillmore's comprehension of "man" is the way in which he discusses the "three departments of man". There is 1) Spirit-Man; 2) Soul-Man; and 3) Body-Man in Mr. Fillmore's thought.

***"The Spirit is the divine center in man and is always in the Absolute; it does not become involved in effects but stand as the creative Cause of the absolute good. It is the indwelling Christ or spiritual nucleus within each individual."*** (Ibid., pp 46-47)

While Mr. Fillmore speaks in terms of man and Spirit, soul, and body, it is well to point out that it is a mistake to speak in terms of these three as though they were something that man "has". ***"Man has neither Spirit, soul, nor body of his own - he has identity only. He can say 'I'. He uses***

***God Spirit, God soul, and God body, as his 'I' elects. If he uses them with the idea that they belong to him, he develops selfishness, which limits his capacity and dwarfs his product. In his right relation, man is the inlet and outlet of an everywhere-present life, substance, and intelligence."*** (Ibid., pp 45-46)

2) Soul, in Unity terminology refers to man's consciousness. It is consciousness that lies back of each and every expression. The soul touches at two levels. On the one hand, it touches the inner realm of Spirit from which it can receive direct inspiration. On the other hand, it touches the external world from which it receives impressions.

3) The body of man is the expression of the soul. It is the product of consciousness. ***"God creates the body idea, or divine idea, and man, by his thinking, makes it manifest. All thoughts and ideas embody themselves according to their character. Material thoughts make a material body. Spiritual thoughts make a spiritual body. The body is the outer court of the soul, an exact representative in form of the ideals that are revolving in the inner realms of its domain."*** (Ibid., pp 47-48)

Original humanity then was (and still is) essentially divine according to Unity. What happened (metaphorically recorded) with the "Fall" described in Genesis chapter three was that humankind (symbolized by the term Adam) turned away from the contemplation of the One (in Neo-Platonic fashion) and became enmeshed in materiality by appropriating ("eating"), beliefs in two powers - Good and Evil, God and not-God.

***"Having developed a consciousness apart from his divine nature, man must 'til the ground from which he was taken,' that is, he must come into a realization of God as the source of his Being, and must express ideas in harmony with Divine Mind."*** (Ibid., p 258)

Before going further, it is well that a few comments be made here regrading Unity's understanding of "Consciousness" because it plays a significant role in understanding Jesus Christ and how salvation is achieved.

## **CONSCIOUSNESS**

***"Consciousness is the sense of awareness, of knowing. It is our knowing that we know. The ideas that are held in mind are the basis of all consciousness. The nature of the ideas upon which consciousness is formed gives character to it. Consciousness is the knowledge or realization of any idea, object, or condition. It is the sum total of all***



*ideas accumulated in and affecting man's present being. It is the composite of ideas, thoughts, emotions, sensation, and knowledge that makes up the conscious, subconscious, and superconscious phases of mind. It includes all that man is aware of in spirit, soul, and body. The total consciousness of man is the conscious, subconscious, and superconscious, phases of mind working as a whole, as a unity."* (Ibid., pp 49-50)

The "**conscious**" phase of mind is our everyday waking consciousness with which we establish our relations with the outer realm of existence and recognize our own individual entities.

The "**subconscious**" phase of mind is the seat of memory. It has no ability to do any original thinking. On the contrary, it acts upon what it has received through the conscious and superconscious phases of mind.

The "**superconscious**" phase of mind is the bridge to the very experience of God and in a sense is the avenue through which divine ideas are received by humanity.

The conscious phase of mind, ideally, should look to the superconscious for its direction and instruction. But humanity, symbolized by Adam failed to do this. The result was the symbolic Fall as described in Genesis 3.

Another way of describing what took place allegorically in the "Garden" is through the use of what Carl Jung called the Four Functions of Consciousness.

Consciousness can be viewed as consisting of four functions: Intuition, Sensation (that which is perceived through the five senses), Thinking, and Feeling. Intuition is ideally to be the source through which we receive our guidance and instruction. Even scripture says "***Do not judge according to appearances ...***" (John 7:24) The sense can indeed deceive us. Also, our own thinking can be misleading as well. How we feel depends upon our cognitive responses and will be consistent with them but if they are faulty then we can not be always guided by our feelings either.

One way in which the story of the Fall can be interpreted is in terms of these functions of consciousness.

In the allegory, there are four characters: man, woman, the serpent, and God. Man symbolizes the thinking function. Woman symbolizes the feeling function. And the Serpent and God symbolize Sensation and Intuition respectively.

With this understanding, it becomes clear then that the disobedience which this allegory illustrates was the failure to follow the Intuitive function of consciousness through which God speaks to man. The result of course was catastrophe. Humanity accepted the false belief in "two" powers, the notion of both Good and Evil, God and Not-God as mentioned earlier.

What then is the relationship between God and Humanity?

Humanity, of course, is God's creature but it is a special creature that has the ability to commune with God through mental processes. This is not accomplished through the normal waking consciousness but through the superconscious phase of mind or the faculty of Intuition.

This is where and how the Grace of God is experienced and the reason that Unity does not place emphasis on physical or outer sacraments. The problem is one of consciousness and the solution entails a change of consciousness.

What then is the **"problem"** of humanity and how is humanity to be redeemed? The essential problem is one of ignorance - the failure to realize that all human problems ultimately rest on the fact that humanity believes itself to be separated from God when in truth - ***"he is not far from each one of us, for In him we live and move and have our being ..."*** (Acts 17:27b-28a).

Does this mean then that humanity can redeem itself?

One of the big objections that the second century church had against Gnosticism was that the gnostics taught that all that was needed was a certain kind of knowledge for redemption to take place. The church said that humanity was too much under the power of sin for it to redeem itself and therefore a redeemer was needed. This is why Jesus came to earth, according to classical Christian theology.

Charles Fillmore saw the obstacle to humanity's redemption in different terms.

According to Unity teaching, all human problems have at their root the false sense in separation from God which expresses itself in terms of duality and the notions of Good and Evil.

Once that initial sin, error, or mistake was made multiplicity came into being and the conscious awareness of only one presence and power - God faded, as it were from memory.

Again, this was not the result of one person's sin (Adam) but was the result of humanity at large or at least more than one person.

So, there is in a sense more than one consciousness that has to be dealt with. Yes, there is the individual consciousness which perpetuates the error of the false belief in separation from God but this is not entirely an individual error or problem. Because there is also **"race consciousness"** into which all of us are born and are definitely subject to:

***"The human race has formed laws of physical birth and death, laws of sickness and physical inability, making food the source of bodily existence, laws of mind that recognize no other source of existence except the physical. The sum total of these laws forms a race consciousness separate from and independent of creative Mind. When creative Mind sought to help men spiritually, the mind of flesh opposed it and made every effort to solve its problems in its own way. The great need of the human family is mind control. Jesus showed us that mastery is attained through realization of the power of Spirit."*** (RW, p 162)

Consequently, if all human problems ultimately are caused by the false sense of separation from God, the solution, then to all human problems is the realization of Oneness with God. And this brings us then to a discussion of Jesus Christ, who he was in terms of humanness and divinity, and his saving act.

## **JESUS CHRIST**

**U**nity has had to deal with the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ just as the traditional church has. And there is much in common. But, again, there are differences.

On the one hand, Jesus was the Man of Nazareth, the son of Mary. On the other hand, he was indeed divine. Recalling our earlier explanation of how God creates through Ideation, Unity states that ***"Jesus Christ is the perfect expression of the divine idea Man. Jesus Christ is a union of the two, the idea and the expression, or in other words, He is the perfect man demonstrated."*** (Meyer, p 86)

Perhaps a citation from Hindu scripture will help with this notion. In the Upanishads it is said, ***"Anyone who realizes Brahman (God) becomes Brahman (God)"***. (Upanishads, p 178)

Jesus was fully divine because he **"realized"** God fully.

To quote Charles Fillmore, once again ***"We cannot separate Jesus Christ from God or tell where man leaves off and God begins in Him. To say that we are men as Jesus Christ was a man is not exactly true, because He had dropped that personal consciousness by which we separate ourselves from our true God self. He became consciously one with the absolute principle of Being. He proved in His resurrection and ascension that He had no consciousness separate from that of Being, therefore He really was this Being to all intents and purposes."*** (Fillmore, ASP, pp 40-41).

The "personal consciousness" that Mr. Fillmore refers to as having been dropped is the personal consciousness that resulted when humanity (Adam) accepted the false belief in separation. The goal of humanity is to return to the pristine conscious awareness of oneness symbolized by the Garden of Eden experience before the "Fall".

The soul that incarnated as Jesus of Nazareth had obtained the state of consciousness in which there is the full-blown realization of Oneness with God either in previous incarnations (Charles Fillmore accepted the possibility of reincarnation) or he had not fallen away with the rest of the crowd at the time symbolized by the Genesis story.

***"As the result of lack of conscious connection between the thinking faculty and the fountainhead of existence, humanity had reached a very low state. Then came Jesus of Nazareth, whose mission was to connect the thinker with the true Source of thought. Thinking at random had brought man into a deplorable condition, and his salvation depended on his again joining his consciousness to the Christ. Only through that connection could he be brought back into his Edenic state...He was the representative of a thoroughly organized plan to help men into a higher realization of God and their relation to Him."*** (Meyer, pp 283-284)

It is in this sense that Mr. Fillmore referred to Jesus as a "Way-Shower" - ***"Jesus is the Way- Shower. He came that we might have life more abundantly. He came to awaken man to the possibilities of his own nature. He came to bear witness to Truth."*** (Ibid., p 285)

But Jesus was more than this. He was a Saviour. And it is in this context that we will discuss the Atonement according to Charles Fillmore.

# ATONEMENT

*"We have been taught that Jesus died for us - as an atonement for our sins. By human sense this belief has been materialized into a flesh-and-blood process, in which the death of the body on the Cross played the important part. Herein has the sense consciousness led us astray. That spiritual things must be spiritually discerned seems to have escaped notice in forming the scheme of atonement..."*

*Jesus of Nazareth played an important part in opening the way for every one of us into the Father's kingdom. However, that way was not through His death on the Cross, but through His overcoming death." (Ibid., pp 318-319)*

The apostle Paul said *"The last enemy to be destroyed is death."* (I Cor 15:26) According to Charles Fillmore's earlier statement regarding "race consciousness", we can see that in his view, at least, that it was a fallen human race that brought death into existence along with innumerable human-formed laws that produce sickness, disease, and various forms of difficulties. God was not and is not responsible for this. In fact, God has nothing to do with it. It was the result of human sin and we are not punished for our sins but by them!

The overcoming of death that Jesus demonstrated on the Cross is neither a ransom to the Devil or a payment to God. The importance of this overcoming and demonstration is the effect it had and still has on race consciousness.

There are a couple of citations in the Gospel of John which are important to the understanding of the concept involved in this discussion. The first citation is found in John 3:14-15 where Jesus is recorded as saying (in anticipation of the crucifixion) *"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."*

The second citation is found in John 12:32 *"...and, I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."*

The reference to Moses and the serpent in the wilderness is a reference to an episode in the Book of Numbers. In chapter 21, beginning with verse 7 we are told:

*"And the people came to Moses, and said, 'We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you, pray to the Lord that he take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. 8 And the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and every*

***one who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live. 9 So Moses made a bronze serpent, and set it on a pole; and if a serpent bit any man, he would look at the bronze serpent and live. "***

This passage is significant because the Israelites understood that there was no power in the serpent. The power was God working through the serpent.

Jesus (the man) is saying that there is no power in the human. It was the divine that was working through him. And it was the divine that he was bearing witness to and was trying to bring to those who had "ears to hear" and "eyes to see".

The second citation from John chapter 12 verse 31 speaks of "drawing all men to myself". The role that race consciousness plays in human affairs cannot be underestimated here.

It was Charles Fillmore's belief that Jesus' great contribution to humankind in his overcoming of death on the cross was that he broke a hole in the wall of race consciousness (metaphorically) so that others might follow him and become what he was.

To illustrate this notion, we might recall young Roger Bannister who astonished the running community by completing the mile in four minutes. Prior to this unique and record breaking accomplishment, it was believed that this was an impossibility. It was an impossibility because no one had done it before and the prevalent "race consciousness" said that it couldn't be done.

The remarkable thing, was that after young Bannister broke the speed record for the mile he also apparently broke up the notion in race consciousness that it couldn't be done because since that time there have been many one mile races run in four minutes or even a little less. It is not unusual to have more than one person in the same race today run the mile in four minutes or less.

It is in this context that Charles Fillmore understood the work of Jesus Christ.

This did not mean that the followers of Jesus were do to nothing, however. For Mr. Fillmore, following Jesus was to become like him.

Also, Mr. Fillmore's mysticism and his understanding of the true "oneness" of all life led him to insist that Jesus Christ was always present and that anyone who had faith in him and who would contemplate the presence of



Jesus would connect with Jesus' consciousness in prayer and would be lifted up in consciousness and know the Father as Jesus knew him.

***"Salvation" then for Charles Fillmore was "The restitution of man to his spiritual birthright; regaining conscious possession of his God-given attributes. It comes as the result of redemption; the change from sin to righteousness. Salvation comes to man as a free gift from God. It embodies a knowledge of God that frees one from all limitations and points the way by which mind and body may be lifted up to the spiritual place of consciousness.***

***The belief that Jesus in an outer way atoned for our sins is not salvation. Salvation is based solely on an inner overcoming, a change in consciousness..."*** (RW, p 173)

So, Mr. Fillmore advocated somewhat of a "divinization" process whereby the individual would consciously experience themselves as a divine being.

The overcoming death of Jesus Christ made all of this possible by breaking through the wall of race consciousness. Jesus could and does help with individual salvation but He doesn't do it FOR us by just having faith in him (at least not in this incarnation).

However, Mr. Fillmore was not advocating a theology of works. It was by the grace of God acting in and through Jesus Christ that makes this possible.

Perhaps the most definitive statement that Mr. Fillmore made on this subject is contained in a personal letter written on June 2, 1936 to Georgiana Tree West. At that time Reverend West was the minister of the Unity Center of Practical Christianity in New York City.

This correspondence is significant because it reflects Mr. Fillmore's views at the height of his theological maturity.

Mr. Fillmore wrote:

***"The relation which Jesus Christ bears to the human family on this planet is somewhat complex and involved, in even a metaphysical explanation, but when we admit that He was one step ahead of us in His race evolution we have a key that clears up many seeming contradictions.***

***The Soul that incarnated in Jesus had attained the glory of the Son of God consciousness aeons of ages previously in another universe evolution, in which He had attained creative power.***

***'Glorify thou me with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.' When the present universe was created, Christ was given the bringing forth of the planetary people to which we belong. As taught in the Scripture, 'We are his offspring.'***

***According to the Generic allegory, all went well with us until the soul (Eve) became involved in the pleasure of sensation (serpent) and sought other sources of guidance than the Jehovah or Christ Mind. Here began the gradual degeneration of the whole human family until they were nearly extinct. Something had to be done to save them from utter annihilation in the murky darkness of their own sense thoughts. Christ then began a series of physical incarnations beginning prehistorically and ending with His incarnation as Jesus. To lift the race out of sense, He was compelled by the necessity of soul sympathy to become an intimate associate of the people He sought to help. As Paul says, 'He was tempted in all points as we are, but without sin.'***

***Then, as a final and very mystical process, He diffused the units of His ascended body into our race ether, to the end that we may be inoculated in both mind and body with those propensities of Being that will restore us to our divine estate...***

***Jesus had to endure all the evils of materiality as we endure them, but He overcame them without going down under the impact, and the glory of associating with Him is that He shows us how He did it, and how with Him, we can do the same...***

***The Christ in Jesus was and is our Father and we are joint heirs with Him to all the possibilities of Being."*** (Fillmore, Archives, see note)

***Mr. Fillmore took quite literally the statement of Jesus when he said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father." (John 14:12)***

***It was only from the standpoint of "Being" that this would be possible. In "Truth" all of humanity must be divine for this to come true. Mr. Fillmore argued that children share in the nature of the parent. God being divine - so are His children.***

The problem is belief in false separation from God. The solution is the realization of Oneness with God. Jesus made this possible by knocking a whole in race consciousness.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

Paul Tillich has written that *"...all dogmas were formulated negatively, that is, as reactions against misinterpretations from inside the church... We may call them protective doctrines, for they were intended to protect the substance of the biblical message... When new doctrines arose which seemed to undercut the fundamental confession, the protective doctrines were added to it... Since each new protective statement was itself subject to misinterpretation, there was always the need for sharper theoretical formulations. In order to do this it was necessary to use philosophical terms. This is how the many philosophical concepts entered into the Christian dogmas."* (Tillich, p xxxviii-xxxix)

Christianity began with faith in what was believed to be a revelation of God. The scripture and tradition (both oral and written) that supported that faith and revelation were in turn believed to be inviolable but both had to be explained.

Since the revelation was connected with the idea of salvation, it is only natural that the original faith be protected. Consequently, while the history of Christian Thought reveals a divergence of views, "protective doctrines" (as Tillich calls them) arose to maintain the accepted confession of faith and to silence "heresies".

The philosophy that joined with Christian faith to explain it was secondary to it in origin and therefore the theological conclusions were given precedence. With such an approach, the necessary metaphysic discussed earlier was not present.

Unity provides the necessary metaphysic because it meets the twofold criteria of beginning with Being and by relating the Christological and Soteriological concerns to a meaningful structure of Human Consciousness without compromising the theological rubric of Salvation.

# NOTES

Abbreviations:

ANF - Ante-Nicene Fathers

ASP - Atom-Smashing Power

NPNF - A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church

RW - The Revealing Word

All bible quotes are from The New Oxford Annotated Bible With The Apocrypha Edited by Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger (Oxford University Press, 1977)

A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2d Ser., Vol 7, p. 440 (Christian Literature Co., 1894)

Aulen, Gustav, Christus Victor, (Collier Books - MacMillan Publishing Co., 1986)

Bettenson, Henry, editor, Documents of the Christian Church (Oxford University Press, 1982)

Fillmore, Charles, Atom-Smashing Power (Unity Books, 1949)

\_\_\_\_\_, "Letter to Geogiana Tree West", Unpublished Correspondence provided by Unity Archives, Unity Village, Missouri.

\_\_\_\_\_, Prosperity (Unity Books, 1936) (Frontispiece).

\_\_\_\_\_, The Revealing Word (Unity Books, 1979)

Freeman, James Dillet, The Story of Unity (Unity Books, 1979)

Menoud, P.H., "Preaching", The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Volume 3 (Abingdon Press, 1982)

Meyer, Warren, Editor, Dynamics For Living - Charles Fillmore (Unity Books, 1967)

Pelikan, Jaroslav, The Christian Tradition - A History of the Development of Doctrine, Volume 1, "The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600), (The University of Chicago Press, 1971)

Petry, Ray C., Editor, A History of Christianity - Readings in the History of the Church (Baker, 1962), Clement of Rome's Letter to the Church at Corinth

Placher, William C., A History of Christian Theology - an Introduction, (The Westminster Press, 1983)

Prabhavananda, Swami, Translator, The Upanishads (Vedanta Press, 1975)

Tertullian, "On The Flesh of Christ", quoted from The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Edited by Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Volume III, (T&T Clark and Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989)

Tillich, Paul, A History of Christian Thought (Simon and Schuster, 1968)  
Whitehead, Alfred North, Religion In The Making (The MacMillan Co, 1960)