

## The Spirit of Charles Fillmore

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing,  
There is a field. I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass,  
The world is too full to talk about.  
Ideas, language, even the phrase each other  
Doesn't make any sense.

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing,  
There is a field. I'll meet you there.

Rumi

Beyond ideas of wrong and right... this was not a familiar concept to me for much of my life. The faith tradition of my childhood and every interaction I had with religion told me there was a right and a wrong. Essentially, I was born wrong, but if I did as I was told, if I believed this way, then I could become right with God. It would be an understatement to say that didn't work for me. Being born wrong just seemed... well, wrong, but could I articulate that as a teenager? No. For many years I walked the streets of anger, rejection, and confusion; until the day that I walked into a Unity Church in Panama City, Florida.

I knew nothing of Unity and I had never heard of New Thought. I had not set foot in a church in close to twenty years. Little did I know what I was walking into. There was a warmth, an aura of love and acceptance that took my breath away. Actually, it scared the hell out of me. There was a safe feeling, an openness and a freedom present that I had never experienced before.

The minister, Rev. Jo Ann Dubroillet, said from the pulpit, "We are not here to tell you what to believe... here's what we believe, take what resonates with you, what

you can demonstrate in your own life.” It was in that loving environment of friendship, creativity, and exploration that the seeds of consciousness were sown for me.

Week after week in my Unity Church I was presented with clear ideas to consider. Unity’s 5 Principles changed my life. To help me remember them I once made them into a single sentence. **God the Good, as me, expressing and creating through my thoughts, my prayers, my very life.**

The emphasis at Unity of Panama City was on learning, exploring and growing; the focus on practical demonstration. Coming from a past history of dogma, rules and rigid ness, I reveled in the openness to freely explore new beliefs. I loved that Unity didn’t seem to argue doctrine. In new member class I learned how Mr. Fillmore had studied the world religions, taking only what worked for him. I heard his declarations, “In this babel I will go to headquarters... The truth we teach is not new nor do we claim special spiritual revelation... and I reserve the right to change my mind!” For me, he became the quintessential spiritual explorer!

In *The Story of Unity*, James Dillet Freeman recalls Mr. Fillmore teaching classes, saying, “Often he would interrupt his students when they were quoting him, with the question, ‘But what do you think about it?’” I was struck by the radical nature of that question. Years later I came across Rev. Margaret Stortz, who in her book *Lights Along The Way*, had this to say about the Fillmore’s legacy, “The teaching of individual spiritual freedom is perhaps the Fillmore’s greatest gift.”

In *The Essential Fillmore*, author Rev. Jim Gaither answers the question “In what sense was Charles Fillmore an innovative thinker?” saying, “Fillmore’s genius was the ability to synthesize and systematize without dogmatizing. He found ways to take ideas

from the seemingly incompatible thought worlds of science, Christian tradition, occult religion, and philosophical idealism and tie them together in a coherent and intelligible world view.”

When I first came to Unity Village for Spiritual Education and Enrichment (SEE) classes I was surprised at the differing viewpoints and understandings of what Unity taught. Having been exposed to Unity teachings from a singular perspective I was unnerved by the vehemence of some of my fellow students whose beliefs approached the level of dogma.

After I began to travel to other Unity churches to speak I began to see the many different expressions of Unity. Some I would describe as more New Agey, some with a more Interfaith, world religions focus; where you might hear the Bible and the Buddha mentioned in the same breath. Other Unity churches seemed more traditionally Christian in expression or deeply metaphysical... some even approaching what I would call Unity fundamentalism. Which one is the real Unity I asked? Each of these expressions are Unity.

What is Unity? Are the Fillmore teachings enough in today's Churches? Rev. Jim Gaither, again from *The Essential Fillmore*, writes, “Fillmore did not intend to set up his teachings as dogmas to be ascribed to or tests of orthodoxy.... Like Emerson, Fillmore points us back into ourselves when we look to him for leadership.” He goes on to say, “If we open our minds to both the words and the spirit of Charles Fillmore and let him inspire us, provoke us, challenge us, his works can direct our attention to a higher nature within us.” The Spirit of Charles Fillmore...

In the April/May 2008 issue of *Contact Magazine* published by the Association of Unity Churches International, the Rev. Michael Moran had this to say about our founders and their teachings. “If Unity is to be relevant today, we must grow beyond our founders, as wise and wonderful as they were. Unity was never meant to be a museum where we try to preserve what was... Unity was meant to be a spiritual laboratory where we boldly discover new and wonderful truths and engaging ways to present them.” When I first read this quote I found it delightfully provocative. It made me think, to consider the spirit of Charles Fillmore and his legacy--for me. The thought occurred to me--what would Charles Fillmore do if he were with us today?

WWCFD? What would he do with the Internet? I believe the spirit of Charles Fillmore lives on in unity.fm, Unity’s Internet radio expression! He would be thrilled with our ability to be online 24 hours a day with archived program content available around the world. The spirit of Mr. Fillmore lives also in the broad spectrum of shows available on unity.fm.

WWCFD? What would Charles do with the Biblical scholarship of the last fifty years? Mr. Fillmore read the scriptures as allegory and Unity today is heavily invested in Metaphysical interpretation of the Bible. What would he do with the Nag Hammadi library and the resulting academic historical and cultural examination of the Bible? What might he think of the work of the Jesus Seminar and their assertion that more than 80% of the sayings attributed to Jesus he probably never said? How might this change the *Metaphysical Bible Dictionary*?

WWCFD? What would Charles do with the integral vision of Philosopher Ken Wilber? In his book *The Integral Vision* Wilber writes, “During the last 30 years we have

witnessed a historical first: all of the worlds cultures are available to us... Knowledge itself is now global... the sum total of human knowledge is now available to us.” Charles Fillmore studied many religions and philosophies—if his genius was his ability to “synthesize and systematize”, then he would have a field day today!

WWCFD? What might Charles do with the work of Clare Graves and Don Beck in Spiral Dynamics? Mr. Fillmore once wrote in *Atom Smashing Power of Mind*, “In his evolution man has apparently always moved in cycles but each time he comes again to his starting place he seems to be a little in advance of his former state” and “Creative intelligence forever up-builds God’s universe.”

Charles Fillmore was a spiritual explorer, a sower of seeds—seeds of consciousness. The spirit of Charles Fillmore lives on in each of us as we explore in spirit. WWCFD? He might say, what will you do? What do you think?

Out beyond ideas

Of wrongdoing and right doing

There is a field... I’ll meet you there.