

Timeless Transformations

The Controversial Question: What Religion Are You?

Living in the Bible belt and having a high SQ (spiritual intelligence) can be challenging when asked the question, ***what religion are you?*** Or what church do you go to? Being in our professional careers and associating with others (friends and family) that may have different beliefs, it is helpful to collect our perspectives in advance. I thought I would share with you how I answer this controversial question and give you my perspective.

The first thing I make clear is that I consider myself more spiritual rather than following a specific religion. Most concepts of religion are looking outside for a distant God to find the right dogma, the right scriptures, and the right church - with an element of dependency to be established there. For me, being spiritual means that an *all goodness of power* or *God*, dwells within me and as part of me. Wherever I am, God is. There is no separation. Being spiritual means there are many paths that lead to God. I do not relate to any belief that separates humanity but one that unites. The important question I ask myself is, is any belief that I maintain expanding me in the spirit of love, oneness, and compassion; and am I serving humanity for good?

One of my favorite verses from the Bible New Testament Gospel of Luke and [rated pink](#) "somewhat likely - Jesus probably or might have said something like this" by the Westar Institute, is Luke 20:46:

King James Version: [Luke 20:46](#) Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts;

New International Version: [Luke 20:46](#) Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted with respect and have the most important places of honor.

Even Jesus said be cautious and guarded by those that believe they know the way (known at that time as scribes and teachers of the law). I believe I am my own teacher and I have the capacity and intellect to research and form my own religious and spiritual beliefs.

Next, a typical response may be, would you consider yourself an Atheist? First you have to define what an Atheist is. An Atheist is one that does not believe in any Gods. That then means you have to define God or Gods. Well, I believe God is not a noun, or a person or a thing. God is a verb, an activity. God is action that we bring into our lives that makes everything good. The word God is identical to the Anglo-Saxon word for "good," and therefore it is believed that the name God refers to the divine goodness. You may be then asked if you are an Agnostic. An Agnostic is a person that doesn't claim to know if any gods exist or not. So, an Atheist involves what a person does or does not believe. An Agnostic involves what a person does or does not know. In summary, I answer the question that I am neither an Atheist nor Agnostic because I know what I believe. That is not to say that I know or believe another person is wrong. It is what I know and believe to be true for me.

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When I answer the controversial question, what religion are you? I respond confidently that the spiritual religion that best fits my beliefs at this time is Unity. When I am asked what church I attend, I say I have been a member of Unity of Houston for many years. That is where I tithe and maintain my membership. If I am asked, what does Unity believe? I have a basic summary of the Unity teachings, as shown in the following. I thought I would share this with you for reference.

On God: God is Spirit, the loving source of all that is. God is the one power, all good, everywhere present, all wisdom. God is divine energy, continually creating, expressing and sustaining all creation. In God, we live and move and have our being. Some other ways Unity speaks of God are Life, Light, Love, Substance, Principle, Law and Universal Mind. I've made this my own by saying **God is an all goodness of power in my life.**

Unity has abandoned the popular image that God is an elderly, superhuman male with a white flowing beard who lives in a remote place "up there". God is not fickle, answering some prayers and ignoring others. God is not a deity to be feared. One fundamental attribute of God is that God is good. We are created to be "healthy, happy, prosperous, loved and loving, courageous and strong". If we fall short of these goals, it may be it is because we have separated our mind from God, and allowed negative thoughts to intrude. God is within each one of us; and is directly accessible. We need only to quietly turn within ourselves to contact God. God exists in all things. God is present throughout creation: in humans, plants, animals, the earth itself.

On Humanity: We are each individual, eternal expressions of God. Our essential nature is divine and therefore inherently good. Unity's purpose is to express our divine potential as realized and demonstrated by Jesus and other master teachers. The more we awaken to our divine nature, the more fully God expresses in and through our lives.

Primary Unity Teachings:

- Heaven is not a place, but a state of consciousness; we create our own heaven and hell here and now.
- We all have an innate capacity to know God through direct experience.
- The "Christ" is that part of God that is in every person. There is a spark of divinity within all people, just as there was in Jesus.
- Prayer works.
- We are here to set a positive example and be a role model for others.
- We are here to make the world a better place.

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Belief System: Unity encourages each person to explore and apply Unity teachings based on their own spiritual understanding. Spiritual understanding is enhanced through reflective prayer and meditation. The five basic ideas that make up the Unity belief system are:

1. God is the source and creator of all. There is no other enduring power. God is good and present everywhere.
2. We are spiritual beings, created in God's image. The spirit of God lives within each person; therefore, all people are inherently good.
3. We create our life experiences through our way of thinking.
4. There is power in affirmative prayer, which we believe increases our awareness of God.
5. Knowledge of these spiritual principles is not enough. The principles must be lived.

On The Bible: The Bible is an evolutionary journey toward humankind's spiritual awakening. It is a complex collection of writings compiled over many centuries. The writings are a reflection of the understanding and inspiration of the writers at the time they were written. The Bible is a spiritual resource as one point of reference. It is not the inspired writing of God nor is it a historical reference.

On Jesus: Jesus expressed his divine potential and sought to show humankind how to express theirs as well. Jesus is a master teacher of universal truths and a *Way Shower*. In Unity, *Christ* is a term that means the divinity in humankind. Jesus is the great example of the Christ in expression. Unity rejects the traditional Christian view that Jesus is a deity to be worshipped; at no time did Jesus tell his disciples to worship him. Rather, Unity looks upon Jesus as a great healer, miracle worker, and mystic who had a direct access to God. His actions can be emulated by believers today. One's life is to be dominated by love, and compassion, even toward one's enemies.

On Prayer: Affirmative prayer is the highest form of creative thought. It includes the release of counterproductive, negative thoughts, as well as holding in mind statements of spiritual truth. Through meditation, we experience the presence of God. Prayer and meditation heighten our awareness and thereby transform our lives. Real prayer does not involve begging God for a favor, or repeating standard prayers in a ritual setting. Prayer is an act or "activity" of becoming spiritually one with God.

On Diversity: All people are created with sacred worth. Unity is free of discrimination on the basis of race, color, gender, age, creed, religion, national origin, ethnicity, physical disability, and gender identity.

On Genesis: Unity rejects the concept of original sin, (the belief that because of Adam and Eve's actions in the Garden of Eden, we are all conceived in iniquity and born in sin). The Genesis story is an allegory. It is a human attempt to explain our beginnings. Unity emphasizes that humans are created in the image and likeness of God, and are thus not intrinsically evil or sinful.

On Hell: The Unity Church does not conceive hell to be a place of eternal torment in which people are eternally punished with fire because of their beliefs and/or actions during life. It is not a place to go to after death. Rather it is a state of consciousness to be suffered here on earth.

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On Heaven: Rather than looking upon heaven as a place "up there" to be experienced as a reward after death, Unity conceives of heaven as expressed by Jesus in Luke 17:20-21 "The kingdom of heaven is at hand", and "The kingdom of God is in the midst of (within) you". One does not have to wait until death. Heaven can thus be enjoyed at any time through prayer. Through proper technique, attitude and receptivity one can elevate one's personal consciousness to a heavenly state.

On the Devil: The devil is evil with a D in front of it. The Devil is the opposite of good. The devil or "Satan" is not a physical entity; but is one's lower nature: selfishness, greed, the desire to turn away from God. The devil can be resisted by systematically striving towards one's higher nature.

On Life After Death: Unity defines heaven and hell as conditions in the here and now. They are not places where people go to spend eternity. Rather, some in Unity believe in a form of reincarnation. After death the soul is believed to leave the body, and to live again in another human body. Most refer to death as a state of transition.

On Sin: Sin is "missing the mark" or falling short of perfection. Unity uses an alternate definition: "living under a false sense of separation from God".

On Worship: It is not limited to Sunday church services. Worship can be pursued at any time and location when one feels adoration and devotion for God. Ideally, it can be experienced continually through the day.

As you move from your 20s and into your 30s, and as you start families of your own, I hope this may be a starting point for you. You may remember me taking you to different churches and doing my best to open our lives up to new thought and perspectives. I know you will do the same. I also know that at some point in our lives, your values may differ from mine. I know that I can be open to any of your perspectives and I can learn from you. I have been exploring an alternate spiritual teaching called Centers for Spiritual Living. It is similar to Unity but more liberal. There is less reliance on the Bible and the teachings of Jesus and Christianity. I'm finding myself getting ready to make a jump, possibly. I believe what is important is to continue to grow and evolve, and serve as the best example possible to make the world a better place for our future generations. So when you answer controversial questions about religion and spirituality, even if only in your mind, I hope you answer with the greatest amount of confidence, tolerance, and love. Always do your own research and validation! Life is an amazing adventure and we are so blessed to live at a time that we are free to choose how and what we believe. I never take that for granted and I hope you never will either.

If I were to count all the blessings from here to eternity, every blessing would include the love that I have for you – Love Mom