

Authenticity, Sincerity and 21st Century Witnessing

John Redmond
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Recently, we have been called to resume witnessing in the Unification Movement in order to recapture the spirit of the 1970s, a time when most of its American members joined.

I'm a veteran of those days and have come to the conclusion they are firmly behind us. However, I am strangely optimistic about the future of our movement and of witnessing in general.

What do I mean by "witnessing?"

In the Christian ideal, it is a communication of a personal, deeply spiritual event which has affected one so positively that one feels compelled to offer that insight to others so they can achieve that experience as well. Christianity testifies to individual salvation: your conversion and life of faith is between you, God and the Holy Spirit.



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Saints in Christian tradition are individuals, both men and women, who have modeled in their lives evidence of a transcendent, loving God.

In Buddhism, one is encouraged to reach a higher consciousness, step out of the day-to-day grind, control the thoughts circling in your head, and try to feel and be aware of a higher, universal interconnectedness and add that reality to your daily life. The monks and nuns in Buddhism model that ideal.

In Unificationism, we witness to the Three Blessings and the three generation family. Individual salvation is not enough, and creating an individual spiritual success is only the foundation for a multi-generational family and wealth. Our salvation is not complete until we have accomplished all three goals. It stands to reason then, that our challenge is higher and deeper than individual witnessing and will require creativity and honest evaluation and persistence.

In my experience, all successful witnessing is done by example. Many of my generation joined our movement because of *who* they met, not because of *what* was said.

An English member recently told me of walking through Boston and meeting another Englishman who invited him to an event and he politely declined. Later he met a Japanese woman who couldn't speak English and had a confusing flyer but he went to the program anyway; he just trusted her. The Principle gets you to stay and commit, but the character of the people and their spiritual foundation allow you to listen.

In the 1970s, our American movement successfully witnessed to thousands of people and in the 1980s, CARP inherited and modernized much of that early success. In Oakland, CA, the singing, "love bombing," and sacrificial care for spiritual children was often copied; however, it was the unseen foundation of fasting, the 24-hour chain prayer and the conditions set by the staff and members that brought success. In CARP, we copied many of the Oakland methods, but all of our best witnesses were the top fundraisers from the previous month on MFT. Their clear, focused spirit was the foundation of their success.

When done well, witnessing is inspiring and thought-provoking. The best and most effective type of outreach now is on the Internet. TED Talks are famous for short, inspiring presentations that move others to reflect and consider new information and values. Internet "influencers" are people who share everyday stories in a way that makes others want to be like them, "follow" them or subscribe to their channel, and buy things from them.

A perfect example is American singer-songwriter Taylor Swift and the culture that surrounds her. Swift is the first billionaire musician based solely on her songs and performances. Every time she has a concert in a major city, the economic impact on the city is equivalent to hosting the Super Bowl. She did 56 concerts last year. The "Swifties" are more numerous and spend more money than most churches in America.

Her authenticity is her secret super power. Columnist Peggy Noonan observed last November:

Nine years ago, in an interview with CBS's Gayle King, Ms. Swift coolly self-assessed. "My life

doesn't gravitate towards being edgy, sexy, or cool. I just naturally am not any of those things." Pressed for what she is, she said: "I'm imaginative, I'm smart and I'm hardworking."

Swift is witnessing to the American Dream: "Be your best creative self and you will be rewarded with happiness and wealth." It turns out she may now also be experimenting with role modeling how to find an ideal mate and perhaps will move on to creating an ideal family.



A stylized depiction of Taylor Swift.

We can't all be pop stars. What is the essence of what good witnesses, celebrities and Internet influencers share? It is *authenticity*: "You shall know by the fruits" (Matt. 7:20). If you are comfortable with who you are and happy with yourself, your family and your life, it will positively affect other people wherever you are.

The opposite is also true. When we have a selfish hidden agenda to "get" a member, witnessing can drive people away from the ideas being considered. Some examples:

- Witnessing to doctrine. Having a book table with tracts and articles and overpowering the curious with facts, ideas and figures. Church people who appear at your door with tracts, and campus book tables are the best examples of this style.
- Witnessing systems. When you visit a church, you often are greeted by the witnessing committee, who overwhelm you with calculated kindness and concern. While kindness and concern are important to any relationship, when the system is more important than the person, it leaves a bitter taste in the mouth of the person on the receiving end.
- Witnessing for profit. When the end justifies the means, such as inviting people to join a cool group, and finding out you have been invited to an Amway (i.e., multi-level marketing) party.

I recently attended a business seminar on salesmanship and one slide showed how communication is achieved in an interaction. Seven per cent is from the words used, and the other 93% is body language and tone. The sarcasm, cynicism, sincerity, and heart of a communication are all decoded by the listener through non-verbal cues.

"I can't hear what you are saying, because who you are is shouting so loudly." Who we are and who we are becoming is the most important part of witnessing rather than the method or words.

What are we "selling"?

I have a friend who insists we should not be witnessing for the Unification Movement or Father and Mother Moon (whom Unificationists call the True Parents), but for the Three Blessings. The "Three Blessings" movement is universal and non-threatening, anyone can do it, and most people are already trying to achieve them without thinking.

True Parents and the church become an important secondary benefit to a person or family seeking to fulfill the Three Blessings.

Most of us are not model citizens, let alone perfected individual truth bodies. That should not stop us from witnessing. Most people will forgive someone who espouses high ideals and hasn't achieved them yet, as long as they see a sincere effort to reach for that excellence. Authenticity and sincerity mean a lot.

The whole milk problem

My father was president of a large dairy cooperative, and one of the problems he spoke about was the difficulty in selling milk in competition with soft drinks. Milk and milk products are so good for every person at every age that it was pointless to make a list of good attributes because it was taken for granted. What worked was "Got Milk?", an advertising campaign that focused on how good milk tastes with cookies.

Unificationists have a similar problem. The vision of the Principle is so high and deep that it is almost pointless to talk about it, since it seems unreachable for many.

The two most successful witnessing strategies in Oakland was to speak about our organic farm in Booneville, and later to talk about Project Volunteer, a gleaning program to bring food to the inner city. These programs embodied the accessible ideals of the Principle without overwhelming the listener.

A true family, centered on high ideals and public service, is tangible evidence of the presence of God and potential of a life well-lived. I think this will be the "new normal" for our movement and the foundation for 21st century witnessing.

The hypocrisy problem

A significant problem for Unificationists is our internal failure to live up to our intentions and ideals. When we were young witnesses, we talked about the theory of the Principle because we hadn't had time to live it. But now we have spouses, children and grandchildren. How are our fruits?

By many measures, our movement has internal problems we are still trying to solve. Disunity and confusion weaken the resolve to witness. The issues we have with our own children and within our local churches undermine our confidence to speak out.

While these failures speak to our challenges, how we respond to them speaks to our long-term prospects as a movement. If you are a movement of high ideals, failure to reach that ideal immediately is offset by a long-term plan to reach the goal. Each person is responsible to make a multi-generational plan to bring their spiritual and physical lineages in line with God's will. This creates energy and purpose and that gives power to witness.

So when Mother Moon calls for a revitalization of our movement, evolving toward joy and away from suffering and indemnity, what is she envisioning?

When I see a three generation family at a restaurant, I can usually tell how they are doing. If the kids are on their phones, or the teenagers are rolling their eyes, or the parents aren't speaking to each other or the grandparents are silent -- that's not good. In contrast, a lively intergenerational conversation is beautiful to watch and leaves one feeling full. That's my vision of the ideal we are promoting. It may take time and love to achieve that level of joy, but what are we doing that is more important?

21st century witnessing

Here are ten key points for 21st century witnessing:

1. Joy is the center of successful witnessing. We started witnessing for a great mission, and now we need to witness about the victory, not the fight.
2. The Internet is the new bus station. God has prepared this tool for us.
3. A picture is worth a thousand words; a video is worth 10,000.
4. Success at the Three Blessings is the key. After that, words and lectures will come easily.
5. We don't witness to get people to join; we witness to liberate them and God from sadness, anger and hopelessness. Anything less and our self-interest ruins the process.
6. Our children and grandchildren are the ultimate witnesses. In or out of the church, their natural beauty and success says a lot more about our movement than our doctrine.

7. We need to get our own house in order as we reach out. Lonely, angry, sad, and disaffected members should be embraced as a condition for reaching out.
8. The third blessing is equal to the first two. A poor, badly run, and disorganized church is an anti-witnessing tool. Being poor is not a sin; being short-sighted, superficial and out of control is.
9. We don't have to be perfect, but we need to have faith that we can be. And we need a visible plan to accomplish that together.
10. Aim high in witnessing. We should witness to our peers, people who have a faith-filled vision of a better world and who have the skills to help us accomplish it.

Witnessing is not a mission, it is a by-product of a life well-lived. While we develop programs and outreach efforts, the key is not the tools, the font used, or the organization. It is the love and heart of the witnesses.

I'm always deeply moved by anyone who stands for God. They don't have to jump up and down but they should hold each other up and lean forward. These are my people. To me, this is what will create the foundation of the American movement going forward.

Optimism has always been the great strength of America. It's time to bring it back to our Movement.

John Redmond is married to a clever wife, is the proud father of four interesting children, and is one of the Tri-Pastors of the Mid-Hudson Family Church in New York State. He has high expectations for the American Unification movement.