

“I have been involved in the Unity movement for over twenty-five years and am thoroughly knowledgeable of its origin and history. But it wasn’t until I read Neal Vahle’s biography, *The Spiritual Journey of Charles Fillmore: Discovering the Power Within*, that I truly felt the passion that permeated the mind and heart of Unity’s co-founder. Vahle does a remarkable job of transporting the reader into the stream of ‘zeal and enthusiasm’ that Charles Fillmore resonated with into his ninety-fourth year.”

—**Reverend Duke Tufty, minister and chairman of the board,
Unity School of Christianity**

“This book is an authoritative biography of Charles Fillmore, co-founder of the Unity School of Christianity. It provides an in-depth treatment of Fillmore’s ‘New Thought’ antecedents and contemporary religious influences. The book is a tribute to Fillmore’s enduring, but little understood, influence.”

—**Vern Barnett, D. Min., columnist for the *Kansas City Star* and
founder of the Kansas City Interfaith Council**

“Neal Vahle’s new biography of Charles Fillmore reveals him as the truly fascinating character that he was. Vahle places him squarely in his place and time and in doing so unveils deep insights not only about the man and his work, but also about the social and religious climate of his day . . . I recommend this book highly as the best and most accurate yet written about my great-grandfather.”

—**Reverend Connie Fillmore Bazy, former president of the Unity School of Christianity**

“This book introduces the reader to one of the most fascinating personalities in American religion, who together with his wife Myrtle, created the world-wide Unity movement. The remarkable success of Unity is rooted in the eclectic, pragmatic, non-dogmatic, intense mystical outlook of its founders.”

—**Joseph P. Schulz, director of the Center for Religious Studies, emeritus,
University of Missouri-Kansas City**

“Neal Vahle’s dynamic biography of Charles Fillmore captures his metaphysical thought and spiritual insight. Vahle’s work provides further clarification to the words and reflections of Charles Fillmore and motivates the reader to live a Christ-filled spiritual life.”

—**Reverend Gregory C. Guice, minister and member of the board of directors of the
Unity School of Christianity**

“Neal Vahle’s biography of Charles Fillmore contributes greatly to the metaphysical literature. It not only provides an in-depth look at the life and teachings of Charles

Fillmore; the book also summarizes the contributions and teachings of other related metaphysical teachers/healers . . . It is goldmine of historical information.”

—Charlotte Shelton, president and CEO of the Unity School of Christianity

“This new biography of Unity’s cofounder Charles Fillmore has plenty in it to surprise fans of New Thought philosophy. Neal Vahle’s research has provided us with fascinating insights into Unity and New Thought’s origins . . . This is an important contribution to American religious history.”

—Reverend Michael A. Maday, former editor of *Unity House* and anthologist of *New Thought for a New Millennium* and *Angels Sing in Me*

“An absorbing study! Neal Vahle has collected in one volume the essence of Charles Fillmore’s thinking and the major sources that formed the beginning of the Unity Movement. Unity and New Thought ministers, teachers, researchers and students will find a wealth of new perspectives here, bringing alive the people and modes of thought that influenced Charles Fillmore.”

—Reverend Philip White, former editor of *Unity Magazine* and dean of education of the Unity School of Christianity

“Neal Vahle has captured the essence, the core of the underpinnings of the New Thought movement through his comprehensive and in-depth biography of the life and writings of Charles Fillmore. The book provides a touching personal story of Charles Fillmore’s dedication to the growth and development of the Unity movement. This comprehensive and passionate work is required reading for those who want to understand how the New Thought movement grew and developed, and for those who want to get a better idea of the place that New Thought occupies in the spirituality of today.”

—Reverend Richard Mantei, minister and member of the board of directors, Unity School of Christianity

“This book is invaluable. With great clarity it sums up the evolution of the Unity and Metaphysical movements as seen through the eyes of Charles Fillmore, a modern mystic.”

—Walter Starcke, author of seven books including *The Double Thread*, *It’s All God*, and *The Gospel of Relativity*

“Neal Vahle’s chronicle of my grandfather’s remarkable journey truly captures the amazing spirit of this very unusual man. This biography, in addition to his two other works, *Torch-Bearer to Light the Way* and *The Unity Movement*, makes Vahle the premier historian of the Unity movement and a major contributor to the history of New Thought.”

—Reverend Rosemary Fillmore Rhea, founder, director, and host of *The Daily Word* television show and co-producer of *The Word from Unity*

The SPIRITUAL JOURNEY
Of CHARLES FILLMORE

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Discovering the Power Within

NEAL VAHLE

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Templeton Foundation Press
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PREFACE

It is now thirteen years since I began this biography of Charles Fillmore. It has taken much study over many years for me to appreciate fully his many talents and gifts, as well as the strength of his character. The path that led me to Charles Fillmore began in 1990 when I began work on the biography of Ernest Holmes, the founder of the United Church of Religious Science and the creator of the philosophy of Science of the Mind. While working on *Open at the Top: The Life of Ernest Holmes*, published in 1992, I observed how Science of the Mind grew out of New Thought, a nineteenth-century metaphysical philosophy and healing movement that drew upon, among others, the work of Emanuel Swedenborg, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Franz Anton Mesmer, and Warren Felt Evans. The origins and development of New Thought intrigued me, so I began looking for another major figure in the New Thought movement whose work merited a biography. As I searched the literature, it became evident that Charles Fillmore was a prime candidate, as he had written nine books, all dealing with metaphysical healing, and he drew upon the best of the nineteenth-century metaphysical authors. He had also cofounded, with his wife Myrtle, the largest of the New Thought organizations in the United States, the Unity School of Christianity, located at Unity Village, in metropolitan Kansas City, Missouri.

Unity School officials, when they learned of my interest in working on a biography of Charles Fillmore, welcomed me to the school and gave me permission to conduct research in the Unity Archives, which contained the works of all the leading figures in the Unity movement. After eighteen months of work and with the project about half complete, I realized that I needed to write a chapter dealing with the contribution of Myrtle Fillmore. Myrtle was known for her work as a teacher and healer and was the editor of

Wee Wisdom magazine. However, she had written very little for publication about the Unity spiritual teaching. She had been known, however, as a prolific letter-writer, engaging in extensive correspondence with people who had written to her for prayer or spiritual healing.

I was astounded to find, preserved in the archives, copies of over two thousand letters written by Myrtle during the three years before she died in 1931. These letters were often several pages long and contained not only prayer, affirmations, and spiritual advice but also explanations of aspects of the Unity teaching that pertained to the particular spiritual challenges faced by her correspondent. I discovered in these letters the entire Unity teaching. In addition, it was presented in a clear, straightforward, and easily understandable manner. The writing was much more forceful and direct than that of Charles and contained the kind of intimacy that only letters can provide.

The letters demonstrated that Myrtle was as important a figure as Charles in articulating the Unity message and that she played an equal role with Charles in the development of the Unity movement. I decided at that time to postpone the biography of Charles and write a biography of Myrtle. That book, *Torch-bearer to Light the Way: The Life of Myrtle Fillmore*, was published in 1996.

Upon the book's completion, Connie Fillmore Bazzy, president of Unity School of Christianity, invited me to research and write the history of the Unity movement from its beginnings in 1889 through the end of the twentieth century. That work took four years to complete and was published by Templeton Foundation Press in 2002 as *The Unity Movement: Its Evolution and Spiritual Teaching*.

My return to the biography of Charles Fillmore was again postponed when, after completion of the manuscript in 2000, I was asked by Connie Fillmore Bazzy to become the editor and publishing director of *Unity Magazine*. Only after completing my tenure as editor in September 2005 was I able to resume work on the biography of Charles Fillmore. Since a considerable amount of research and writing had been completed in the early 1990s, I assumed that completing the biography would be a relatively easy task that would take only a short amount of time.

It soon became evident that my previous research was incomplete and that the writing needed major revision. I also began to see Charles in a new

and more appreciative light. I had not realized how conversant he was, as a thirty-five-year-old without formal education, with the spiritual literature of the day as well as with the classics of world literature. I had not seen that the basic elements of the Unity teaching were already developed in his mind in 1889 when he began editing and writing for *Modern Thought* magazine, the forerunner to *Unity Magazine*. Finally, I did not appreciate how capable he was as an organizer and how important his organizational ability was to the successful development of the Unity movement. This biography is a much fuller and more in-depth work than would have resulted had I continued with my original plan to complete a biography of Charles before focusing on Myrtle or on other Unity-related work.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

During the past fifteen years many people assisted me in my research and writing about the Unity Movement. Several of those whom I acknowledged in *Torch-bearer to Light the Way: The Life of Myrtle Fillmore* and *The Unity Movement: Its Evolution and Spiritual Teaching* contributed indirectly to this biography. I appreciate the work they did to set the stage for this work.

I give thanks to Vern Barnet, Gregory Guice, Michael Maday, Rosemary Fillmore Rhea, Joseph P. Schulz, Charlotte Shelton, Walter Starcke, Duke Tufty, and Phillip White. Their deep knowledge of the Unity Movement, and the work of Charles Fillmore, enabled them to read the manuscript with a critical eye and give valuable comments. I am particularly grateful for the support of Connie Fillmore Bazy. During her presidency of the Unity School of Christianity, she made it possible for me to conduct the research upon which much of this biography was based. She also read and gave advice on this manuscript.

Thanks are due to the Unity School archivist Eric Page, whose knowledge of the materials in the Fillmore collection facilitated my research. Carol Guion, who for many years was an editor at the Institute of Noetic Sciences, provided copyediting service. Natalie Lyons Silver and Mary Lou Bertucci at Templeton Foundation Press undertook the detailed editorial work required to get the manuscript ready for publication.

As I wrestled with the day-to-day problems of organization and writing style, my wife, Nancy, who is knowledgeable in spiritual literature, made suggestions that were useful in moving the work ahead. She also provided the emotional support that a writer who works in isolation often needs. That help was much appreciated.

INTRODUCTION

Charles Fillmore was a metaphysical teacher and healer, a writer and thinker who, from the beginning of his work in 1889 until his death in 1948, made a notable contribution to the development of spirituality and religion in America. Early in the twentieth century, he and his first wife, Myrtle, cofounded and organized the Unity School of Christianity in Kansas City, Missouri, an institution with a staff of four hundred, which continues to be devoted to spiritual teaching, healing, and publishing.

The teachings of Jesus, as he understood them, were central to the work of Charles Fillmore. As May Rowland, the longtime director of Silent Unity and close personal associate, said, “Charles Fillmore was a tremendous advocate of Jesus Christ.” Shortly before he died, he questioned those who went to see him, “Do you know what the greatest teaching was that was ever given to man?” He hesitated when he asked that, and then he said, “It is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Then he told his visitors, “and don’t forget it.” Rowland reported that he signed all his letters, “Representative of Jesus Christ at large.”¹ Charles at one time referred to himself as a minister “of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”²

Charles Fillmore set the tone for his spiritual work and his focus on the teachings of Jesus in the inaugural issue of *Modern Thought*—the magazine he began editing and publishing in 1889. He wrote, “The teaching of Christ rightly understood and applied will lead the human family back to Eden.”³ The prayer that he loved most, May Rowland recalled, was “Jesus is now here, raising me to his consciousness of eternal life.”⁴

From the time Charles Fillmore began his editing and publishing in 1889 until he died in 1948, all of the issues of *Unity Magazine* and its predecessors have his writings in them. They took many forms—unsigned commentaries, editorials, publisher’s notes, radio talks, sermons, and articles. He was a prolific writer.