Lyceum 2010

A Critical Look at the Unity Movement in the Context of Christian Social Ethics

Jacquelyn J Hawkins

A Critical Look at the Unity Movement in the Context of Christian Social Ethics: A Dialogue with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Introduction

Unity has a responsibility as a member of the Christian circle of faith to actively engage in service in the world known as Christian Social Ethics. To not actively engage in Christian Social Ethics is to be incongruous with one of the core teachings in the Christian faith. The issue of Christian Social Ethics – which means broadly, Christians' relationship in the world - has been one of the most persistent issues confronting this faith community since its very beginnings.

All theologians have a responsibility to seek an understanding of those things that shape their faith traditions. Clearly, when the Unity co-founders, Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, began this movement they sought an understanding of many faith traditions before deciding that Christianity held the core teachings that resonated most with them even though they honored all spiritual paths to

God. As noted by Stone and Duke in *How to Think Theologically*, "A responsible theologian is guided by deliberations on the historic themes of faith, by scripture and tradition, by worship, and by engaged service in the world."[1] As a spiritual movement, Unity certainly has a responsibility in its various roles of educator of theologians, sustainer of tradition, facilitator of individual spiritual exploration and faith builder to be guided by deliberations on the historic themes of faith, by scripture and tradition, by worship, and by engaged service in the world.

Acknowledging this responsibility is helpful, and embarking on a process of deliberations is the next logical step. Yet, how does Unity or any theologian begin such a process? The process begins through theological inquiry. There are many tools that can be used to conduct theological inquiry. Tom Shepherd provides six in his model described in his book, *Glimpses of Truth: Systematic Theology from a Metaphysical Christian Perspective*. In his model, he examines theology in terms of its functional requirements. Briefly, the functions are: 1) "Ongoing re-interpretations of the Faith; 2) Provide critical analysis of religious ideas; 3) Integration of religious ideas with everyday life; 4) Establish dialogue within the theological circle; 5) Interpretation of symbolism; and 6) Raise new issues and

[1] Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), viii.

suggest answers."[2] I have used functions #1 and #4 to look at the Unity movement in the context of Christian Social Ethics.

Function #1, "to provide an ongoing re-interpretation of Truth for each new generation," posits that a faith is required to look at its systems of belief for the purpose of keeping the language and other ways of expressing its meaning fresh and current. Function #4, "establish dialogue within the theological circle," asserts that there are certain givens in order for a theoretician to be considered a part of the theological circle. These givens are the "pivotal truths" from which the dialogue begins. One of the pivotal truths in the Christian circle of faith is the belief in God. Another pivotal truth within the Christian circle of faith is engaged service in the world.

Conducting research on Unity's evolving consciousness in relation to God was not something that I wanted to venture into; at least not in twenty pages and not at this moment in time. My interest has been and continues to be in engaged service in the world. Only fairly recently did I become aware of the term "Christian Social Ethics." My examination of Unity's involvement in Christian Social Ethics has just begun, and in this presentation, I will use dialogue with Dr.

[2] Thomas W. Shepherd, Glimpses of Truth: Systematic Theology from a Metaphysical Christian Perspective, (Carol City: Universal Foundation for Better Living, 2006), 27-32.

Martin Luther King, Jr., a twentieth century icon within the Christian circle of faith, as one way of sharing insights into his interpretation and demonstration of Christian Social Ethics. The dialogue with Dr. King will include excerpts from some of his most memorable interviews, speeches and sermons. This approach is meant to provide the Unity movement with ideas of what has worked, what has been accomplished on a grand scale, and what are some things to consider as it continues to seek new ways to impact the world.

For at least twenty years the Five Basic Ideas that make up Unity's belief system have been taught with little or no dialogue, re-interpretation, or deliberation within the Unity movement or the broader Christian circle of faith. Therefore, the need for discussion, re-interpretation, and deliberation is present. I have used the premises articulated in Stone and Duke and those in Shepherd's model for conducting theological inquiry as a call to revisit Unity's Five Basic Ideas in a deliberative and dialectical format. Due to the limitations of this presentation, however, the deliberations and dialogue with Dr. King are confined to a focus on the fifth idea in the context of Christian Social Ethics.

We begin our process of re-interpretation, deliberations and discussion with a review of the subject of the deliberations and discussion – Unity's Five Basic Ideas.

Background

Connie Fillmore the great granddaughter of Unity's co-founders, Charles and Myrtle Fillmore introduced Unity's Five Basic Ideas as an idea whose time had come in the 100th anniversary issue of *Daily Word* magazine in January 1989.[3] However, it was H. Emilie Cady's seminal work, *Lessons in Truth* that provided the early framework for the Five Basic Ideas to be written and refined. In that, she spoke of four affirmations of Truth[4] that were to be repeated constantly and by doing so the mind would be retrained or renewed. The ultimate result would be self transformation.

Cady's Four Affirmations of Truth

[3] Connie Fillmore, An Idea Whose Time Has Come, Daily Word (Unity Village: Unity, 1989), 4.
[4] H. Emilie Cady, Lessons in Truth, Complete Works of H. Emilie Cady, ed. Michael A. Maday 9th printing (Unity Village: Unity House, 2007), 59.

First: *God is life, love, intelligence, substance, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence.*

Second: *I am a child or manifestation of God, and every moment His life, love, wisdom, power flow into and through me. I am one with God and am governed by His law.*

Third: *I am Spirit, perfect, holy, harmonious. Nothing can hurt me or make me sick or afraid, for Spirit is God, and God cannot be sick or hurt or afraid. I manifest my real Self through this body now.*

Fourth: *God works in me to will and to do whatever He wishes me to do, and He cannot fail.*

Cady's work, first published in 1894, became the foundation for Unity's teaching curriculum. Over the years, the four affirmations were used and refined by Unity instructors such as Martha Giudici and Kathryn Rowbotham who have been credited with developing concepts that were early versions of what Connie Fillmore introduced as Basic Ideas that make up the Unity belief system.[5] When Cady's four affirmations of Truth and the Basic Ideas are placed side by side, there is an unmistakable coherence.

Connie Fillmore, former President of Unity School of Christianity clearly believed that these ideas must be taken into the world in order that they may be more than theory only. In an introduction to the Five Basic Ideas she said "the

[5] Unity Archives, Basic Unity Principles, 1966 – 1990, (Unity Village: Unity)

power of an idea lies in its capacity to be used in the everyday situations that face all of us."[6]

The ideas that constitute Unity's core beliefs are as Cady had originally called them, affirmations of Truth, that work every day in every situation through application. Another term for Truth is Principle. Ellen Debenport in her 2009 released book, *The Five Principles: A Guide to Practical Spirituality* defines a principle. She says "a principle is a rule or law that never changes. It applies to all people, everywhere, all the time."[7] And as Cady noted in *Lessons in Truth*, "…principle will work in the solution of all life's problems…to free us…from all undesirable conditions and to bring good into our lives, if we will take up the simple rules and use them faithfully…"[8]

Cady, Fillmore and Debenport are all consistent on the matter of principle working in everyday life. So, we see by this beginning research and analysis of the Five Basic Ideas that form Unity's belief system that there has been some recent re-interpretation of the language that is fresh and current. The Five Principles of Unity serve as a guide in its faith tradition. The question now goes to deliberation and dialogue in order to understand how the principles work in everyday life.

---

[6] Ibid., 6.
[7] Ellen Debenport, The Five Principles: A Guide to Practical Spirituality (Unity Village: Unity House, 2009), 1.
[8] H. Emilie Cady, Lessons in Truth, Complete Works of H. Emilie Cady, ed. Michael A. Maday 9th printing (Unity Village: Unity House, 2007), 62.

Deliberation and Dialogue

As suggested by Fillmore in her 1989 introduction of the Five Basic Ideas, these principles are mere theory if they are not taken into the world to help people of all faiths live better lives. But there are also questions here in terms of individual versus community responsibility. Is it solely the individual's responsibility to live the truth that she knows? How is a person to interpret this fifth principle in the context of the theological responsibilities that she carries? How is a community of faith to interpret this principle in the context of their belief as a member of the Christian circle of faith? And how does that interpretation work in the context of Christian Social Ethics?

Unity has done extraordinary work by anyone's standard of measurement when its prayer ministry is examined. From its first 10 p.m. prayer meeting with a small band of like minded individuals in the late 1800's to the world wide connections that it is making in 2010 through Silent Unity, Unity has been and continues to serve a need in the world through prayer. More than two million prayer requests are made and answered by Silent Unity on an annual basis and that number increases each year. Through its publications of *Daily Word* both

online and in hard copy, Unity teaches its prayer and meditation concepts, provides scriptural interpretation and reaches an estimated three quarters of a million people around the globe each year. However, there is little in this world wide reach that would be termed Christian Social Ethics. Even though ministering to the homeless, the infirmed, the poor, and those in other situations that one might categorize in the physical realm as less than whole are obvious places for prayer work.

The social ethics or social action component of this impressive ministry is so small in relation to the whole ministry that it does not register in percentages, and some would refer to these efforts as outreach rather than social action. However, that being said the programs that are being conducted are addressing needs. For example, the Message of Hope Program, formerly Silent 70, is a free literature program that distributes *Daily Word, Healing Thoughts* and other low cost Unity publications within the United States. The mission of Message of Hope is “to share the assurance of God’s love and grace with those who might otherwise be without inspiration by distributing free literature to individuals,

hospitals, hospice, long-term care facilities, prisons, and correctional institutions."[9]

Another program that lends itself to spiritual social action is International Services. There are 19 Unity affiliates around the globe. Each affiliate has outreach in terms of spiritual social action. For example, in Jamaica the affiliate coordinator "takes his ministry to the streets. They pray with the people in the streets. They have organized an interfaith group that has been very successful in bringing groups together that have traditionally [fought] each other and enabled them to see how they're alike rather than different."[10] This kind of engaged service, however, is unique and works based on the individual coordinator's interests, consciousness and personal financial means. There is not an organized program that trains, and provides financial support to these service efforts. The only support is a limited number of low cost Unity publications such as *Daily Word* that are provided. One argument for maintaining the status of the current quotient of social outreach to request-based programs is that by responding to those who are open to their Christ consciousness, they in turn will do good in the world on their own. This argument does not take into account that "Christianity is

[9] Crystal Gehlken, Message of Hope brochure, (Unity Village: Unity, 2003)
[10] Lois Cheatham, Interview on Unity's International Services program, December 8, 2009.

more than a call to higher consciousness – it is a summons to action, to commitment, to discipleship."[11]

On December 2, 1955 Martin Luther King, Jr. was called to action to take a stand against the lawful yet discriminatory treatment that a Black seamstress had encountered. She had been arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a city bus to a White man the day before. As a young twenty-six year old minister, King had been pastor of his first church for only a year, but when he was called late at night he knew that he could not simply say that it was not part of his ministry. His response changed his life, and ultimately transformed an entire society of millions.

His theology expanded in a very short period of time to encompass active social responsibility as well as worship, scripture and pastoral tradition. An excerpt from *The Strength to Love* chronicles one of many decision points in the early days after King takes up the mantel of Christian Social Ethics in Montgomery, Alabama:

"I got out of bed and began to walk the floor. Finally, I went to the kitchen and heated a pot of coffee. I was ready to give up. I tried to think of a way to

[11] Thomas W. Shepherd, Glimpses of Truth: Systematic Theology from a Metaphysical Christian Perspective, (Carol City: UFBL, 2000), 277.

move out of the picture without appearing to be a coward. In this state of exhaustion, when my courage had almost gone, I determined to take my problem to God. My head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud. The words I spoke to God that midnight are still vivid in my memory. 'I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I can't face it alone.'[12]

This moment in King's young life and very early in his ministry was a turning point. He could either, give up and return to learning what it meant to be a full time pastor of a church with a congregation who had hired him only a year earlier or he could go within to find the strength to do both - to engage in service for social transformation and to lead his congregation. King chose the latter and riskier alternative.

He said, "At that moment I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never before experienced him. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice, saying, 'Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth. God will be at your side forever.' Almost at once my fears began to pass from me. My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything. The outer situation remained the same, but God had given me inner calm."[13]

[12] Martin Luther King, Jr., The Strength to Love (1977; repr, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981). 114.
[13] Ibid.

Even though King was resolute in knowing that he had made the right decision, and clearly the Black community of Montgomery were also pleased with his choice the decision did not mean that his inner calm would immediately manifest in peaceable solutions to the social inequities that existed in the city. Three nights later, King's home was bombed. However, he accepted the news of the bombing with amazing calm. King wrote "my experience with God had given me a new strength and trust. I knew now that God is able to give us the interior resources to face the storms and problems of life.

Let this affirmation be our ringing cry. It will give us courage to face the uncertainties of the future. It will give our tired feet new strength as we continue our forward stride toward the city of freedom. When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds and our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, let us remember that there is a great benign Power in the universe whose name is God, and he is able to make a way out of no way, and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows. This is our hope for becoming better men. This is our mandate for seeking to make a better world."[14]

Martin Luther King, Jr. understood deeply what his responsibility was. He had a dual responsibility – a responsibility to be the minister of his church and the responsibility to ensure that his church understood what its responsibility was – engaged service in the world. In response to a question on the proper role of the church, Dr. King said – "The projection of a social gospel, in my opinion, is the true

[14] Martin Luther King, Jr., The Strength to Love (1977; repr, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 114.

witness of a Christian life. This is the meaning of the true ekklesia – the inner, spiritual church. The church once changed society. It was then a thermostat of society. But today I feel that too much of the church is merely a thermometer, which measures rather than molds popular opinion."[15]

Walter Wink in his book, *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way*, says that "most Christians desire nonviolence, yes; but they are not talking about a nonviolent struggle for justice. They mean simply the absence of conflict. They would like the system to change without having to be involved in changing it. What they mean by nonviolence is as far from Jesus' third way as a lazy nap in the sun is from a confrontation in which protesters are being clubbed to the ground."[16] This quote from Walter Wink, noted professor of Biblical Interpretation at Auburn Theological Seminary and Fellow of the Jesus Seminar, is clear in its meaning. There is not only a place for Christianity to be active in social action; there is a responsibility for Christians to be actively engaged in service in the world. In fact, the very example and ministry of Jesus was nonviolent social action. This model is one of the primary driving forces behind the actions taken by Dr. King. As noted earlier, one of the functions of Christianity and the

[15] Playboy Interview, January 1965; A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr., ed. James M. Washington, (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 345.
[16] Walter Wink, Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way (Minneapolis: Fortress Press,2003), 4.

Christian church as an established community of faith is social ethics which is called by many names, including spiritual social action, social gospel, and Christian Social Ethics. Stone and Duke's reference to "engaged service in the world" is Christian Social Ethics. And Shepherd's treatment of the subject in a full chapter discussion in *Glimpses of Truth* brings the issue into sharp focus as an important aspect of Christian theology that has been neglected.

Unity's fifth principle as it stands has the capacity to be used as the call to action for this movement to embrace fully Christian Social Ethics. Arguably early impetus for this comes from the words expressed by none other than Charles Fillmore himself when he said "I fairly sizzle with zeal and enthusiasm as I spring forth with a mighty faith to do the things that ought to be done by me."[17] However, many Unity members and ministers do not interpret the principle in this way. And Unity as a collective has not engaged in formal deliberations or informal dialogue that could lead to a "corporate" interpretation of the principle. Yet there are numerous indications that Unity is ready to engage in such deliberations and dialogue.

[17] Thomas W. Shepherd, Glimpses of Truth: Systematic Theology from a Metaphysical Christian Perspective, (Carol City: UFBL, 2000), 271.

This two day Lyceum offers a platform for scholarly presentation, dialogue and debate within the circle of faith on issues that help to clarify and challenge current theological thinking. This type of symposium and other events can promote what Connie Fillmore spoke of twenty years ago – helping people of all faiths live better lives. The ultimate goal of Christian Social Ethics is about helping people live better lives, and doing so with Charles Fillmore's "zeal and enthusiasm."

Christian Social Ethics does not require Unity to abandon its current core teachings and beliefs. It does, however, require a change in attitude or perhaps a re-interpretation of the co-founder's words, "things that ought to be done by me." Whether written or unwritten, the prevailing attitude and emphasis in the Unity movement continues to center on helping the individual realize their inherent Christ consciousness rather than on raising the consciousness of the masses through effective dialogue with "people who are struggling to learn God's will."[18] I believe, as Coretta Scott King stated "By reaching into and beyond ourselves and tapping the transcendent moral ethic of love, we shall

[18] Thomas W. Shepherd, Glimpses of Truth: Systematic Theology from a Metaphysical Christian Perspective (Carol City: UFBL, 2000), 277.

overcome…Love, truth and the courage to do what is right should be our guideposts on this lifelong journey."[19]

The work required when an individual, movement or institution is engaged in Christian Social Ethics can be and often is uncomfortable, messy and difficult. We need look no further than the examples of Jesus Christ, Gandhi and the person with whom this dialogue is engaged, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to see how uncomfortable, messy, difficult and physically dangerous such work can be. But avoiding the social issues does not mean that they go away. "If we deal with ethical problems by dialogue and intelligent analysis, we stand a better chance at reaching some kind of societal consensus."[20] Utilizing the knowledge that the Unity principles contain can bring about amazing social change. Just as Martin Luther King, Jr. utilized his own knowledge of Truth and took action to disarm the error thinking that existed in this country regarding African Americans, poor people and others, Unity has the capacity to take its movement to a place that must have been nestled in the vision of Charles and Myrtle Fillmore. Christian Social Action is not an either or. "The choice should never be between spirituality

[19] Coretta Scott King, Foreword to Strength to Love, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 9-10.
[20] Thomas W. Shepherd, Glimpses of Truth: Systematic Theology from a Metaphysical Christian Perspective, (Carol City: UFBL, 2000), 278.

and action in the real world: spirituality should help us 'spring forth with a mighty faith to do the things that ought to be done'."[21]

Martin Luther King effectively blended spirituality and social action. In the midst of one of the many times that he was jailed for living his Truth, Dr. King made this prayer appeal for justice:

"Even though convicted, we will not retaliate with hate, but will still stand with love in our hearts, and stand resisting injustice, with the same determination with which we started out. We need a great deal of encouragement in this movement. Of course one thing that we are depending on, from not only other communities but from our own community, is prayer. We ask people everywhere to pray that God will guide us, pray that justice will be done and that righteousness will stand. And I think through these prayers we will be strengthened; it will make us feel the unity of the nation and the presence of Almighty God. For as we said all along, this is a spiritual movement."[22]

Even though he identified himself as a Baptist minister first, he was also a Christian leader in the movement to gain civil rights for African Americans, and

[21] Ibid., 279.
[22] Martin Luther King, Jr. and Glenn E. Smiley, Walk for Freedom, A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr., ed. James Melvin Washington, (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 84.

other disenfranchised people in this country during the 1950's and 60's. In identifying his responsibility to eradicating social injustice, he stated strongly and truthfully that the civil rights movement was a spiritual movement. His model in doing so was Jesus' teachings to love one's enemies. This was Dr. King's core message and strategy in dealing with enormous obstacles to social justice. In his letter written while in the Montgomery jail and delivered in his 1957 Christmas sermon at the church he pastured, he provided a glimpse of what those who viewed him as an enemy would encounter in the years to come.

"To our most bitter opponents we say: We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will, and we shall continue to love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws, because noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. Throw us in jail, and we shall still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and we shall still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities at the midnight hour and beat us and leave us half dead, and we shall still love you. But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom, but not only for ourselves. We shall so

appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory."[23]

Martin Luther King's interpretation and demonstrations of Christian Social Ethics utilized the best examples, if not the most effective demonstrated teachings of Christian Social Ethics – the teachings of Jesus Christ. His astute use of Jesus' ancient teachings in 20th century American Society demonstrates the timelessness of Christian Social Ethics, their fundamental importance in spiritual movements and their effectiveness in transforming social structures.

As noted by Unity minister, Rev. Sallye Taylor, "It was in full understanding of the poverty and inequality caused by the economic system of first century Jewish Palestine, and its impact on the lives of peasants, that led Jesus to take his ministry to the rural poor rather than to the urban elite. Jesus' commitment to helping the poor transcend this systematic limitation is crystallized in the words with which Luke's gospel has him beginning his ministry – 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.' (Luke 4:18)" And even though Rev. Taylor correctly notes that "this passage [in Luke] as a whole is thought to be the words of the writer of Luke's gospel rather than the words of the historical Jesus, yet the image they reveal of Jesus taking his ministry

[23] Walter Wink, Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 58.

to the poor (to the common people as they are known in the New Testament) is the image of Jesus portrayed in all the gospel stories."[24]

So the question to pose at this juncture is why has Unity been relatively silent on the issue of Christian Social Ethics when one would think that given its belief system, this Christian movement would be quite active? What are possible reasons for this minimal involvement in social issues? Unity was founded by Charles and Myrtle Fillmore as a prayer and healing ministry; the origins being Myrtle's long term debilitating bouts of tuberculosis. Her two year singular focus on healing herself through prayer and the success of that focus launched a prayer and healing ministry that ultimately became the world wide Unity movement. Charles and Myrtle's individual demonstrations of healing and the movement founded around that focus may have in some sense imprisoned the thinking of its followers, which is ironic given Unity's third principle – "Human beings create their experiences by the activity of their thinking. Everything in the manifest realm has its beginning in thought."

Charles Fillmore often admonished his students for not thinking for themselves. He would say something like "never mind what the book says, what

[24] Sallye Taylor, *Jesus, A Unity Perspective: A Workbook Journal on…The Way of Transformation Walked and Talked by Jesus* (Lees' Summit: Soul Food Unity Ministry, 2008), 11.

do you think"? And he always reserved the right to change his mind on a subject. He was constantly seeking to renew his thinking. Martin Luther King's "pilgrimage to non-violence" confesses that King was not a born pacifist. His thinking evolved through a combination of serious study of philosophy and systematic theology, transformative experiences, prayer and meditation. He understood up close and personal that "a religion that professes the concerns for the souls of men and is not equally concerned about the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them, and the social conditions that cripple them, is a spiritually moribund religion."[25] Members, of the Unity movement, we have an opportunity once again to be led by the renewing of our minds through deliberative and dialectical actions that this presentation is suggesting.

The religious principle that sustained Martin Luther King, Jr. and the movement that he led was based on love. Any person or organization that participated in non-violent demonstrations and marches under the umbrella of King's civil rights spiritual movement had to be committed to this spiritual principle, and the principle had to be demonstrated in training. The training was focused, serious and tough. Persons who could not discipline their minds and center on the love in their hearts would not pass the training and could not

[25] Martin Luther King, Jr., Strength to Love (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 149.

participate in demonstrations and marches. In describing the "army" he was building King said,

"It was a special army with no supplies but its sincerity, no uniforms but its determination, no arsenal except its faith, no currency but its conscience. It was an army that would move but not maul. It was an army that would sing but not slay. It was an army that would flank but not falter. It was an army to storm bastions of hatred, to lay siege to the fortresses of discrimination. It was an army whose allegiance was to God and whose strategy and intelligence were the eloquently simple dictates of conscience."[26]

The spiritual principles and strategies used by Martin Luther King, Jr. were effective because they were what they were – Truth. He was guided by frequent deliberations on the historic themes of faith that his religious tradition had taught him. As those deliberations brought forth new ideas, he considered them and took them into prayer. This is where he ultimately found the answers to his questions on which path to take and what strategies to utilize in the quest for freedom for African Americans and ultimately all people in the United States. The American Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 60's was a spiritual movement

[26] Ibid., 62.

as its spiritual leader so often reminded the news media, as well as his faithful followers. Without the spiritual focus which included prayer, love, meditation and the teachings of Jesus at the center, the Movement would not have been successful.

Much has been made about Mahatma Gandhi's influence on King's non-violent strategy of passive resistance. And Gandhi's tactics that brought the British government to its knees were certainly studied by King and utilized effectively. However, a more universal influence was always present in King's strategies. He held a "theological belief in the interdependence of all life [that] inevitably led to methods for social change that dignified the humanity of the social change advocate as well as his adversary. 'Christ gave [King] the goals and Mahatma Gandhi provided the tactics'."[27]

Concluding Statement

Unity's fifth principle is an affirmation of Truth that calls everyone in Unity to live the truth that we know. It is an individual and a community responsibility. No one is exempted. Each person and the community at large are responsible for

[27]Coretta Scott King, Foreword to Strength to Love, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 7.

springing “forth with a mighty faith to do the things that ought to be done.” As Martin Luther King, Jr. so eloquently stated “Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth. God will be at your side forever.” God is absolute good, everywhere present. Everyone in Unity knows this truth. The good that God is resides in everyone regardless of outward appearances.

In those situations where individuals are struggling to learn God’s will, whether that is manifested in terms of drug addiction, alcoholism, illiteracy, poverty or crime, Unity as a member of the Christian circle of faith has a responsibility to “stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth,” because the truth that we know is that we are all one in Christ. What is happening to the individual in Jamaica is happening to the mother in Lee’s Summit. What is happening to the alcoholic in Guyana is happening to the Telephone Prayer Ministry associate at Unity Village. There is no situation that can be named that does not impact someone in another part of the world.

The answers don’t come easily; and they should not. In fact, they must not if Unity theologians are doing the required deliberative work that Stone and Duke are referring to, and that Martin Luther King, Jr. so effectively employed. The deliberations are not done alone, because as theologians the work is not done

alone. The work is done in community – in communities of faith that have the responsibility to nurture and to train, to uphold principle and to interpret principle.

Christian Social Ethics calls Unity to take up its responsibility in the way that it knows how – "by reaching into and beyond ourselves and tapping the transcendent moral ethic of love." Continuing the dialogue with theologians in the Christian circle of faith who have done Christian Social Ethics well is a starting point. Martin Luther King, Jr. is an iconic example of Christian Social Ethics done extremely well. His model can be studied, but not duplicated. The talents within the Unity movement are uniquely Unity, and they are to be mined with the same zeal and enthusiasm that those who have gone before us have demonstrated.

Sharing the vision of our co-founders is wonderful, and I believe that if one or both of them were living in the 21st century they would be the first to pray with the people in the streets of Costa Rica. In time, the theologian must move forward from deliberations and discussion to take action and respond in the ways that she is equipped to respond.

This last part of the responsibility equation is where Unity must acknowledge its opportunity for growth in consciousness. It has been the

intention that the dialogue with Martin Luther King, Jr. could serve as one step in this process.

Bibliography

Cady, H. Emilie, and editor Michael A. Maday. *Complete Works of H. Emilie Cady.* Unity Village: Unity House, 2007.

Cheatham, Lois, interview by Jacquelyn J Hawkins. *Unity's International Services Program* (December 8, 2009).

Debenport, Ellen. *The Five Principles: A Guide to Practical Spirituality.* Unity Village: Unity House, 2009.

Duke, Howard W. Stone and James O. *How to Think Theologically.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006.

Fillmore, Charles R. "The Adventure Called Unity." *Unity Periodical.* Unity Village: Unity School of Christianity, 1963.

Fillmore, Connie. "An Idea Whose Time Has Come." *Daily Word*, January 1989: 4-9.

Forell, George W. *Christian Social Teachings: A Reader in Christian Social Ethics from the Bible to the Present*. Garden City: Anchor Books, 1966.

Freeman, James Dillet. "Answers to Your Questions About Unity." *Unity Periodical.* Unity Village: Unity School of Christianity, 1980.

Gehlken, Crystal, interview by Jacquelyn J Hawkins. *Unity's Message of Hope Program* (December 8, 2009).

King, Martin Luther, and edited by James M. Washington. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991.

Martin Luther King, Jr. *Strength to Love.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981.

—. *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story.* New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958.

—. *Why We Can't Wait.* New York: Signet Books, 1964.

Shepherd, Thomas W. *Glimpses of Truth: Systematic Theology from a Metaphysical Christian Perspective.* Carol City: Universal Foundation for Better Living, Inc., 2000.

Taylor, Sallye. *Jesus, A Unity Perspective: A Workbook Journal on…The Way of Transformation Walked and Talked by Jesus*. Lees' Summit: Soul Food Unity Ministry, 2008.

Unity Archives. *Basic Unity Principles.* Compilation, Unity Village: Unity, nd.

Wink, Walter. *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.