

A PATH TOWARD PERSONAL PEACE



**The remarkable story of Unity,
a non-denominational religious
group which is dedicated to the
true brotherhood of all men**

BY ELEANOR MOREHEAD

■ IT WAS SIXTY EIGHT years ago last April that a husband and wife, living in modest circumstances in Kansas City, Mo., founded a new religious movement which they called Unity. Today, Unity's teachings are known throughout the world, and its followers have grown from a bare handful to well over 5,000,000.

The faith called Unity began with a miracle, a miracle of healing in answer to prayer. But perhaps the most miraculous thing about Unity is that its basic concepts were so far ahead of the times. Conceived in the gaslit era of the 1890's, decades before the radical and profound changes that have marked the twentieth century, Unity none the less embodied then, as it does today, many modern aspects of contemporary religion.

Unity would be the last group in the world to seek or expect recognition for its trail-blazing, pioneering religious techniques. Yet, many, many decades before the phrases

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*Myrtle and Charles Fillmore
Kansas City, Missouri, ca. 1925*

“the power of positive thinking” and “abundant living” were heard in the land, Unity taught that God never meant this life to be a trial and a vale of tears, but, on the contrary, that it “is God’s will for man to be strong and vigorous and rich and successful and happy.” Therefore, Unity affirmed, those who prayed with a positive faith could overcome every problem, whether ill health, poverty, anxiety, fear, mental illness, alcoholism, personal relationships, or business worries.

Long before more orthodox denominations began to stress religion in business and industry, Unity published its *Good Business* pamphlet.

It is now commonplace for churches to spread the word via radio and TV programs, but Unity was a pioneer in this, also; it owned its own radio station back in the early 1920’s when radio was still in its infancy.

Similarly, Unity published its magazine, *Wee Wisdom*, which carries non-demoninational inspirational stories for children, back in the 1890’s. *Wee Wisdom* is thriving today, and so are hundreds of its imitators, published by other denominations.

The list of Unity’s “modern” innovations, so far ahead of their times, could go on and on, but perhaps the religious historian Dr. Marcus Bach best summed it up when he wrote: “Every contemporary writer in the field of positive thinking, peace of mind and peace of soul is in debt to this school. Unity is directly responsible for the renaissance of personalized faith and for

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many of the methods which modern purveyors of the gospel of reassurance have now popularized.”

The name Unity itself is twentieth century, for it refers not only to the union of God and man, but to the common aim and brotherhood of all men everywhere—a daring philosophy that preceded One-World groups and the United Nations by more than half a century.

This basic belief is largely responsible for Unity’s remarkable success and growth where other sects and cults faltered and failed. For unlike many cults, Unity does not quarrel with other religions, seeks no converts from them. It explores the good in all faiths, whether Christian or non-Christian. Instead of emphasizing their separations and differences, it teaches that men of all creeds can live, work, and believe together.

Thus, of its more than five million followers, only a few hundred are enrolled as “members” of Unity; all the others receive spiritual inspiration and help from it while retaining their affiliations with other denominations.

It is precisely because Unity has never functioned as a limited sect with a fixed creed that it has such a universal and dynamic appeal. Its hopeful faith of “practical Christianity” is readily understood and embraced by people everywhere, for it states quite simply and positively that God will hear and answer affirmative prayer.

Unity sums up affirmative prayer in one sentence: Stop thinking about the difficulty, whatever it is, and think about God, instead. Thus, the sick do not ask to be made well but affirm, “I am a child of God and therefore I do not inherit sickness.” Instead of asking God for a better job or a prosperous business, the Unity prayer affirms, “God, my opulent father, has poured out to me all resources, and I am a mighty river of affluence and abundance.”

Assuring the alcoholic that he can be cured, Unity advises, “Begin to change your thought about yourself. Say to yourself again and again until the truth of it stays with you, ‘I am a spiritual being. I am created in the image and likeness of God, and through His spirit in me I am able to meet everything in my life. I am strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.’ ”

Unity receives thousands of letters a day from its followers testifying to the miraculous results of these simple prayers. They report count-

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less instances where the sick and crippled have been made well, the blind have regained sight, the mentally ill have become sane, and alcoholics have been restored to normal life.

Such divine healing is an integral part of Unity, for this religious movement came into being when Myrtle Fillmore, gravely ill with tuberculosis, made a remarkable recovery and attributed her cure to prayer alone.

It was in 1886 that Mrs. Fillmore and her husband, Charles, a Kansas City real estate man, attended a religious lecture and heard the speaker say the words, "I am a child of God and do not inherit sickness." Mrs. Fillmore repeated the words over and over. She came to believe, as she later wrote, that life must "be guided and directed in man's body by his intelligence. Then it flashed upon me that I might talk to the life in every part of my body and have it do just what I wanted. I began to teach my body, and got marvelous results."

According to Unity historians, doctors had given up all hope for Mrs. Fillmore at this time, but after two years of prayer and thought direction she was cured and lived a full and active life for 50 years more.

When people heard of Mrs. Fillmore's miraculous recovery, afflicted neighbors began to come to her home to ask for her prayers. There are eye-witness accounts of how an old man came there on crutches and within a short time was able to walk without them, and of how she restored sight to a blind boy.

Meanwhile, Charles Fillmore had become impressed with the healing principle his wife had discovered and began to apply it to his own handicap, a shortened leg due to a boyhood accident. Within a few years he was able to wear normal shoes and to discard the cane he had used most of his life.

Although Charles and Myrtle Fillmore were convinced that physical ills can be cured solely by means of prayer, Unity has never required that its followers give up medical treatment.

Myrtle and Charles began to hold regular prayer meetings in their home and were joined by neighbors and others whom they had helped. It was during one of these meetings that the word "Unity" came into Charles' mind. And in 1892, the husband and wife signed a written covenant to devote the rest of their

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lives to spreading the teachings of Unity.

Their first step was to publish a magazine. From this small beginning a vast publishing enterprise now flourishes at Unity headquarters, the Unity School of Christianity, near Lee's Summit, Mo.

Each month two million pieces of literature come off the 12 printing presses there. There are eight monthly magazines that go into more than a million homes. Among the organization's many publications are *Unity*, *Weekly Unity*, *Daily Word*, *Wee Wisdom* and *You*.

In addition, Unity publishes dozens of books and hundreds of pamphlets which go to every country in the World. Some of these works are published in Dutch, French, German, Greek, Ibo, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Swedish. Five publications are printed in Braille and distributed free to the blind. It has been estimated that, in the U.S., at least one-third of all people who belong to church denominations have read Unity literature, thus making Unity the greatest "supplementary" faith in the country.

Unity also sends its message out over 50 radio stations in the U.S., Australia, New Zealand and Cuba, to an estimated audience of more than 3,000,000.

In addition to a \$1,000,000 temple in Kansas City, there are Unity Centers in hundreds of cities where lectures are given, services and prayers are conducted, and literature is available. Though Unity is no "church" it trains students at the Lee's Summit headquarters to become ministers at the many centers.

No dues are ever levied at any of these centers. Not the least remarkable thing about Unity's growth and success is the fact that since its inception it has thrived solely on free-will "love" offerings and from the sale of literature.

Unity's most impressive monument is its 1,200-acre headquarters, 17 miles southeast of Kansas City. Resembling a university campus, its buildings include the printing plant, cottages for visitors and students,

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tennis courts and a golf course, and administration buildings.

And here, also, is the Silent Unity Building and the Unity Tower. In one window of the Silent Unity Building there is a light, known as "the light upon the world," which burns day and night as a symbol of hope for hundreds of thousands of troubled people throughout the world.

Into the Silent Unity Building pours an avalanche of more than 600,000 urgent appeals for help each year. They come by letter, by telegraph and by telephone—Silent Unity's switchboard is always open to receive calls for aid.

Every minute, day and night, devout Unity workers pray for these people, who have heard that God answers Unity prayers with miracles and new hope.

The workers of Silent Unity have always claimed that they have no special power that is not also latent in every one else. The statement, "It is not I but the Father within me, He doeth the works," is always before them when they enter the prayer room. Each worker is given a list of names of those asking for help, and this statement is printed at the top of these lists. Only those who have spent years of preparation in prayer and the study of the teachings of Jesus may take part in the several services devoted to healing each day, and few persons outside of the members of Silent Unity are ever permitted inside this special prayer room.

From the beginning, letters poured in to show that Silent Unity's prayers had produced results; today an average of 1,500 are received each day, gratefully acknowledging an appeal for help that was answered. For example, one Kansas City doctor wrote this letter:

"Last Tuesday night I was watching at the bedside of an apparently dying woman. I had exhausted every resource. She was surely passing away, when I thought of Silent Unity. I prayed that I might have your help in saving my patient. It was about nine o'clock and I knew you were in session. So I shut my eyes and asked that the Spirit of truth might be poured out upon the dying woman.

"Instantly the room seemed ablaze with a bright light and I saw a stream of what seemed a luminous ether poured upon my patient. I saw it just as plainly as I could the sunlight coming through a window. Just how long it lasted I do not

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know.

"When I opened my eyes, I found the woman sleeping. In about half an hour, she awoke greatly improved. Again she went to sleep. The next morning I was satisfied that she would live. Yesterday she started on a long journey.

"It was to me the tangible evidence of an invisible healing principle of which our medical science is still quite ignorant. I can only say that it could only have been the power of God."

Today Myrtle and Charles Fillmore (who firmly believed in reincarnation) are dead, but their work is carried on by their sons, Lowell and Rickert, now in their 70's. They like to recall their mother's words long ago when Unity was in serious financial straits. Bills that had to be paid were piling up, and there did not seem to be money enough to meet the payroll. The Fillmores called their staff together to pray about the matter.

One of the staff said, "Let us pray that the money holds out."

"Oh, no," Myrtle Fillmore chided gently. "Let us pray that our faith holds out."

Today, with the mainstream of religious thought following the pattern of affirmative belief on which Unity was founded so many years ago, it would seem that her prayer was answered.

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