

Unity Transformation Experience and Integral Spirituality

April 2013

To my dear Unity family – I am again sending an open letter to you about what I believe to be the greatest threat to Unity's ministry today. I am aware that what is revealed below may shock some readers. Please know that my intention is not to shock or be inflammatory in any way. I send it anonymously so that it may reach your discerning heart, without personality, and that you may ponder and chose to accept or reject my thinking in the quiet of your stilled mind. I do not wish to debate, only to highlight and inform. I trust that Spirit flows through you, as you, as me, and that, together, we shall move forward in harmony and love.

Four years of Unity's Transformation Experience

Unity Worldwide Ministries has placed tremendous effort and focus on the Transformation Experience¹ during the past four years. Twenty-two articles about the pilot program of thirteen churches in TE have appeared in Contact Magazine, making it the most covered topic in Contact Magazine since 2009.²

Ministers of pilot ministries have contributed nearly half of the articles, beginning with Aliza Bloom's June 2010 piece entitled *The Path of Transformation Is Not Always Easy*. Her piece sets the pattern for most of these stories, describing a leap of faith, frustration and murmurings emerging a little later, the sage guidance of Consultant Guides and the eventual shift from a minister-centric model of ministry to a community model.

It seems to me that there is something unusual here. Doesn't it seem strange that a pilot program of thirteen churches has dominated Unity's attention for over four years? Was all this attention really about a dozen or so churches? If so, the pilot officially ended in September 2012, so where are the details about exit interviews and metrics? Why were there no results in the March 2013 issue of Contact Magazine? If not, what was the Transformation Experience about anyway?

What was the Transformation Experience about?

Take a look at the June 2011 article in Contact Magazine by Gary Simmons about his

1 Unity Transformation Experience <http://www.unityworldwideministries.org/transformation-experience>

2 Transformation Experience Contact Magazine Articles Overview
<http://www.unityworldwideministries.org/transformation-experience-contact-magazine-articles-overview>

conversation with Ken Wilber entitled *Ken Wilber Applauds the Transformation Experience*.³ Gary writes,

Ken explained that moving to any enlightened perspective requires not only a movement toward greater spiritual maturity, but also an actual leap in consciousness. This leap is not possible unless the church's leadership is actively engaged in spiritual practice and shadow work ...

I shared how each ministry in the Pilot Program has an Art & Practice Ambassador trained in facilitating a 21-Day aware-apy activity called the Q Process™—a methodology for shadow work—and how this has equipped leaders to differentiate between issues that arise from the organization's pain body and their own shadow material.

It seems to me that there are two concerns here: (1) the goal of bringing about a “leap in consciousness” by means of shadow work and (2) the adoption of a method of doing shadow work described as “21-Day aware-apy activity called the Q Process™.” I will address them in reverse order.

The Q Effect

If you read the eleven stories by ministers of pilot ministries of the TE, you'll see plenty of positive references about *The Art & Practice of Living with Nothing and No One Against You* and the Q Process. Gary has his own article in the March 2012 issue of Contact Magazine, which describes this method and has the following byline:

Rev. Dr. Gary Simmons is co-founder of the Q Effect, LLC, and serves the New Thought movement as a private consultant. For information on hosting a no-upfront-costs Art & Practice of Living with Nothing and No One Against You workshop or how to become a certified Q Coach, visit www.theqeffect.com.

In June 2010 Contact Magazine had a story entitled *Q and A About the Transformation Experience* which answered the question “How is it financed?” by saying “we have been blessed by donors who dedicated funds to this process. In addition, our Association receives a Templeton grant specifically for this project. Each pilot ministry agreed to send

3 Contact Magazine <http://content.unity.org/association/publications/contactMagazine.html>

10 percent of our income to the Association.” In June 2011 Deborah Frownfelter wrote that “The total income for the Transformation Experience comes from the John Templeton Foundation grant monies plus the increased portion of tithes from the Thriving Ministries Pilot Program and Enlightened Leaders Program participating ministries.”

There are some serious issues here. If Gary was employed by UWM, why was the program he developed not part of the intellectual property of UWM? Second, since Gary was at sometime previously employed by UWM, was there a transparent process that selected Q Effect, LLC as the principle contractor for Transformation Experience?

Finally, it is said in two articles that no operating funds from UWM went into the TE program. But the question remains how much of the money which went to UWM from Templeton, tithes and donations flowed out to Q Effect, LLC? If UWM decides to continue the program, should we not expect that a full accounting of finances be included in the report of results that we expect from UWM? Is there not a transparency issue here? Can we trust the process without a full accounting of all transactions?

The Leap in Consciousness

The second question is who is Ken Wilber and what does he have to say about “leaps in consciousness”? Ken Wilber is a well-known American philosopher and you can find plenty of information about him and by him on the Internet.

In June 2005 Ken Wilber wrote a summary of his beliefs as they relate directly to the role of spirituality in the modern and postmodern world. The document is 118 pages and available on the Internet by doing a search on *What is Integral Spirituality?*⁴ I encourage you to download and read the document. Here are some things that Wilber says in *Integral Spirituality*:

Metaphysical Baggage. Wilber writes on pp.3-4, 12-13:

We start with the simple observation that the 'metaphysics' of the spiritual traditions have been thoroughly trashed by both modernist and postmodernist epistemologies, and there has as yet arisen nothing compelling to take their place. So this paper begins with an overview of the methodologies available that can be used to reconstruct the spiritual systems of the great wisdom traditions but with none of their metaphysical baggage ...

4 Ken Wilber What is Integral Spirituality? <http://files.meetup.com/91062/Integral%20Spirituality.pdf>

This leads to an entirely new approach to metaphysics that is actually post-metaphysics, in that it requires none of the traditional baggage of metaphysics ... The important truth advanced by the postmodernist epistemologies is that all perceptions are actually perspectives, and all perspectives are embedded in bodies and in cultures.

Wilber is advocating for a postmodern version of Metaphysics. Truth, rather than being revealed by God (the traditionalist approach), or by being discovered by science (the modern approach), is embedded in culture as a perspective.

Egocentric, Ethnocentric and Worldcentric Worldview. On p. 18 Wilber refers to the way we respond to life as being “preconventional, conventional, and postconventional. We often summarize these as egocentric, ethnocentric, and worldcentric.” He describes these worldviews by posing an old question: “A poor man is married to a woman who has a terminal illness that an expensive medicine can cure. Does he have the right to steal the medicine?” Wilber explains that the traditionalist, characterized by the pre-conventional response, will say “Fuck you, nobody tells me what to do!”

IQ and morality. Wilber describes a dozen or so lines of human development, which include the cognitive, moral, spiritual, emotional lines (p.27). But he emphasizes the importance of the cognitive line and implies that stupid people have no morality: “you can be highly developed in the cognitive line and poorly developed in the moral line (very smart but not very moral: Nazi doctors), but we don't find the reverse (low IQ, highly moral).”

Spiral Dynamics, Primitive States and Jesus. Wilber enthusiastically embraces the Spiral Dynamics idea ranking of human development in history and in individuals. On pages 49-51 he asks how, “in whatever way that we define enlightenment today, can somebody 2000 years ago – say, Buddha or Christ Jesus or Padmasambhava – still be said to be 'enlightened' or 'fully realized' by any meaningful definition?” Is it possible that someone like Jesus, who lived in “the lower stages of development – such as magic or mythic – could still have profound religious, spiritual, and meditative state experiences.”

Wilber's answer is affirmative, but complicated. The subtle answer is that yes, Jesus was enlightened, at the magical, preconventional and egocentric “stage of development” in which he lived (p.54).

Worldcentric and Postconventional or Nazi. Wilber writes on p. 92:

Start with a few facts. Depending on which scales you use, somewhere between 50-70% of the world's population is at the ethnocentric or lower waves of development. This means amber or lower in any of the lines. To put it in the bluntest terms possible, this means around 70% of the world's population are Nazis ... In the great developmental unfolding from egocentric to ethnocentric to worldcentric and higher, 70% of the world's population has not yet made it to worldcentric, postconventional levels of development.

So 70% is now ethnocentric or lower. This would be enough to rattle the average onlooker. But it gets a bit worse. Who owns the ideas that are subscribed to by this 70%?

Basically, the world's great religions.

It is apparent from the above that for Ken Wilber, the “leap of consciousness” which he told Gary Simmons is necessary for a Transformation Experience is from a modern to postmodern worldview. The goal of the Transformation Experience, as it appears to me, is shifting the seventy percent of Unity's congregations from traditional and modern worldviews to the postmodern worldview. I want to conclude this section by repeating the same thing I wrote in my first open letter:

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.⁵

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

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

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.

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 postmoderns – 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.