Diversity, Branding and Worldview in Unity

March 2013

This is an open letter to my friends in Unity – my spiritual family – where I share what seems to me is the greatest challenge the Unity movement faces today. As we all know, it's not so much about the decisions we make as it is about reflecting on the ideas that come to us and considering the consciousness we hold. This letter is an idea. Not all ideas are divine, but some are. I trust, in writing anonymously, this idea will stand on its own, without personality, and will be held in your sacred place of love and judgment for the next step in its journey.

From Diversity to Key Constituency

Unity's statement on diversity includes the following:

"Centered in God, we co-create a world that works for all. Unity honors diversity within the Unity movement and it's ministries are free from discrimination based on race, gender, age, creed, religion, national origin, ethnicity, physical disability or sexual orientation. Our sincere desire is to create spiritually-aware organizations that are nondiscriminatory and support diversity."[1]

We should applaud these statements and be especially happy that Unity has avoided the rancor over full acceptance of homosexuality that has gripped other denominations and society in general.

Unity has also adopted a Unity Identity Project to create cohesion among ministries and to lead to greater recognition of Unity. The project has developed a brand – consisting of a common logo, images and language – which enables Unity to better define how it relates to *key constituencies*. Unity says

"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."[2]

It seems to me that these statements are inconsistent. Should spiritually-aware organizations take on a brand personality? Moreover, if we are a religious movement that works for all and honors diversity, why would some constituencies be key? Is God "no respecter or persons?" If so, does God have key constituencies?

---

1   Unity, A Positive Path For Spiritual Living; Unity Worldwide Ministries;
    http://www.unityworldwideministries.org/who-we-are
2   Welcome to the Unity Identity Project; http://content.unity.org/association/branding/index.html

We can begin to answer these difficult questions by asking some others. Who are these key constituencies? Who selected them?

Who are Unity's Key Constituencies?

In January 2010 Unity released Unity Branding Research Results, showing the results of research done by Brand Solutions.[3] The UWM website states that "Chuck Pettis of Brand Solutions conducted two powerful rounds of extensive comprehensive research; the results indicated a high level of consensus from both within and outside our Unity movement." The research from outside Unity was based on a survey of 604 people, which included 506 people identified as "Cultural Creatives", 322 people with "affinity for Unity" and 88 persons who are "dissatisfied Christians."

The statement above gives us good insight into who Unity sees as its key constituency. Eighty-four percent of the those who are outside of the Unity movement are "cultural creatives." Who are they and how do they differ from you and me?

The term cultural creative was coined by Paul Ray, Ph.D., and is described Chapter 2 of his report *The Potential for a New, Emerging Culture in the U.S., a Report on the 2008 American Values Survey*.[4]

According to Paul Ray, C*ultural Creatives* are a segment of the general population and they are compared by him to those he identifies as *Traditionals* and *Moderns*.

Traditionals

Ray says

"Americans who see themselves as 'Traditional' actually favor a 19th century worldview and values, nothing more ancient than that, and they are largely in reaction against the culture of today's world, usually from a rural, small town or religiously conservative stance."

He goes on to portray traditionalists with such qualities "militarism, anti-immigration and against civil liberties." He concludes his description by saying "Their hatred partly reflects their fear of being on the losing side of history."

---

3   Unity Branding Research Results - January 2010;
     http://av.unityonline.org/en/Association/branding/brandingSurveyResultsUnity.pdf
4   The Potential for a New, Emerging Culture in the U.S., Report on the 2008 American Values Survey; Institute for
     the Emerging Wisdom Culture; https://www.wisdomuniversity.org/emerging-culture.htm and
     https://www.wisdomuniversity.org/CCsReport2008SurveyV3.pdf

Before I go on, I ask you to consider the language that Paul Ray is using to describe what is probably 25-35 percent of the American population and which comprises the majority of people in the United States who attend church. Does Unity want to be associated with language such as this? Is there not a risk that the term "cultural creative" could be associated with such accusations ?

Moderns

Paul Ray's characterization of moderns is not much better than what he says about traditionals. He describes moderns as those who "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." Later on in his study, Ray gives the criteria that he uses to identify moderns in his surveys. The criteria includes "for national education, anti-big-business, and for national healthcare."

Again, before we go on, we should ask a few questions about how Paul Ray describes and selects moderns in his surveys. Moderns are over fifty percent of the American population and they make up nearly 100% of the academic community. Is Paul Ray's characterization of them fair? Do we want to exclude them from our surveys? Does Unity want to adopt images and language that turns them off?

Cultural Creatives

Compared to his description of traditionals and moderns, Paul Ray's description of Cultural Creatives is flattering. Cultural creatives, according to Ray, "grew out of their involvement in all the new social movements, from civil rights, to women's, to social justice, to environmental, to concerns for hunger and third world peoples, to new spiritualities and psychotherapies, to bio-foods, and finally to ecology and the growing climate crisis of the planet." He says they are "simply the best informed people" and that "Cultural Creatives are also mainstays of middle class support for the arts and good causes in America, for they are America's practical idealists." He concludes that "they lead the growing realization that this is indeed 'one world' after all, and we must now act on that realization. Planetary integration into a global cultural supersystem is a big cultural change that they are helping emerge. They are movers in the trend of our time."

The criteria Ray uses to select for cultural creatives includes "be wise planetary citizen, see nature as as sacred, wisdom is important, altruism, helping others, self-

actualization and demand for authenticity." His criteria also includes "reject big business to preserve environment, reject 'America first' super-patriotism, reject big business conservatism in politics, reject libertarianism, and reject Religious Right."

Again, before continuing, I ask those in Unity if the language that Paul Ray is using does not just reflect a political point of view. If so, so we really want to brand the Unity movement on that?

How were the cultural creatives selected as Unity's key constituency?

As mentioned above, Unity's survey of "external" people was setup so that eighty-four percent of them fit the criteria of being "cultural creatives." Why them?

Independent Research

At first I thought it must be because independent research had uncovered a new insight into American society. It may be that there is in fact a new, emerging trend in our culture that we don't yet see. Paul Ray's biography says,

> "Over the past 30 years he has headed research on over 100 major research and consulting projects, and written reports on them all. Dr. Ray was Chief of Policy Research on Energy Conservation, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources of the Government of Canada. There he headed the largest evaluation research project conducted in Canada, on Canada's efforts at home energy conservation. He was previously Associate Professor of Urban Planning and a Faculty Associate of the Institute for Social Research, at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan."[5]

So I conducted a search of academic research on the term "cultural creative", including peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations and market research. What I found was no reference at all to Paul Ray's research in articles published by the academic community. I then did a broad search of stuff on the Internet, looking for marketing studies that might be using the term. Again, nothing came up except lots of blog posts that referenced Paul Ray.

Paul Ray's research came out in the 1990's. Other than his own follow-up study in 2008, which I've referenced above, no one in academia or business has given any indication of having used this material, other than Chuck Pettis and Brand Solutions, which I will address further on.

---

5 http://www.noetic.org/directory/person/paul-ray/

Ideology

My research did find that Paul Ray's research has been quoted in a journal that is devoted to Integral Studies and the work of Ken Wilber[6]. Integral Studies has become very popular in Unity recently and it may be that somehow the work of Paul Ray resonates with those who are promoting Ken Wilber's work within Unity. I don't know. But it is possible. It is for them to say.

Paul Ray's research may also be resonating with those who are teaching Spiral Dynamics. There is a great amount of discussion on the Internet that ties Ken Wilber's writings to Don Beck and Spiral Dynamics.

What ties Paul Ray's research to the work of Ken Wilber and Don Beck is a somewhat unfounded accusation of elitism. Some have accused Wilber and Beck of going so far as to describe all of the history of civilization in totalitarian and cult-like terms[7] and being socially elitist and authoritarian.[8]

While such criticism of Wilber and Beck is probably unfair, it's fair to say that the language used by Paul Ray to describe over 75% of the population is elitist. I hope that all of us in Unity are aware of how the philosophies we adopt and promote can be construed in negative ways.

Profit

Another possible explanation for selecting cultural creatives as Unity's key constituency may be the financial incentive for Chuck Pettis and his company Brand Solutions.[9] Pettis worked with Religious Science from 2006 through 2009 in developing a new Brand Implementation Plan.[10] The work he performed there is remarkably close to the work he provided for Unity. The Centers for Spiritual Living reported

> "We have spent over $250,000 in the research and development of a brand identity package that accurately reflects who we are, identifies who we want to talk to, and provides images, key messages and phrases, colors, and web site layouts that resonate with our target market."

You can watch his presentation to Unity Worldwide Ministries, uploaded in July

---

6 Deep Understanding: Wisdom for an Integral Age; Copthorne Macdonald; Journal of Integral Studies; http://www.cejournal.org/GRD/DeepUnderstanding.html
7 http://www.kheper.net/topics/Wilber/SDi_critique.html
8 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiral_Dynamics#Criticisms_of_Spiral_Dynamics
9 Brand Solutions; http://www.brand.com/
10 Brand Solutions; http://www.brand.com/

2010, where he states that his research shows "incredible consensus" internally and externally.[11]

The value of Church Pettis' research, similar to the value of Paul Ray's research, remains to be substantiated. As Brand Solutions is a private concern, his research is not public or open to scrutiny. I would like to see the criteria he used to select for cultural creatives. Hopefully it distinguishes better than the criteria used by Paul Ray.

Projection

But the most likely explanation for why Unity chose cultural creatives as their key constituency is that we all too often look around and *assume that everyone thinks just like us*. When we have problems we go to our friends. Our friends tell us what we want to hear.

Unity says in it's survey report that the Chuck Pettis research had "two powerful rounds of extensive comprehensive research" which provided results that "indicated a high level of consensus from both within and outside our Unity movement." Yes, there was a high level of consensus, but it wasn't comprehensive research. It was narrow research, based on a pool of people who looked and talked *just like us*.

Professionals in marketing make this mistake all the time. Our culture can blind us to the needs and beliefs of those in other cultures and it leads people like Paul Ray to engage in projection and inaccurate projections.[12]

Does Unity's Key Constituency Reflect a Commitment to Diversity?

So I ask you, does the selection of cultural creatives as Unity's key constituency reflect our commitment to diversity? I know that there is no clear answer and that this question requires each of us to make an individual judgment. I regret having to bring it up.

But, given what the Unity Identity Project is asking of member churches – adopting a new logo, remaking new websites, promoting new messaging and language – this question has enormous and long-lasting ramifications. As will be shown in the section below on worldviews, those who hold traditional and modern values comprise 75-85% of the general population. *Is it possible to brand against so many people and continue to claim a commitment to diversity?*

---

11 Consensus about our identity; Chuck Pettis presentation to UWM July 2010; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xb-Wb_gOPE
12 Who Do We Know: Predicting the Interests and Opinions of the American Consumer; Stephen J. Hoch; Journal of Consumer Research; December 1988

A Way Forward

Unity's commitment to diversity is laudable. However what divides us runs deeper than race, ethnicity and sexual orientation. And while we must be vigilant to address these barriers to unity, there is an even more important division that must be addressed, both in our society and in our movement. That division is "worldview" and the way worldview shapes our preference for particular values.

Worldview

We see life through the lens of three worldviews – traditional, modern and postmodern – and the worldview we chose shapes the preference we have for one value over another.[13]

Our lens of tradition indicates to us that "some things are True and some practices are wrong." Most important, this lens tells us that Truth is revealed – by God, by the church, though the Bible, or directly "from headquarters" through spiritual intuition. The lens of tradition also tells us that ethical practices are followed because they align us with the order of the created universe.

Our modernist lens also leads us to Truth and ethical behavior. But they are not revealed by any source, internal or external. Rather modernism equips us to arrive at them by scientific inquiry and reason. We follow such inquiry for the pursuit of happiness.

Our postmodern lens enables us to see hidden ideologies and implied power relationships behind our previous understanding of Truth and ethical behavior. It indicates that Truth is relative and most any behavior is ethical, given a proper context. Finally, it shows that we must be the judge and arbiter of all things and that we must do this to assure that all people are respected and empowered.

We use these lenses in varying degrees. Best estimates indicate that 25-35% of our society relies primarily on the lens of tradition, 50% of our society relies on the lens of modernity and 15-25% of our society relies on the postmodern lens. But the lens we use can also vary based on the life context. It may be that we use a postmodern lens to navigate social relationships, a modern lens to help make business and political decisions and the lens of tradition to cope with religious or life-or-death issues.

---

13 Valuescapes in Postmodernity: An International Study of Undergraduate Worldviews; Norwine, et. al.
http://www.siue.edu/GEOGRAPHY/ONLINE/norwine.htm

Unity's Lens

Unity has fallen into seeing itself from a particular worldview – postmodern – and this prevents us from being a movement for all people. Truth transcends worldview. Any church or religion that is based on a particular worldview instead of Truth is limiting itself and its ministry.

If we were to assemble a panel of three persons with three worldviews – a traditionalist, a modern and a post-modern – and we asked questions for ninety minutes then we would learn how spiritual things look from different points of view. We would see how the language we use and the things we emphasize make all the difference when conveying Unity's basic positioning statement: "Unity is a practical, positive and progressive approach to Christianity, based on the teachings of Jesus and the power of prayer."

We would learn that Unity's teachings are equally relevant to people from all walks of life – traditionalists, moderns and cultural creatives – and that, when we position ourselves as Truth students, no person, regardless of their cultural, social or political perspective can fail to inspire and bless us when given the opportunity to share with us how the Spirit within expresses through and as them.

The route to an inclusive, diverse and vibrant Unity movement is not by branding to key constituencies, but rather tolerance and respect for all.

The way forward is to address why cultural creatives were selected as Unity's key constituency, why Unity chose to exclude 75% of the American population in it's survey and then to rework the study in a fashion that is inclusive of all.