The biggest mistake people in Unity are making today

Seven Ways Unity is Not Nearly as Inclusive as We Think

Hi Friends -

This past week at the 2019 Unity People’s Convention in Overland Park, Kansas, I gave a talk based on an earlier version of this post. The name of the talk was “Deep Diversity and Grand Opportunity: Recognizing, Bridging and Blessing Traditionalists, Moderns and PostModerns in Unity.” You may download the 8-page handout and listen to the talk by clicking on the links further down.

I highlight seven ways that Unity is not as nearly inclusive and tolerant as we think. And that’s just happens to be from my perspective, which is representative of someone with a traditionalist worldview. If I had been joined by someone with a modern mindset and by someone with a postmodern mindset then we would have uncovered many more ways that our cultural blindness excludes and discourages growth in Unity. We can do better.

A worldview is a particular philosophy of life or conception of the world. As you will read below, our worldview is shifting from a modern to postmodern perspective. Not many religious denominations are able to accommodate the change and none that I know of are able to truly bridge cultural differences.

My sense is that Unity is particularly well suited to do exactly that. And, perhaps even more important, is that this change could also reflect a shift from an era of Evangelical Christianity to an era of Metaphysical Christianity. That is my personal belief and I have spoken about it several times.

If so, we in Unity will have to make a few adjustments to accommodate the opportunity. It begins with honest conversation about tolerance of cultural differences. This revised
The biggest mistake people in Unity are making today is assuming that we all arrive at Truth in the same way. Because Truth is universal and unchanging, we assume that the way we come to know Truth is also universal and unchanging. But that is not so. The Truth we come to know comes to us in at least three ways.

For Traditionalists, Truth is REVEALED — revealed by the church or by the Bible, through intuition, as taught by the Transcendentalists, or, as taught by the Fillmores, by "going to headquarters" or "in the Silence". Revealed Truth orders our thinking according to God Mind and aligns our consciousness with the perfect image of God of which we are true expressions. Tradition revealed monism, a Truth that God and the world are one, that they are "categorically distinguished but nowhere disjointed"
and where "all things fall into [their perfect and right] place." In Unity, we know this as oneness.

- **For Moderns, Truth is DISCOVERED** — discovered by observation of nature, scientific discovery and deductive thinking. Truth discovered by moderns taught us that all persons are created equal and that the pursuit of happiness is a noble cause. Moderns in Unity are enthusiastic about the insights gained from quantum physics, near-death experiences, neuropsychology, crystals, energy-medicine and a slew of other pathways that straddle the unknown world and the world which we can grasp by the senses. While the moderns are also interested in how science may order our thinking ("order is heaven's first law"), the true hope of modernity is progress, or, as we refer to it in Unity, prosperity.

- **For Postmoderns, Truth is known in RELATIONSHIPS** — what is "right and true" leads to loving relationships, or else it is not based on rightness nor Truth. Many of our accepted Truths from tradition and from modernism have rapidly been discredited and rejected in the past 100 or so years. Postmoderns have stepped in with a way of acquiring Truth that moves us forward. We have learned that ending slavery could not address racism; we have learned that scientific achievement could not prevent the barbarism of the holocaust; we have learned that extending voting rights to women could not fully open them to their human potential; and most recently we have learned that what is typically called "family values" never brought about the renaissance of commitment to marriage and family that gays and lesbians are leading in today’s society. Postmoderns in Unity are especially attached to *A Course in Miracles*, the *Peace Song* and the Beatles ("Imagine" and "All You Need Is Love"). The love they teach leads to what we know in Unity as wholeness.

### Three Dominant Wordviews

- **Traditional.** Based on Greek philosophy (Plato), traditional worldview emphasizes esoteric ideas emanating from a divine Mind. What distinguishes the traditional worldview is recognition of a dimension of Reality perceived by intuition, beyond the physical world perceived by the senses. This worldview dominated western thought in the first 1,000 years of Christianity. Traditional values include a conviction that some things are True and that some practices are wrong. These values are deeply illustrated in Catholic social teaching.

- **Modern.** Modernism is a version of a traditional worldview that emphasizes reason, science, progress, and the importance of happiness. It came to be as a result of the discovery of the controlled experiment. Modern values include technology, self-interest, and the pursuit of happiness. Modernism does not necessarily deny the
existence of a Reality beyond the physical world, but its emphasis on what can be
controlled by experiment constricts our understanding of life to what can be
perceived by reason and the senses. It will be a surprise for many that Evangelical
Christianity holds to a modern worldview.

Postmodernism is an outlook or worldview marked by the conviction that
systematic knowledge is impossible. Postmodernism exhibits an impulse to
deconstruct, that is, to take a text not at face value but in terms of its hidden
ideologies and implied power relationships. For example, seen from a postmodern
point of view, “Global Warming” might be discussed with respect to the domination
and marginalization of groups. In extreme forms, postmodernism means that there is
no Truth. The individual is the judge and arbiter. “Anything goes” as long as the
individual is respected and empowered. Postmodern values include “Happiness is
whatever makes me feels good”; “All ideas have equal worth”; “My opinion is as
valid as that of an authority”; and, “Personal sacrifice is not essential for happiness.”

What is Your Worldview?

Truth is:

1. revealed by God or Spirit
2. becoming better known as science and humanity evolve
3. impossible to know for sure
4. a guide to living a moral and successful life
5. the result of tried and proven practices
6. what I know in my heart to be loving and kind

Happiness:

7. usually requires personal sacrifice
8. is a learned behavior
9. is whatever makes me feel good
10. is the result of making moral choices
11. is the most important thing to pursue in life
12. is worthwhile, even if it means being poor

I believe:

13. I am willing to die for my country
14. merit should be the basis for determining status in society.
15. I would be willing to live in poverty if I could be content.

16. sexual relations prior to marriage is morally wrong.
17. sometimes violence is necessary.
18. “Live free or die” is a motto that I accept.

19. cigarettes should be banned.
20. a white person can understand a black person.
21. my ideas are as good as those of an authority.

22. personal sacrifice is essential for happiness.
23. a man can understand a woman.
24. friendship is important to me.

25. one must have children in order to have a happy life.
26. I am more hopeful about the future than despairing.
27. all ideas have equal worth.

Seven Ways Worldview Limits
Tolerance and Diversity in Unity

1. **Unity as a “make it up as you go” religion.** For fear of being dogmatic, Unity has abandoned its teachings. Because it has abandoned its teachings, we have an endless process of visitors who enter the front door of our churches, hoping for a practical application of what they learned in their denominations and then leave through the back door upon finding out that a “make it up as you go” form of religion does not work in the long term. We need a teaching and that teaching must build upon what they have gained from their denominations.

2. **Privileging Postmoderns as “Key Constituents”**. Promotion for Unity’s branding program said “What is branding? A brand is the personality that identifies a product, service or organization (name, term, sign, symbol, design, or combination of them) and how it relates to key constituencies.” Who are these key constituencies? Eighty-four percent of the those who were included in Unity’s branding survey and are outside of the Unity movement are “cultural creatives (postmoderns).

3. **Disparaging Traditionalists and Moderns.** According to Paul Ray, who coined the term “Cultural Creatives,” Traditionalists are nothing more than a “reaction against the
culture of today’s world, usually from a rural, small town or religiously conservative
stance” who promote “militarism, anti-immigration and against civil liberties” and “Their
hatred partly reflects their fear of being on the losing side of history.” Moderns,
according to Ray “see the world through a filter of personal success and financial gain,
with an acceptance of ‘things as they are’ in big cities, big organizations, the latest
technologies, mass media, and a ‘modern’ life rewarded by material consumption.”

4. Intolerance of Language. 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 “current
thinking in Unity” declared that precision in language produces power. Precision and
language are tools of a modern mindset. Traditional mindset recognizes that the
language of religion is symbolic, which includes art and music. Postmodern mindset
rejects literalism in all its forms and embraces a much more tolerant understanding of
religious expression. Many people now feel inadequate and unwelcome in Unity, sensing
that they don’t fit in because the language they use in prayer isn’t good enough.

5. Spiritual Elitism. Sometimes we hear about Unity leading an “expansion of global
consciousness”. My sense is that such talk is really about converting traditionalists to
postmodernism. Any expansion of consciousness is good, but it does not imply that the
the traditional or modern worldview no longer has access to truth. I’ve had several
people recommend that I read works coming from Integral philosophy, especially Jesus
and the Three Faces of God by Paul R. Smith, a popular minister from Kansas City. The
problem is found in Ken Wilber’s Afterword, where he writes: “a whole new level of
sophistication, complexity, and completeness is brought to our spiritual endeavors by
these more inclusive approaches, which will catapult religion itself from being something
of the laughingstock of the modern and postmodern world…” In the spiritual realm,
sophistication, complexity and completeness is not a sign of greater truth (it is rather a
sign of sophistry) and religion is not a laughingstock of the modern and postmodern
world.

6. Misunderstanding of the “nones”. When asked about their religious affiliation, 30%
of millennials select the category “none.” Why? Lillian Daniel writes that they are of four
categories: those who have chosen to never join (No Way), those who left and will never
return (No Longer), those who have never considered joining (Never Have) and those
who are interested but haven’t joined (Not Yet). The mistaken assumption is that all
nones have rejected the church. But Daniel argues that half have done so (No Way, No
Longer), and the other half simply have never been churched. This, alone will explain the
rise in nones.

7. Marginalizing Unity teachings from traditional and modern perspectives. Emilie
Cady writes as a traditionalist and Eric Butterworth writes as a modern. But Unity’s two
most widely read resources, Lessons in Truth and Discover the Power Within You, have
been reduced to a single course in Unity’s education program. Emilie Cady’s essay,
Unity of the Spirit, speaks to this and writes, “Beloved, as surely as you and I live, it is all one and the same truth. There may be a distinction but it is without a difference.”

Recognizing, Bridging and Blessing Deep Diversity in Unity

While you are in church this Sunday, look around at your fellow congregants; and especially consider the person with whom you are not all that familiar. Is it not possible that he or she beholds the same Truth as you, but that his or her Truth comes in a different way than it comes to you? And, if that is so, can you not recognize the unique way he or she expresses that Truth? And if the minister’s lesson isn’t quite resonating with you, can you look beyond the preacher’s illustrations and words to the deeper Truth of the message?

Awareness of these differing ways of coming to Truth enables Unity to reach its potential in the current (digital) age: the traditionalists teach us to commit to Unity's spiritual pathway, to support the church congregation and to tithe; the moderns teach us to think of new discoveries as spiritual truth and to use our intellect as much as our understanding; and the postmoderns stretch us to be more loving, open and tolerant to all people and all creation.

These new ways of how we come to know Truth expand our consciousness. We need to embrace the diversity of acquiring Truth in our fellow congregants for the simple fact that we need to embrace it in our own thinking. You don’t need me to tell you that when we judge the other fellow, we constrict our own soul.

Unity has often said that it is "Positive, Practical, Progressive Christianity." That statement was, almost for certain, written by a committee. I can imagine well a group of Unity editors thrashing out Unity’s tagline. The traditionalist says "Unity is positive thinking that brightens my day!" Oh, no," says the modernist, "Unity gives me a practical way to express prosperity in this technical world I live in." The postmodern, certain that all we need is love, asserts that "our form of Christianity has progressed" beyond that of orthodox Christianity. So it is that we in Unity have unconsciously adopted a hybrid statement of who we are; one that is strengthens Unity while acknowledging diversity.

Before we launched Unity of Georgetown, I organized an evening workshop entitled "How To Talk About Unity With Your Friends." I invited a panel of three persons — a
traditionalist, a modern and a postmodern — and asked them questions for an hour. I then asked the 30+ people in attendance if they would be comfortable forming a church community with these three. All I can say is that our mailing list grew from 75 to over 250 in the next two weeks and we launched a short time later with 103 people attending.

**I am a traditionalist** and the material I post on TruthUnity is especially appealing to those who also find that Truth is revealed. **But I am also aware that I often switch to modernist and postmodern thinking when it is necessary.** I become a modernist when the doctor is prescribing my medicine and I become postmodern when my emotions run wild listening to PosiPalooza. In fact, I often cry when I think about the goodness of relationships and when I am aware that all we need is love. **But my traditional God and my modern mind hold me when I cry.**

So, while it sometimes feels like there is a culture war in Unity, there is also a culture war in our own consciousness. If so, think about how healthy each of us would be if we were aware of the diverse ways each of us may acquire Truth. If we could do that, then we will have manifested the Truth expressed by St. Paul,

> There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28).

While I confidently stand in the **Truth that has been revealed** to me, I am happy to be a part of a **culturally-diverse denomination** and I am grateful for the fellowship of those who accept me at the table regardless of how I receive Truth and who remind me that "all we need is love."

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3. Answers: Each group has 3 answers. The first corresponds to traditional worldview, the second corresponds to modern worldview and the third corresponds to postmodern worldview.
5. Daniel, Lillian; The Four Types of Nones. [http://day1.org/7844-lillian_daniel_the_4_types_of_nones](http://day1.org/7844-lillian_daniel_the_4_types_of_nones)
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