



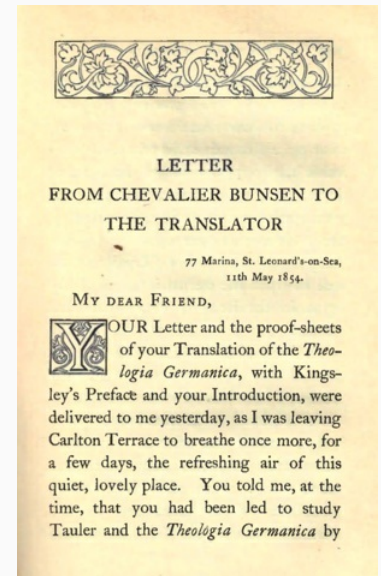
Theologia Germanica—Letter to the Translator

Where Did Practical Christianity Come From?

Hi Friends –

Have you ever wondered where or how the Fillmores might have come up with the name “Practical Christianity”? Here is how that might have happened:

- In 1854, the terms “practical Christians” and “practical Christianity” appear in an essay entitled [Letter from Chevalier Bunsen to the Translator](#). This essay is printed in the preliminary pages of [Theologia Germanica](#), a 14th century book of Christian mysticism attributed to John Tauler, a student of Meister Eckhart.
- In 1892, *Theologia Germanica* is quoted in two places in [Finding The Christ In Ourselves](#), the essay which brought Emilie Cady to the attention of the Fillmores.
- In 1897 or 1898, Charles and Myrtle Fillmore publish a tract entitled “[What is Practical Christianity?](#)” This might have been a reprint of an earlier tract, but it is the first instance I see of the Fillmore’s using the term.



We can’t conclude from these events that the Fillmores got the term *practical Christianity* from *Theologia Germanica*. But it’s possible. Further, in his letter to the translator, the Chevalier Bunsen says several things which resonate with Fillmorian ideas (italicized and highlighted below). *Declaring the book to be free of religious sophistry, understood by common people, and grounded in practicality*, the Chevalier says it brings “religion home from fruitless speculation, and reasonings upon imaginary or impossible suppositions, to man’s own heart and to the understanding of the common people, as Socrates did the Greek philosophy.”

This, he says, is the “practical Christianity” of “practical Christians”. He writes, “In this sense, [they] were, like the Apostles, men of the people and practical Christians...” In his conclusion, speaking of the region from which this book has emerged (Germany), he writes, “I have found to be also the home of practical Christianity”.

That was 1897 or 1898. Twenty years later, in 1918, we find another apparent instance of the Fillmore’s concept of Practical Christianity being linked to *Theologia Germanica*:

- In the [June 1918 issue of Unity magazine](#) we have an article entitled *As to the Character of Sin*, an article which is comprised of extracts from [chapter 2](#) and [chapter 3](#) of *Theologia Germanica*.
- That same year, 1918, Charles Fillmore published a pamphlet entitled [The Pure Reason and Honest Logic of Practical Christianity](#).

In his 1918 essay, Charles Fillmore has much to say about Practical Christianity. *Declaring Practical Christianity to be free of religious sophistry, understood by common people, and grounded in practicality*, Mr. Fillmore writes:

“Practical Christianity is not a theory having origin in the human mind; nor is it a revelation to humanity from some prophet whose word alone must be taken as unquestioned authority... it is the only system of religion before the people today which because of a universal appeal to pure reason in man, can be applied and accepted by every nation under the sun. It takes as the basis of its doctrine a fundamental truth that is known alike by savage and civilized, and from that truth, by cold, deductive reasoning, arrives at

each and every one of the conclusions which are presented. Thus it ... invites the closest mental scrutiny, and the analytical logician will find a new world open to him in following the sequential deductions which this science of pure reasoning evolves.”

Again, we can't say that these connections in 1898 and in 1918 are proof that Charles and Myrtle Fillmore got the term *Practical Christianity* from the 14th century mystical book *Theologia Germanica*.

But we do know that in 1939, in the commemorative book *Unity's Fifty Golden Years*, Dana Gatlin writes that Mr. Fillmore told her some of his understanding of Christianity. Speaking of the *Metaphysical Bible Dictionary*, she writes,

“Mr. Fillmore’s eyes were lighted with the fire of his own zeal as he earnestly told the writer: ‘If you want to know Unity and the Unity teaching, get this *Dictionary* and study it... This *Dictionary* explains Principle: the principles by which we have worked and demonstrated. Every attribute of God and life and the way in which it is worked out in the life experience of man is included in this book... After two thousand years we are just beginning to grasp the true meaning of His [Jesus’] message, to accept it and put it to its right use.’”

Dana Gatlin then says **Mr. Fillmore then made a profoundly revealing statement:**

✍ “Unity might be defined as Christian mysticism practically applied to everyday living.” (p. 96)

So there we have it. The practical teachings of Unity are not grounded in what we know as New Thought nor its founders Parkhurst Quimby, Mary Baker Eddy, nor Emma Curtis Hopkins. **Rather, the practical teachings of Unity are grounded in Christian mysticism.** And the direct references we have in Unity regarding the practicality of Christian mysticism is Emilie Cady’s *Finding the Christ in Ourselves* (1892), the Unity tract *Practical Christianity* (1897), the June 1918 issue of *Unity* magazine and the Unity pamphlet *The Pure Reason and Honest Logic of Practical Christianity* (1918).

There is, however, an indirect reference to Christian mysticism in what is one of Unity’s most well-known books and what was it’s final chapter. When we return *Bondage or Liberty, Which?* to it’s original place as the final chapter of Emilie Cady’s *Lessons in Truth* and study it’s content from the perspective of her earlier essay *Finding the Christ in Ourselves*, we will find **ten steps on the shift from Metaphysics to Mysticism:**

1. From Bad Decisions to Fullness of Time (paragraphs 1-5).
2. From Oneness with Self to Oneness with God (6-9).
3. From Being Source to Being an Inlet and Outlet (10-19).
4. From Calling on Principle to Hearing God’s Call (20-22).
5. From Practicing Principle to Practicing Presence (23-27).
6. From Power to Gentleness (28-31).
7. From Forgiving Evil to Giving Good (32-33).
8. From Only Good to Only God (34-38).
9. From Truth to Trust (39-46).
10. From Greek Philosophy to Practical Christianity (47-48).

I wrote in 2019 that **I sense that the popularity of *Lessons in Truth* has been its message of mysticism and that it has become Unity’s “primary textbook” because the mysticism in the lessons offer an important balance to the metaphysical writings of Charles Fillmore...**

I am deeply grateful for my training in metaphysics. Metaphysics brought back to me the Gospel in a way that orthodox theology was never able to do. But, **for me, and for Emilie Cady, the bottom line is that “Christ is the way.” We aspire to be both metaphysician and mystic but our spiritual pathway is ultimately the way of Christ—the way of the mystic.**



Mark Hicks



LETTER FROM CHEVALIER BUNSEN TO THE TRANSLATOR

MY DEAR FRIEND,

77 Marina, St. Leonard's-on-Sea, 11th May

YOUR Letter and the proof-sheets of your Translation of the *Theologia Germanica*, 1854.

with Kingsley's Preface and your Introduction, were delivered to me yesterday, as I

was leaving Carlton Terrace to breathe once more, for a few days, the refreshing air of this quiet, lovely place. You told me, at the time, that you had been led to study Tauler and the *Theologia Germanica* by some conversations which we had on their subjects in 1851, and you now wish me to state to your readers, in a few lines, what place I conceive this school of Germanic theology to hold in the general development of Christian thought, and what appears to me to be the bearing of this work in particular upon the present dangers and prospects of Christianity, as well as upon the eternal interests of religion in the heart of every man and woman.

In complying willingly with your request, I may begin by saying that, with Luther, I rank this short treatise next to the Bible, but, unlike him, should place it before rather than after St. Augustine. That school of pious, learned, and profound men of which this book is, as it were, the popular catechism, was the Germanic counterpart of Romanic scholasticism, and more than the revival of that Latin theology which produced so many eminent thinkers, from Augustine, its father, to Thomas Aquinas, its last great genius, whose death did not take place until after the birth of Dante, who again was the contemporary of the Socrates of the Rhenish school,—Meister Eckart, the Dominican.

The theology of this school was the first protest of the Germanic mind against the Judaism and formalism of the Byzantine and mediaeval Churches,—the hollowness of science to which scholasticism had led, and the rottenness of society which a pompous hierarchy strove in vain to conceal, but had not the power nor the will to correct. *Eckart and Tauler, his pupil, brought religion home from fruitless speculation, and reasonings upon imaginary or impossible suppositions, to man's own heart and to the understanding of the common people, as Socrates did the Greek philosophy.* There is both a remarkable analogy and a striking contrast between the great Athenian and those Dominican friars. Socrates did full justice to the deep ethical ideas embodied in the established religion of his country and its venerated mysteries, which he far preferred to the shallow philosophy of the sophists; but he dissuaded his pupils from seeking an initiation into the mysteries, or at least from resting their convictions and hopes upon them, exhorting them to rely, not upon the oracles of Delphi, but upon the oracle in their own bosom. The "Friends of God," on the other hand, believing (like Dante) most profoundly in the truth of the Christian religion, on which the established Church of their age, notwithstanding its corruptions, was essentially founded, recommended submission to the ordinances of the church as a wholesome preparatory discipline for many minds. Like the saint of Athens, however, they spoke plain truth to the people. To their disciples, and those who came to them for instruction, they exhibited the whole depth of that real Christian philosophy, which opens to the mind after all scholastic conventionalism has been thrown away, and the soul listens to the response which Christ's Gospel and God's creation find in a sincere heart and a self-sacrificing life;—a philosophy which, considered merely as a speculation, is far more profound than any scholastic system. But, in a style that was intelligible to all, they preached that no fulfilment of rites and ceremonies, nor of so-called religious duties,—in fact, no outward works, however meritorious, can either give peace to man's conscience, nor yet give him strength to bear up against the temptations of prosperity and the trials of adversity.

In following this course they brought the people back from hollow profession and real despair, to the blessings of gospel religion, while they opened to philosophic minds a new career of thought. By teaching that man is justified by faith, and by faith alone, they prepared the popular intellectual element of the Reformation; by teaching that this faith has its philosophy, as fully able to carry conviction to the understanding, as faith is to give peace to the troubled conscience, they paved the way for that spiritual philosophy of the mind, of which Kant laid the foundation. But they were not controversialists, as the Reformers of the sixteenth century were driven to be by their position, and not men of science exclusively, as the masters of modern philosophy in Germany were and are. Although most of them friars, or laymen connected with the religious orders of the time, they were men of the people and men of action. They preached the saving faith to the people in churches, in hospitals, in the streets and public places. In the strength of this faith, Tauler, when he had

been already for years the universal object of admiration as a theologian and preacher through all the free cities on the Rhine, from Basle to Cologne, humbled himself, and remained silent for the space of two years, after the mysterious layman had shown him the insufficiency of his scholastic learning and preaching. In the strength of this faith, he braved the Pope's Interdict, and gave the consolations of religion to the people of Strasburg, during the dreadful plague which depopulated that flourishing city. For this faith, Eckart suffered with patience slander and persecution, as formerly he had borne with meekness, honours and praise. For this faith, Nicolaus of Basle, who sat down as a humble stranger at Tauler's feet to become the instrument of his real enlightenment, died a martyr in the flames. **In this sense, the "Friends of God" were, like the Apostles, men of the people and practical Christians**, while as men of thought, their ideas contributed powerfully to the great efforts of the European nations in the sixteenth century.

Let me, therefore, my dear friend, lay aside all philosophical and theological terms, and state the principle of the golden book which you are just presenting to the English public, in what I consider, with Luther, the best Theological exponent, in plain Teutonic, thus:—

- Sin is selfishness:
- Godliness is unselfishness:
- A godly life is the steadfast working out of inward freeness from self:
- To become thus Godlike is the bringing back of man's first nature.

On this last point, — man's divine dignity and destiny, — Tauler speaks as strongly as our author, and almost as strongly as the Bible. Man is indeed to him God's own image. "As a sculptor," he says somewhere, with a striking range of mind for a monk of the fourteenth century, "is said to have exclaimed indignantly on seeing a rude block of marble, 'what a godlike beauty thou hidest!' thus God looks upon man in whom God's own image is hidden." "We may begin," he says in a kindred passage, "by loving God in hope of reward, we may express ourselves concerning Him in symbols (*Bilder*), but we must throw them all away, and much more we must scorn all idea of reward, that we may love God only because He is the Supreme Good, and contemplate His eternal nature as the real substance of our own soul."

But let no one imagine that these men, although doomed to passiveness in many respects, thought a contemplative or monkish life a condition of spiritual Christianity, and not rather a danger to it. "If a man truly loves God," says Tauler, "and has no will but to do God's will, the whole force of the river Rhine may run at him and will not disturb him or break his peace; if we find outward things a danger and disturbance, it comes from our appropriating to ourselves what is God's." But Tauler, as well as our Author, uses the strongest language to express his horror of Sin, man's own creation, and their view on this subject forms their great contrast to the philosophers of the Spinozistic school. Among the Reformers, Luther stands nearest to them, with respect to the great fundamental points of theological teaching, but their intense dread of Sin as a rebellion against God, is shared both by Luther and Calvin. Among later theologians, Julius Muller, in his profound Essay on Sin, and Richard Rothe, in his great work on Christian Ethics, come nearest to them in depth of thought and ethical earnestness, and the first of these eminent writers carries out, as it appears to me, most consistently that fundamental truth of the *Theologia Germanica* that there is no sin but Selfishness, and that all Selfishness is sin.

Such appear to me to be the characteristics of our book and of Tauler. I may be allowed to add, that this small but golden Treatise has been now for almost forty years an unspeakable comfort to me and to many Christian friends (most of whom have already departed in peace), to whom I had the happiness of introducing it. May it in your admirably faithful and lucid translation become a real "book for the million" in England, a privilege which it already shares in Germany with Tauler's matchless Sermons, of which I rejoice to hear that you are making a selection for publication. May it become a blessing to many a longing Christian heart in that dear country of yours, which I am on the point of leaving, after many happy years of residence, but on which I can never look as a strange land to me, any more than I shall ever consider myself as a stranger in that home of old Teutonic liberty and energy, which I have found to be also the home of **practical Christianity** and of warm and faithful affection.

Bunsen.

