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Evangelical Mission, Congregational Polity

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This article is about growing the number of active members in the Unification Church. It is based on the assumption that church growth has regular causes that can be discerned by examining churches that are growing. The corollary is that church decline also has regular causes that can be discerned by examining churches that are declining in numbers. Fortunately, the process of discovery is not rocket science. The differences between the churches that are dying and are growing are plain as day.^[1]

In this paper, I will argue that possession of an evangelical mission and congregational polity is the defining characteristic of most growing churches. I will present a case that when the Unificationist churches possessed this mission and polity, they grew. Although I will not delve into it for want of space, I also believe that the evangelical mission and congregational policy are rooted in the Divine Principle teachings and Founder's aspirations embodied in home church and Tribal Messiahship.^[2]

I then will propose that at this stage of its maturation, if the Unification Church adapts the practices of the churches that are growing, and ceases the practices of the churches that are failing, it will grow. I will conclude by responding to five criticisms of my position.

Evangelical Mission and Congregational Polity

For a church to have an evangelical mission means that the church is organized to proclaim the good news (the "evangel") and to bring others to salvation through it. The Unificationist evangelical mission could be stated like this: it is to create True Parents' disciples of all peoples, teach them to follow the church teachings, bless them in marriage and release them to multiply and prosper. The basics of the evangelical mission implicit in the statement of purpose in the HSA-UWC Articles of Incorporation: "the worship of God and the study, teaching and practical application of Divine Principles."^[3]

Beginning with the end in mind, the objective is to create people who profess faith in True Parents and want the Blessing, on the foundation of membership in a spiritual community. I believe that the proliferation of communities of Blessed families practicing faith in God, fidelity, sexual purity and universal love, will save the world.

The evangelical mission is based on the Divine Principle words, "...the teachings of the returning Christ can freely and swiftly be conveyed to the hearts of all humankind. This will enable his teachings to bring rapid and profound changes all over the globe."^[4] It is the direct practice advocated by the Family Pledge, "to convey the Blessing to our community." It is embodied in Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon's words to the Universal Peace Federation global conference: "Without a clear understanding of the Principle of Creation, and the way in which evil entered and expands in this world, we are very limited in our ability to change the course of history toward a world of universal peace. Therefore, I encourage you to study Divine Principle."^[5] Rev. Moon's peace messages similarly taught the Divine Principle and called people to receive the Holy Marriage Blessing sacrament. This is the evangelical mission.

Congregational polity means that the members of the local church own and govern the local church. The congregation, centering on the lead pastor couple, is accountable directly to our Heavenly Parents; there is no human intermediary. As stated by a Baptist minister, "Congregational polity best represents my beliefs because I have faith in people. It is true that people can be disappointing, but I believe that no one is better equipped to make decisions for a local congregation than the congregation itself. The members have each been given a brain, a conscience, and the ability to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. The congregational polity also represents humankind's freedom in Christ."^[6]

The most important result of congregational polity is congregational ownership. People who are owners know that they are responsible. More often than not, this brings out the best in people. Owners tend to care for what they own. Owners settle down and have children. Ownership has to be both internal and external. Internally, the belief system has to support local ownership—and the Family Pledge and Divine Principle do. Externally, the members have to take real ownership, with its risks and opportunities, and outside authorities must likewise keep their proper position.

The Denominational Model: Multiple Missions and Episcopal Polity

This model is in direct contrast with the denominational model of multiple missions and episcopal polity.

Multiple missions

Once a church reduces the evangelical mission to less than unparalleled importance, it cannot stem a rising tide of competing missions. The Episcopal Church in America is an example. In his installation sermon as the sixteenth bishop of the Episcopal Church diocese of New York, on February 6, 2013, the Right Reverend Andrew M.L. Dietsche called his church to a mission addressing (in this order) childhood poverty, a resurgence of overtly racist language in the public square, the number in prison in America, the “wealth gap,” war in general and the problem of refugees. As to the evangelical mission, he stated that “It is extraordinary hubris for any institution, even one professing to hold claim to the purposes of God, to imagine or expect that the world would be drawn to us just because we are.”^[7]

The “four areas of focus” of the United Methodists in America begin with “combating the diseases of poverty by improving health globally,” followed by “engaging in ministry with the poor.” “Creating new places for new people and revitalizing existing congregations” and “developing principled Christian leaders for the church and the world” come next.^[8]

The multiplicity of missions taken on by Methodists and Episcopalians is typical of mainstream Protestant churches.

Episcopal polity

Episcopal polity means that local church congregations are guided by direction from a central authority, be it an anointed person, as in the Catholic form, or an elected committee, as in the Presbyterian form. The central authority controls resources, from which clergy are salaried. The center governs each congregation, whose sole accountability and communication line is to the center. The center has authority over the planning, schedule, strategies, style, properties, and so forth for each congregation.

To understand what is really going on in the episcopal system, you have to realize that it was built for a society in which there is only one church. As Christian society modernized, the church became a department of the state. Membership became coterminous with citizenship. Evangelism was not necessary. Taxation supported the church. People by law had to attend the church assigned them according to their location. This is called the parish system. Only the state-certified clergy could give the message, multiply sacramental objects and officiate liturgical events. It was like agriculture in Russia under Stalin, or the American public schools.^[9]

Episcopal polity leads to a church culture that is world affirming, property-centric, and non-conversionist with a strenuously guarded liturgy. Such churches tend to have few young leaders and no innovation. Churches with this polity do not, and I believe cannot, expand in a free society.

Which Churches Are Growing; Which Are Dying?

Table1: Dying and Growing Churches in America^[10]

Dying Churches	Growing Churches
American Baptist Churches USA	Assemblies of God
Church of the Nazarene (in the USA)	Roman Catholic Church
Episcopal Church	Seventh Day Adventist
Evangelical Lutheran Church of the USA	Latter Day Saints
Presbyterian Church of the USA	Church of God (Cleveland, TN)
United Church of Christ	The Vineyard Association
United Methodist Church	Jehovah's Witnesses
Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod)	Nondenominational and Independent Churches
Southern Baptist Convention	

Historian Paul Johnson refers to the dying churches listed in Table 1, above, as the “Seven Sisters.” The seven denominations “as a whole lost between a fifth and a third of their members in the years 1960-90.”^[11] He cites one study that calculated that the Methodists were losing 1,000 members a week and have been for thirty years.

Gallup categorizes these as “mainline” churches. Between 1973 and 1983, the United Methodist Church was down 8%, the Presbyterian Church USA was down 15%, the Lutheran Church in America was down 3%, the Episcopal Church down 4% and the Christian Church / Disciples of Christ was down 13%.^[12]

From 1983 to 2013, the UMC is flat if we include “preparatory members” and down 12% if we count “lay members” and the PCUSA has an astonishing drop of over 30% (from 3.15M to 1.9M).^[13] More recently, in the span from 2010 to 2011, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was down 1.96% (to 4.5 million), the United Methodist Church was down 1% (to 7.8 million), the Presbyterian Church (USA) was down 2.61% (to 2.7 million).

As to the causes of decline, Johnson’s comment as a historian is that they declined “chiefly because they forfeited their distinguishing features, or indeed any features.” Let’s look at the Episcopal Church as an example.

After the Episcopal Church’s General Convention of 1994, marked by a bitter dispute over the right of practicing homosexuals to become or remain clergy, one official observer commented: ‘The Episcopal Church is an institution in free fall. We have nothing to hold onto, no shared belief, no common assumptions, no bottom line, no accepted definition of what an Episcopalian is or believes.’^[14] A neighbor of mine in upstate New York, a devout lay minister in her local Episcopal Church, believes that the church’s stance on homosexuality and abortion will lead God to destroy it. This does not bode well for church growth.

In a *Wall Street Journal* article, a practicing Episcopalian described the 2012 General Convention thusly:

General Convention is also notable for its sheer ostentation and carnival atmosphere. For seven straight nights, lavish cocktail parties spilled into pricey steakhouses, where bishops could use their diocesan funds to order bottles of the finest wines.

During the day, legislators in the lower chamber, the House of Deputies, and the upper chamber, the House of Bishops, discussed such weighty topics as whether to develop funeral rites for dogs and cats, and whether to ratify resolutions condemning genetically modified foods. Both were approved by a vote, along with a resolution to ‘dismantle the effects of the doctrine of discovery,’ in effect an apology to Native Americans for exposing them to Christianity.^[15]

The writer, Jay Akasie, stated that the denomination had 3 million members in 1970 and today has about 1 million.

On the other hand, between 1973 and 1983, the Southern Baptist Convention increased by 15%, the LDS increased by 40%, the Assemblies of God increased by 71%, Seventh-Day Adventists increased by 34% and Church of the Nazarene increased by 22%. Gallup categorizes these all as “evangelical” churches. Since 1983, the Southern Baptist Convention has increased another 15%, the Assemblies of God has grown by about 30%, and the LDS has roughly doubled in size. In the period from 2010 to 2011, while the Southern Baptist Convention was down 0.42%, to 16.1 million, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) was up 1.42%, to 6 million, the Assemblies of God was up 0.52%, to 2.9 million, up 0.52%, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses was up 4.37%, the largest reported growth (no base number given).

Characteristics Reported by Growing and Dying Churches

One is led to ask, of course, “What are the differences between these churches?” If we ask thousands of churches about what they do, and then sort it out by answers from dying churches and growing churches, will we see any patterns? Sociologist of religion C. Kirk Hadaway did just that, for the Hartford Seminary’s Institute for Religion Research. He found clear differences. To review a sampling of that information, I present Table 2. It sets forth a number of ways in which dying and rising congregations differ, based upon Hadaway’s research.

Table 2: Characteristics of Growing Versus Dying Churches^[16]

	Dying Churches	Growing Churches
Age of congregation	In existence more than 35 years	Founded in the last 10 years
Mission clarity	Unclear to the members	Clear to the members
Standing for something	We are not a moral beacon to the community	We are a moral beacon to the community
Exceptionalism, Uniqueness	We are not exceptional, not so different from other churches	We are exceptional, different from other churches
Worship atmosphere	Not spiritually vital and alive, "We do not encounter God"	Spiritually vital and alive, "We encounter God"
Polity and tradition	Mainline Protestant or Catholic (episcopal) style	Evangelical style
Latitude	Broad, accommodating, middle-of-the-road	Narrow, whether on the right (most cases) or on the left (if you do, go all the way and be clear about it)
Worship music	Drums, percussion, guitars and bass seldom if ever used in worship services	Drums, percussion, guitars and bass are used in worship services
Youth in worship	Rarely if ever are children or youth involved	Children and youth speak, read or perform during worship
Changes in worship style in last 5 years	No change	Changed a lot, added a new service
Desire to have more members	No such desire	High degree of desire
Leader's time spent in evangelism	Little	A great deal
Member involvement in recruiting new members	Little or none	Very involved
Special events for guests	Never	Once a month or more
Prayer groups	None or "some emphasis"	A lot of emphasis or "specialty of the congregation"
Leader's time to develop and promote vision and purpose	Little	A great deal
Program target	Few or no programs or events to attract non-members to become members	Regular programs that attract non-members to become members
Planning	No plan for growth, to recruit members	Plan for growth, to recruit members
Member support	No support groups such as bereavement, marriage, divorced, wellness, 12-step	Have support groups such as bereavement, marriage, divorced, wellness, 12-step
Attention to visitors	Do not follow-up with visitors, or do so in only one way	Follow-up with visitors in 4 or 5 ways
Historical position	Mainstream Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox	Evangelical, "other" Christian

This information illustrates my thesis, that the crucial characteristics of growing churches, the root of all the growth dynamics, are two in number. First, these churches have an evangelical mission. Second, they have a congregational polity. A sorting of the above characteristics by mission and polity illustrates this (Table 3).

Table 3: Characteristics Sorted by Mission and Polity

MISSION	Multiple Missions (evangelism lost in the shuffle)	Evangelical Mission (other missions based on foundation of evangelism)
Mission clarity	Unclear to the members	Clear to the members
Standing for something	We are not a moral beacon to the community	We are a moral beacon to the community
Exceptionalism, uniqueness	We are not exceptional, not so different from other churches	We are exceptional, different from other churches
Worship atmosphere	Not spiritually vital and alive, "we do not encounter God"	Spiritually vital and alive, "we encounter God"
Latitude	Broad, accommodating, middle-of-the-road	Narrow, whether on the right (most cases) or on the left (if you do, go all the way and be clear about it)
Worship music	Drums, percussion, guitars and bass seldom if ever used in worship services	Drums, percussion, guitars and bass are used in worship services
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Planning	No plan for growth, to recruit members	Plan for growth, to recruit members
Member support	No support groups such as bereavement, marriage, divorced, wellness, 12-step	Have support groups such as bereavement, marriage, divorced, wellness, 12-step
Attention to visitors	Do not follow-up with visitors, or do so in only one way	Follow-up with visitors in 4 or 5 ways
POLITY	Episcopal / Presbyterian Polity	Congregational Polity
Age of congregation	In existence more than 35 years	Founded in the last 10 years (penchant for church planting)
Changes in worship style in last 5 years	No change (it's all decided)	Changed a lot, added a new service (the leader is responsible)
Leader's time to develop, promote vision and purpose	Little (it's all decided)	A great deal (the leader is responsible)
Polity and tradition	Mainline Protestant or Catholic	Evangelical style
Historical position	Mainstream Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox	Evangelical, "other" Christian
Ambiguous—could go either way		
Prayer groups	None or "some emphasis"	A lot of emphasis or "specialty of the congregation"
Youth in worship	Rarely if ever are children or youth involved	Children and youth speak, read or perform during worship

I discern that critical characteristics of growing churches require, or are typical of, an evangelical mission (or “one” mission) and are contrary to or are atypical of churches with multiple missions. I also discern that critical characteristics of growing churches require, or are typical of, a congregational polity, and are contrary to or are atypical of churches with episcopal or Presbyterian polity.

The Unification Church as a Case Study

The Unification Church grew when and where it had an evangelical mission and congregational polity

Founding of the church: The Unification Church grew from one spirit-led man starting a local congregation. The church had an evangelical mission and congregational polity. He taught and preached a God-centered biblical vision for world transformation. He prayed incessantly. His mission began with a vision of Jesus; people who joined testified that it was the spirit world that led them to him. He loved and served others to bring them into his church, sleeping and eating little, giving up his family, worrying not about physical needs. That was how it started.

In the early church, as described in Rev. Moon’s autobiography and numerous testimonies, witnessing was the only concern. In Reverend Moon’s words,

Before [1966], I had prohibited members from carrying out economic activities, in other words, from earning money. If they had made money before that time, it would have created a bad condition. In God’s providence of restoration, the principle is to find people first, which is why you cannot touch material goods before finding people. Because of this, we went about finding people even if it meant going through suffering by selling off everything we had; we did not engage in money-making campaigns... I prohibited all financial activities save those involving manual labor where you shed your blood or sweat. Anything where you did not shed blood or sweat, I prohibited. The blood or sweat was like the payment of a price.^[17]

Rev. Moon’s initial church in Pyongyang, 1946-48, grew rapidly enough in two years to incur hostility from established Christian leaders. After the Korean War, the Unification Church grew from two members in 1951 to 400 members in 1956, a growth rate in the range of 175% per year.^[18] He reports having 120 churches in Korea four years later, which indicates that this phenomenal growth rate continued.

Mission field: How did it continue? Rev. Moon sent out disciples to replicate his process.

Unificationism followed the evangelical mission and congregational polity in its mission field, where missionaries had to rely on God and had latitude for the way they organized. They had only one mission, it was evangelical, and they had the freedom to figure out how to succeed. Thus, the church in its early stage, whether in Korea or on the frontiers of the global mission field, was evangelical. Members were fervent in witnessing and teaching, highly reliant on the spirit world, conversionist, radically separated from the world and intensely focused on witnessing and discipleship. It is worth pointing out that this type of church attracts young people.

Korea: Reverend Moon called members, including students down to middle school age, to do full-time evangelical work in the summer. “Each group of three [college students] in each district (township) must take responsibility for teaching Divine Principle, counseling people and promoting the enlightenment movement. If college students go to rural communities and take charge of the education of middle school students, they will come to grasp the situation of farm villages and feel a spirit of patriotism as well. Invest at least a third of the members in witnessing activities.”^[19]

America: In America, the church grew from 2 missionaries in 1959 to 300 full-time church workers in 1971. That is a growth rate of over 150% per year. Over the next five years the national growth rate was distorted by the importation of 200-300 missionaries from overseas, but we can isolate many localities that were not affected by this. In Durham, New Hampshire, where I was located, a group of 7 grew to 21 full-time members and another 19 home-members in the months of June-August, 1973. Others in that period relate similar growth in their locations. The Oakland center, where I joined, had a fervent evangelical mission and hard-fought congregational polity. A group of 3 grew to about 70 between 1971 and 1973—a growth rate of about 500%.

Europe: The church in Europe grew at a similar rate, 1965-73. Rev. Moon dispatched, some five missionaries to as many countries in 1965—England, Germany, Austria, Italy, France and Holland. By the end of 1972, Austria had about 100 members.^[20] The others were likely on a par with that, as each of the six countries sent 20 missionaries to the US, January-February, 1973. Based on this account, the church in these six countries grew at a rate of approximately 80% per year.

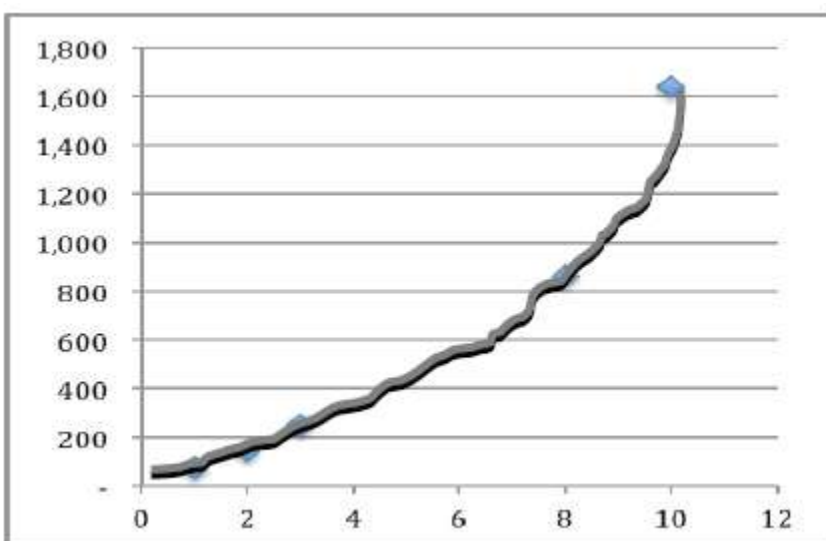
The evangelical spirit is exemplified no better than by Rev. Reiner Vincenz, the church planter in France, who fasted for 40 days prior to gaining his first member.

Russia: The mission in Russia was the same in the 90s and early 2000s. The church in St. Petersburg grew from a handful of missionaries in 1991 to a peak of 300-400 attending Sunday service in 1993. The mission was only witnessing; they were only inviting people to and teaching workshops in the Divine Principle. By 2002, they had 1,000 members.[\[21\]](#)

Global result: The church maintained evangelical fervor and congregational polity in its mission field until the early 90s. The overall growth pattern of the Unification Church during this period globally was astounding, and is revealed by its marriage statistics between 1961 and 1992. And one should note that the numbers recorded are not those of the total membership, but rather the number of members who had newly qualified for Blessed marriage. The total number of members had a steeper rate of growth. Since there were very few second generation of marriageable age prior to 1992, this is an indicator of the church's conversion rate.[\[22\]](#)

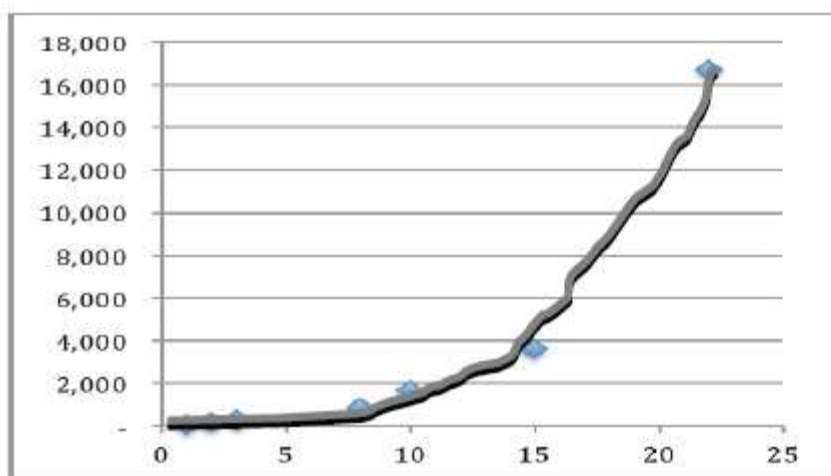
I include three graphs to illustrate a very important point: the growth rate was sustained even as the scale increased exponentially. In other words, this was more than a charismatic pastor building a mega-church. Many pastors can grow a congregation, and it stops there. Rev. Moon did that, but he didn't stop there. Some pastors can sustain a movement that grows within a particular nation and its diaspora, but it stops there. Rev. Moon did that too, but he didn't stop there. *He managed to maintain almost the same growth velocity within scores of diverse cultures, on a global scale.* Rev. Moon was not personally involved with most of this growth.

Table 4: Number of Individuals Blessed in Marriage, 1961-70



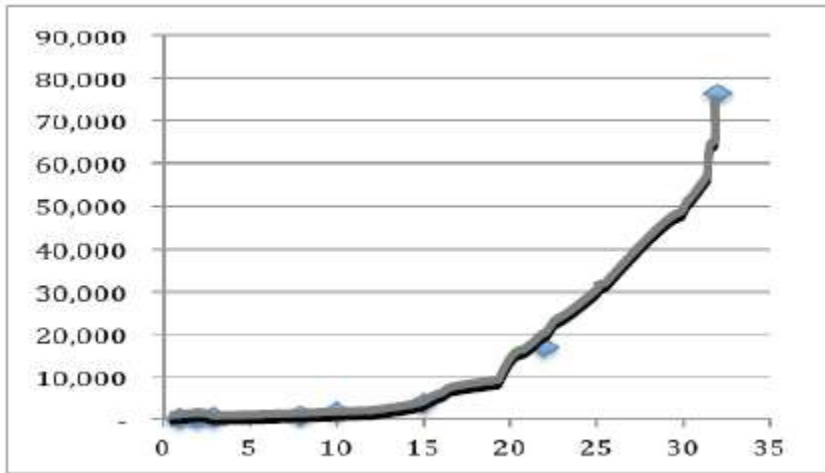
Blessed individuals, 1961 (yr 1) – 1970 (yr 10). Note the vertical scale, 0 to 1,800. The growth rate is 29% per year.

Table 5: Number of Individuals Blessed in Marriage, 1961-82



Blessed individuals, 1961 (yr 1) – 1982 (yr 22). Note the horizontal scale has doubled, from 12 to 25 years, and the vertical scale has multiplied by 10, from 1,800 to 18,000, but the growth curve stays roughly the same. The growth rate is 23%.

Table 6: Number of Individuals Blessed in Marriage, 1961-92

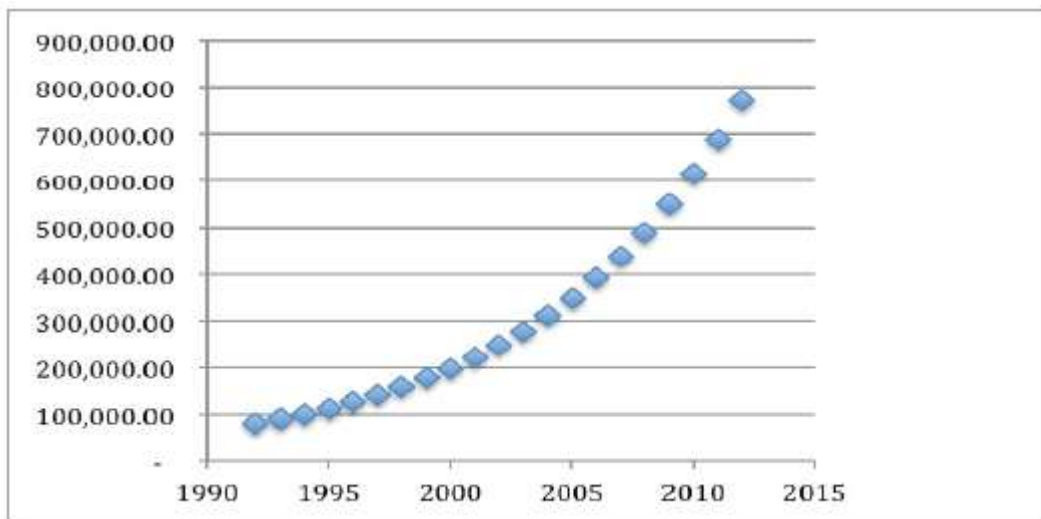


Blessed individuals, 1961 (yr 1) – 1992 (yr 32). The horizontal scale has increased by 30%, from 25-35 years, and the vertical scale multiplies by 50, from 1,800 to 90,000, with the growth curve again staying the same. The growth rate is 16%.

It is worth noting Rodney Stark’s findings that the growth rate of Christianity in the sub-apostolic age, prior to its emergence as the state religion of Rome, was 4% per year. He found that this also has been the growth rate of the Latter-Day Saints since their inception. The conclusion: a steady 4% growth rate sustained over centuries puts a faith tradition on a trajectory to world religion status. In its first decades, the Unification Church was far ahead of that.

Now, let us speculate. What if the movement had maintained this pace of growth? Let us calculate based on a lower growth rate than the 16% maintained from 1982-92—let’s say, 12%. From a base of 80,000 Blessed members in 1992, compounded over 21 years, it would look something like this:

Table 7: Number of Individuals Blessed in Marriage, 1992-2013, If the 1960-92 Growth Rate Had Continued



This indicates that True Parents would have blessed some 772,000 fully dedicated believers of the first generation on Foundation Day. Now, I’m well aware there are lies, damned lies and statistics. I’m also aware that the math as well as sociological variables here are more complex than I’m ready and able to explore. Nonetheless, trends are worth pondering.

The Unification Church with diverse missions and episcopal polity did not grow

As the Unification Church settled its global ministry, Rev. Moon followed the denominational model. This is characterized by centralized authority introducing multiple and diverse missions of an economic, social, cultural and interfaith nature.

Mission diversification: The Unificationist mission expanded from evangelism to business, the arts, media, secular or interfaith education, member-revival and interfaith.

Unification ecumenism began in the late 60s in Korea and mid-70s in the US. The outreach to scholars and scientists began at the same time. The seminary launched in 1975. The newspapers started in 1976 in the US and other countries over the next 15 years. Businesses such as machine tools production, ginseng sales, ship-building, fishing and restaurants, construction companies, hotels, printing and many more started in the late 60s in Korea and multiplied globally beginning in the 70s.[\[23\]](#)

Episcopal polity: Rev. Moon established a parish system in the United States, with each state a parish and, in some cases a city a parish. He installed regional directors in Japan and the United States, and national leaders and continental directors globally. In the late 90s he imported four “national messiahs,” one of which had effective governing authority, into each nation, and in 2006 another authority in many nations representing him directly (*the boon bong wang*).[\[24\]](#)

Concurrent was the waiving of belief or practice requirements to receive the church’s core sacrament, the blessing.

The result

After the 1992 Blessing of 30,000 couples, in 1995 we had a marriage blessing of 360,000 couples, signifying a growth rate of nearly 400% per year. We cannot take that number as representing church growth. The US sent less than 100 people to that event, after having sent 1,000 to the 1992 Blessing. Nor can we take as representing church growth the increase reported by the American church from 88 to 6,068 couples in the space of three weeks during the “360 Million Couples Blessing.”[\[25\]](#) In 1997 the global church fielded 1,500 couples, in 1998, 800 couples, in 2000, 185 couples, and in every blessing event thereafter, between 200 and 2,000 couples. The 2013 “Foundation Day” blessing included 42 first-generation members from the US.[\[26\]](#) The number of members being blessed diminished to a trickle—and most of those were not converts but the fraction of the biological growth that adhered to church marriage practice. This is a reversal of the trend of the church’s first decades.

Rev. Moon never curtailed the evangelical mission, but because economic, social-cultural and interfaith activities are less demanding spiritually, they trumped evangelism and it generally disappeared. In addition, removing authority from local hands eventually resulted in the abdication of local responsibility. At that point, the church stopped growing.

Ocean Church: The mission of Ocean Church combined evangelism with fishing. Fishing led to building boats and commercial retail and wholesale ventures. The evangelical aspect of the Ocean Church vision was, excuse the expression, dead in the water. Rev. Moon envisioned thousands of young Americans finding God and a healthy lifestyle through the ocean. But all the members’ energy went into the practical side of the mission, learning to fish, taking care of the boats, and expanding (or surviving) financially.

We have this problem *in extremis*, because it wasn’t just one secular mission; it was many simultaneously. Rev. Moon gave his blood and tears so that the Seminary would convert the professors, ICUS convert scientists, PWPA convert scholars, and similar educational activities convert political leaders, journalists and clergy. But none of these organizations served as vehicles of evangelism. If anything, they suppressed the evangelical fervor of the members engaged in them.

Russia: After the growth in St. Petersburg, the trend turned negative and by 2000 there were less than 200 attending, and in 2011 it is less still. The thousand members in 2002 became 800 by 2012. A Russian member I interviewed cited a court case against the church as a cause, both for public image damage and the forcing of leading missionaries out of the country. She stated that those who departed from active membership were free riders. American missionaries with whom I’ve spoken added to the analysis. One, the church failed to disciple indigenous leaders and turn ownership over to them. Hence, long before the missionaries left, many talented converts had departed. When the missionaries left, the remaining indigenous members could not fill the leadership vacuum. Also a second wave of Asian leaders arrived requesting obedience as the highest virtue and these leaders, naturally, perhaps, praised the obedient members as superior to the others. It might have rallied their troops but it divided the membership.[\[27\]](#)

Korea: According to Rev. Hyung Jin Moon, the membership in Korea peaked at 16,000 and then declined to 14,000 by 2009.[\[28\]](#) In 1988, the Korean church averaged 20,000 attending church each Sunday. In July, 2012, the Tongil Foundation headquarters reported that under their governance, membership grew from 30,000 to 45,857 within a year or two.

This is a phenomenal growth rate. One would expect that the global church would be awash with testimonies of these thousands of new members flooding in. I have never seen any, at least in English language publications. My conclusion is that this growth, while due the utmost respect, cannot be credited to fresh conversions, but a general improvement of care for existing and lapsed members and more attention to record keeping. When I requested data on the global church demographics from that office, I was told that it is restricted information.

The United States: Growth in the United States was hampered by persecution, to be sure, but continued where good evangelical practices persisted into the late 80s in the San Francisco area and through the 90s and into the 2000s in New York and Chicago. The most persistent growth sector at present is the Latino community. I would point out that the leaders of this community are motivated strongly by evangelism. Further, due to the language barrier, they are effectively congregational in polity. They do not have to deal with properties and they can organize according to the needs of their market.

A Call for a Return to Evangelical Mission and Congregational Polity

Reverend Sun Myung Moon has led God's providence with a vision of a God of love beyond human understanding. But in the process, he created two distinct models. One is a church with a congregational polity and evangelical mission. The other is a church with an episcopal polity and multiple missions. I propose that we need to choose between them and should choose the former, a church with a congregational polity and evangelical mission.

I realize that Unificationists have several criticisms of the evangelical congregational model, and I want to address them. But first, I need to address a more fundamental criticism.

First, why choose? We can do both!

The idea that we can unite everything into one is wonderful, but we take it too far. Our unyielding commitment to "both-and" is the Achilles Heel of the Unification Church. We force the move from origin to union without a healthy growing period in which subject and object partners can achieve maturity.

Why can't one organization do evangelism along with all the other missions? It is because economic, social-cultural and interfaith activities are less demanding spiritually than is evangelism. Therefore they trump evangelism and it soon disappears. The fallen world is not a level playing field. You need to incentivize witnessing; you need to create a *culture of evangelism* if you want people to do evangelism.

I reject the riposte in our church that "no one is stopping you from witnessing." So too, in the mainstream Protestant churches, no one is stopping anyone from witnessing, *but their members don't witness*. Structure affects culture. People witness in evangelical congregations, not because they are more virtuous, but because *the leader and the system promote witnessing and render witnessing effective*. Witnessing is not easy. People need to feel it is supremely important. The leadership has to model that personally and build a system around it.

Jim Collins has shown that an effective organization is an organization that does *one thing* fantastically well. Businesses provide goods and services. Governments fix potholes. Schools teach how to read and write. Churches save people.[\[29\]](#)

Then what about creating God-centered economy, politics, culture and recreation? Isn't that part of the Messiah's core mission? Didn't he have to, therefore, assign church leaders and members to do that stuff? I address that as the second criticism.

Second, an exclusively evangelical mission is contrary to the Unificationist vision of not only restoration of religion but of all aspects of life.

This is in large part a strategic issue. A system of separation of powers, checks and balances, division of labor and specialization simply works better than central planning. This system reduces abuse and increases results. The Divine Principle upholds the analogy of the body, with its division of labor among specialized organs, and rightly criticizes the entanglement of the Renaissance Popes with secular economic and governmental power structures. The church mission is not to govern society, train for technical skills or produce goods and services. The church naturally advocates godly principles and values, enables individuals and families to separate from Satan, and nurtures a responsible citizenry. Rev. Moon did address the leaders of governments, but what he told them was a religious message, to get their personal house in order and then lead their nations based upon godly principles. He did what a pastor is supposed to do.

Secular activities *per se* have no salvific value. Thus I reject the ethos that because the Messiah has to restore the secular world, our economic, media or political activities can save us. What our first generation swept under the carpet was Rev. Moon's sincere expectation that members would be witnessing and growing the church at the same time they were creating secular institutions. With rare exceptions, we failed to meet his

expectations. Evangelism is the most difficult mission, and people always choose the less difficult. That's why the third blessing comes last.

Third, having an evangelical mission is contrary to the Unificationist commitment to interfaith.

The perception is that evangelism denies the interfaith tenet that "I'm okay, you're okay" and therefore undermines Unificationist interfaith outreach. I agree with the first part of that statement, but disagree with the second.

As to the first part, Rev. Moon is clear that "interfaith" means for all religions to accept the True Parents. This is set forth in the Divine Principle "Resurrection" chapter on the unification of religions.^[30] Rev. Moon's address to the first Assembly of the World's Religions was entitled, "Dialogue and Alliance." True Parents' interfaith includes dialogue, as in traditional interfaith, but goes beyond that to "alliance." Alliance presupposes a shared vision and cause. We should be out front: the cause is to give the Blessing, *authentically*, to people of all religions. By authentically, I mean with responsible preparation and implementation of Blessed family life supported by a spiritual community.

But we were not true to that. We focused on dialogue, not alliance, and sought solely to make friends. As a result, have we become a major player in the world's interfaith movement? Is Reverend Moon honored appropriate to his interfaith work? Sadly, the answer is no. The reason boils down to this: we are not one of them, *and they know it*. They know we believe True Parents are the Messiah, and they know, even though we are in denial of it, that the Messiah is not here to dialogue.

As to the second part, evangelical congregationalism is the key to effective Unificationist interfaith. *Our interfaith vision can best be built upon an association of self-governing congregations united by the mission of Blessed marriage.* The definition, requirements and standard of Blessing association membership would be the evangelical mission to bring people into and through the marriage Blessing path based on the Peace Messages. That would be the definition of a Blessing ministry, whether carried out by a Unificationist, Baptist, Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist community.

Congregational leaders would receive the Blessing and would be ordained to multiply it in their community by their own methods. They would create Blessing ministries to serve their unique markets. The Unification churches should model it. If we go through the same path that we are asking them to take, and make that path accessible to them, we will move forward with them. We will listen more to them and in return they will listen to us. By listening and partnering, we will gain other benefits. One, we will tap into Muslim and Hindu traditions for arranged marriages, Catholic sacramentalism and Confucian veneration for parents. Two, we will tap into the Jewish and Christian marriage movement and pure love courtship processes. Three, we will hugely expand the population of single men and women eligible for the Blessing. Four, we want billions of people to *receive* the Blessing, and this will empower millions of pastors to *give* the Blessing and minister to Blessed families.

How would the association be governed? HSA should anchor a congregational association of independent churches and religious / spiritual communities.^[31] Each would be, with us, in a spiritual communion with True Parents. "In spiritual communion with True Parents" means to carry out the Blessing ministry, which is True Parents' core mission. *The Blessing ministry is the unifying authority.* This starts with us and includes all faiths eventually, because any religion can uplift the Blessing. Ergo the instruction Rev. Moon gave in his final public speech at Unification Theological Seminary, June of 2001. The seminary curriculum, he said, looking at me in the eyes, should focus on two things: *world religions and the change of blood lineage.*

Implications for Unificationist polity and mission: In the late 1990s, we extended the Blessing beyond our faith community. Was this wrong? No. What was wrong was that we failed to minister to those who could have joined our church (because we were not evangelical) and we did not empower the spiritual leaders of other faith communities to minister the Blessing (because we were not congregational). We failed to consider that other religions could carry out the True Parents' Blessing ministry as congregations distinct from ours. Why? Because we have episcopal presuppositions.

What was the result? In the first thirty years of our church, we restricted the marriage blessing to those who understood, valued, and paid for it. Under those conditions, the numbers receiving the Blessing grew exponentially. After 1992, we moved from Blessing to "pre-blessing" people who did not understand, value, significantly desire, or pay for it. Three things happened. One, the numbers of "pre-blessed" couples reached

into the hundreds of millions. Two, the Blessing was evacuated of its meaning for these couples. Three, the assimilation of new members into the church declined and even ceased.

All religions can be vehicles of the Blessing: To minister, on the simplest level, means to guide and enable people to understand, value, and pay for the Blessing, and empower them to do the same for others. Receiving the holy wine walks hand-in-hand with the teaching that we are justified by attending True Parents.^[32] So our essential purpose is not just to give holy wine, but also to bring people to attend True Parents.

How is this accomplished in a congregational polity? One way only: by the community *carrying the evangelical mission with the Messiah*. God will judge us all, but from the human vantage point, the safest, simplest, measurable way to attend True Parents is *bring people authentically to the Blessing*. This happens only through the organization that designed to receive, *and stimulate you to give*, that offering. That can be the Unification Church. But here is the key to the unity of the world's religions: *any spiritual community can carry out the Blessing mission. This is the key to the unity of the world's religions.*

Remove the obstructions: There exists in America a cadre of Christian clergy who accept Divine Principle and True Parents, have received the marriage blessing, teach Divine Principle, have blessed their congregations and remain in their church positions. *This is the small spark, and we need to fan the flame.*

What is their common characteristic? It is not their theology; *it is their polity, which is congregational*. These are independent churches. They generally are Bible churches of a Pentecostal and Baptist lineage. They are just like the church the young Rev. Moon created in Pyongyang, Pusan and Seoul. We can become one family of churches with them. To abet this, we need to remove the obstructions between them and us. *The main obstruction is that the Unification Church is an episcopal system*. Independent churches will never join an episcopal system.

The only way to embrace these churches is to establish Unificationism as a congregational polity and relate as sister churches in associations that are authentically self-governing. Free and independent churches with a strong sense of True Parents' transcendent lordship would very possibly join a congregational association of independent congregations, including Unification churches, *whose tie that binds is the Blessing*. Our common base for give and take action is the Blessing ministry.

Fourth, congregational polity increases the possibility of schism

Until human beings are perfected in love, we will have conflicts. Therefore the crucial question is, what sort of polity is most effective at minimizing the potential for conflict and the harm done by it? Unificationism tends to posit that unity comes through increasing oversight, reporting and control. This leads to the concentration of power. I believe that unity comes by reducing oversight, reporting and control, that is, by decentralizing power. The concentration of power—until all people are perfect in love—actually increases the possibility of conflict and schism, and the damage wrought by these.

Episcopal and Presbyterian polity concentrates ownership, and ownership means power. Two problems arise. One, power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. When the corruption of leaders is revealed, it leads to schism. Two, in an environment in which power is centralized, leaders fight over it. This leads to schism. Three, the leaders become elephants who, when fighting, trample the ants—who, if they survive, create schisms. It's bad enough when the ants are individuals and their families, far worse when those ants are corporate boards.

Reverend Moon views power as a paramount motive in the arena of religion. He wrote in his memoir: "Some theologians who studied our church in its early days described our teachings as original and systematic. Some were prepared to accept them. This means that the magnitude of the heresy controversy surrounding our church could not be for theological reasons. It had more to do with issues of power."^[33]

Congregational polity reduces the possibility of schism and its impact when it happens: Episcopal hierarchies by their nature act to preserve their power. As a result, they see any instigator of change as a threat. When Jesus' spiritual practice violated Temple polity, by which the Sanhedrin maintained their power, they attacked. When Luther's passion for salvation undermined papal polity, Rome attacked. When the Anabaptists undermined state church polity, Catholics, Lutherans and Calvinists alike attacked them. Wesley's passion for revival led him to conflict with the Church of England's polity and the Church of England excommunicated him. When Sun Myung Moon established a new church, the persecution he suffered was not over theology; it had to do with power. He was taking away their members.

Organizing the church as congregational will eliminate the possibility of schism because there will be nothing from which to separate. Heresiarchs will not gain control of political or economic power, because the church will not offer political and economic power. To remove the perks of power, we need radical change of polity from episcopal to congregational, driven by the passion for evangelism. Will this result in a few leaders driving off in an unprincipled direction? Yes, most likely. But the benefit of evangelical congregationalism far outweighs this cost.

Congregational polity distributes power: In the speech at the Coronation of God's Kingship, January 13, 2001, Rev. Moon stated that all Blessed parents have the authority to bestow the Blessing upon their children.^[34] The church needs to build from that and ordain ministers of the Blessing in a transparent way that combines integrity with liberality. This is an immediate task, for within two or three generations, as the concrete memory of True Parents' life on earth fades and the super-abundance of his teachings is unpacked and disseminated, as it should be, leaders will arise in the name of the ascended True Parents. These people will minister the Blessing in full confidence that it is the will of God and they will present an abundance of Rev. Moon's words to back them up.

Will the Blessing expand in peace? Or will our ideals of true love be discredited by mutual excommunications over orthodoxy, or legality, or lineage? Mutual recrimination by those claiming to represent True Parents will do nothing but justify criticism and rejection of the Blessing itself. Therefore, we need a transparent procedure to ordain clergy, Unificationist and otherwise, to give the Blessing. How do we do this? By identifying that the *real* power is the experience of salvation by the Messiah, the change of blood lineage, and by responsibly distributing it. This means that the church is responsible to establish an ordination to give the Blessing beyond the family level.

Fifth, congregational policy is contrary to the primacy of vertical relationships

True Father sometimes called God the vertical True Parents and referred to himself and True Mother as the horizontal True Parents. Since God indwells in the local church, the congregational polity is vertical, direct to God. The physical True Parents, or their legates, on the other hand, relate to the local congregation and family through layers of temporal intermediaries—a horizontal relationship. Episcopal polity actually is the horizontal polity.

The rationale for episcopal polity appears in the origins of Catholicism, and is based on belief that the Holy Spirit—the *charism*—works through substantive vertical relationships. The grace of God proceeds through this love of elder to younger, and this extends across generations, beginning with Jesus giving the keys to Peter. In Christianity it is called the apostolic succession. The highest value is unity with one's father, the priest. The benefit of episcopal polity is its focus on filial piety. This reflects the strongest Principle value, the parent-child relationship.^[35]

Let's talk about that for a moment. On the restoration course, Abel and Cain take the positions of parent and child, with the proviso that Cain is a disunited child whom Abel has to love into oneness with him/her. Once they achieve oneness, God can accept both Abel and Cain together.^[36]

The Unification Church community, in too many instances, did not take Cain and Abel past the "you're a disunited child!" level of relationship. Neglected was the precept that the pastor and member succeed only together. To understand this fully, we need to view it from the perspective of three generations in a local church—the pastor, the member and the member's guest. The pastor is the grandparent, the member is child to the pastor and parent (Abel) to the guest, and the guest is child to the member (Cain). It devolves to parent-child love. Pastors and members sacrifice and serve their members and guests.

This is the family-model. The vision of the parents is to turn their children into successful parents. The vision of the pastor is to create new pastors (successful Tribal Messiahs). The vision of the members is to create new members. The local church models on the three-generation family. In the church and in the family, three-generational love is truly vertical and is an absolute value. If anyone should practice, "honor your father and mother," it is the followers of True Parents.

But this changes when expanded beyond the three-generation family. Authentic love doesn't come through bureaucracies, bulletins and broad-casts. Remote control is for a TV, not a teenager. Rev. and Mrs. Moon sacrificed intimate family life and extended True Parents into Kingship through multiple levels for the sake of a global mission, and we understand the suffering this brought upon all parties. That mission is completed and we do not need to turn it into a church system.

We need to go where Rev. Moon started, the local church, teach the Divine Principle and turn *charism* into care-ism. The ethic of filial piety works where there is proximity, constant encounter and accountability, and that's in the local church. It makes pastors accountable to their people more than to a bishop or national office. In fact, *the entire point of the local church is to inculcate authentic love and public accountability*—values lost in the episcopal system. The congregational polity offers the best environment for vertical relationships. After all, “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.” (1 John 4:20)

Addressing an Alternative

There are two churches that are growing with a vertical model. They are the Latter Day Saints and the Jehovah's Witnesses. Now, why should not the Unification Church adopt a vertical model like theirs? This begs further discussion, but is apropos to this essay and I will address it briefly.

First I will briefly describe their model. They strongly promote evangelism. Witnessing is normative for all members. They have a witnessing system and excellent evangelical and educational material provided by the central office, uniform throughout the world. Their worship services are standardized. Local and regional leadership and ministry is voluntary. Advancement in the hierarchy is by appointment. The Witnesses cover living expenses of full-time church workers unless or until they have children. They are family-friendly and teach a high standard of morality.

What's good about this model is what they share with the churches I have described: the culture of evangelism, excellent evangelical material, lay ownership, all ministry by volunteers, family friendliness and high moral expectations.

What's wrong with it is “it majors in the minors.” The LDS and Witnesses are New Testament Christians. They consider themselves restorations of the early church community, from which the rest of Christianity deviated. They differentiate from other Christians not on the core Gospel but on what I would argue to be non-essentials. Thus after 150-200 years they remain separatists. This contradicts the Unificationist vision.

Over what do they separate? For the LDS it is the historical narrative in the book of Mormon, the hagiography surrounding Smith's discovery and translation of it, the sacraments and various revealed spiritual practices. For the Witnesses it is interpretations of particular passages of the Bible held with the conviction that any other interpretations are of the devil. Witnesses are not allowed to set foot on the property of other religions, including Christian churches. In both cases there is no salvation outside their organization.

The Unification Church could easily follow this path, but such would be a betrayal of Rev. Moon's vision. Yes, what I am saying, as one who calls for Unification Church evangelism, is that our message transcends our church. People should join the Unification Church, but one need not join the Unification Church in order to be saved. The salvation we offer is an in-breaking of God on the cosmic scale, comparable to that of Jesus Christ, for which every faith tradition is a preparation and which every faith community can house. The LDS and Witnesses are new wineskins for old wine. The Blessing is new wine and each tradition can create their new wineskin for it.

The Unification Church should not adopt LDS or Witness-style polity because it makes of us a restrictive denomination. We need to infuse the wine of all religions, knowing that the *eschaton* features the disappearance of all religions, including our own.^[37] Adopting an LDS-JW structure would suppress the multiplication of the Blessing to other faith communities, because it embeds the sacrament into the ecclesiological structure. We need a liberal ecclesiology to house the Blessing; even no ecclesiology beyond what is implicit in the Blessing itself. And that is what? It is a community of Blessed families with leadership equipped and empowered to minister the Blessing authentically.

Conclusion

If it intends to increase in size, the Unification Church should adopt a congregational polity and evangelical mission. To do so, the church should phase out its episcopal polity and delegate its non-evangelical missions to freestanding businesses or para-church organizations. This is the only way to grow the church. This is the only way to bring harmony of the world's religions. This is the only way to insure the everlasting unity of True Parents' body on earth and in heaven.

Notes

[1] The Divine Principle envisions that Christianity will divide between dying and rising segments, and history is bearing out the truth of this prophecy. See *Exposition of the Divine Principle* (New York: HSA-UWC, 1996), pp. 4-5, 98-9, 340.

[2] This I presented in “The Believer’s Responsibility,” available by request from the author, at thendricks@unification.org.

[3] From Article I, Articles of Incorporation of the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, filed September 18, 1961 with the State of California.

[4] *Exposition of the Divine Principle*, p. 328.

[5] Seoul, February 23, 2013

[6] users.ox.ac.uk/~rege0695/congregational.pdf

[7] www.diocesenyn.org/news_items/243-bishop-dietsche-s-installation-sermon

[8] www.umc.org/site/c.lwL4KnN1LtH/b.4443111/k.F4C8/Four_Areas_of_Focus.htm#.UT89B44sem1. In contrast, Saddleback Community Church’s website invites you to join a small group, listen to the pastor’s sermon, or read a testimony that begins: “Have you ever imagined what your life would be like if God gave you exactly everything you wanted? How happy you’d be? I don’t have to just imagine. It happened to me...”

[9] A personal aside: I thought my Presbyterian church in California was dead, but I didn’t know “dead” until 1978, when I entered an Anglican parish in London. It was on a par with Moscow hotel cuisine, 1990. From those experiences, I easily grasped the effect of the dementors in the Harry Potter saga.

[10] “Trends continue in church membership growth or decline, reports 2011 Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches” in “News from the National Council of Churches,” www.nccusa.org/news/110210yearbook2011.html, accessed May 16, 2013; Scott Thumma, “A Report on the 2010 National Profile of U.S. Nondenominational and Independent Churches,” Hartford Institute on Religion Research. www.hartfordinstitute.org/cong/nondenominational-churches-national-profile-2010.html, accessed May 16, 2013; “Adventist Church Reports Second Highest Growth Among Denominations in North America,” *Spectrum* (February 17, 2011), spectrummagazine.org/blog/2011/02/17/adventist-church-reports-second-highest-growth-among-denominations-north-america, accessed May 16, 2013.

[11] Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999), p. 116.

[12] George Gallup, Jr. and Jim Castelli, *The People’s Religion: American Faith in the 90s* (New York: MacMillan, 1989), p. 17.

[13] www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/pdf/2011-comparative-summaries-stats.pdf; confirmed in usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/religion/2011-02-16-church-growth_15_ST_N.htm

[14] Johnson, *A History of the American People*, pp. 968-69. For current Episcopalian statistics, see andromeda.rutgers.edu/~lcrew/ecusa_history.html.

[15] Jay Akasie, “Lessons in Church Governance: What Ails the Episcopalians,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 12, 2012.

[16] C. Kirk Hadaway, “Facts on Growth,” based on the “Faith Communities Today 2005,” and “Facts on Growth,” based on the “Faith Communities Today 2010,” both based on Hartford Seminary national surveys of 14,301 local churches, synagogues, parishes, temples and mosques. fact.hartsem.edu/products/index.html.

[17] “True Father’s Life Story: The Business of Restoration,” *Today’s World*, September 2011.

[18] Sun Myung Moon, *As a Peace Loving Global Citizen* (2009), p. 138.

[19] “True Father’s Life Story” describes the “enlightenment movement”: “members taught practical skills (often reading and writing hangul) to rural residents. Their work, according to church publicity, inspired the Park Chung-hee administration’s “*Sae Ma-ul*” (New Village) movement, which brought scientific improvements to rural Korea and served as a model globally for developing countries.

[20] Testimony of Rev. Sebastian Heumer, who joined in Austria, January 1972.

[21] Testimony of Rev. Alexey Saveliev, president of the Russian church, 2012. This growth came on the foundation of decades of underground evangelism.

[22] There is a modicum of double-counting members with failed blessings getting blessed a second time.

[23] In general they did not make profits and relied upon church subsidy. The ethos of most of these companies in the US, at least in the beginning stages, was Unificationist-insular. Therefore the church missionary cadre, a God-prepared population for church planting if there ever was one, was directed into non-church careers.

[24] In February, 2013, Mrs. Moon disestablished the *boon bong wang* position and called the Korean national messiahs to divest all assets and authority in their mission nation and return to Korea. A short time later she installed Cheon Il Guk Special Envoys to twenty nations.

[25] Author's personal document, "Dec prebless stats," dated Dec 29, 1997. Note that this was a campaign launched less than two weeks after the Blessing of 40 million couples centering on RFK Stadium, and during Christmas season!

[26] "There were 42 first Gen at the 2/17/13 Blessing. Five of them were matched to 2nd Gen. Several were re-Blessings." Blessed Family Ministry office, March 15, 2013.

[27] It's the irony of the cult within the cult, of which the Unification Church has had an abundance. By this I mean sub-groups possessing the mentality that they alone hold the key to God's providence.

[28] It is not completely reliable as a specific number of tithing members who attend church regularly, but the general trend is accurate.

[29] See "the hedgehog principle," in Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2001), pp. 90 ff.

[30] *Exposition of the Divine Principle*, pp. 146-47, 150-51.

[31] The "United Federation of Churches" was such an endeavor. Strangely, the Unificationist churches were not part of it.

[32] *Exposition of the Divine Principle*, p. 151.

[33] Moon, *As a Peace Loving Global Citizen*, p. 134 or 132, depending on edition.

[34] The English text reads, "Then what is the center of the blessed family? Who gives the Blessing? The parents do. Who officiates the marriage? Who should officiate the ceremony through which children can resemble their parents and inherit their parents' blood lineage marked by their parents' harmonious unity? The officiators are the parents."

[35] As European civilization became efficient, Rome projected parental power across Europe through multiple vertical levels. This vastly enriched and ultimately corrupted Rome. It was a corruption of the parent-child principle, denying the growing period and keeping the next generation in the position of children. If one is told that one is a child and is treated as a child, one will tend to behave as a child. Children do not care for properties. Children do not have children.

[36] *Exposition of the Divine Principle*, p. 233.

[37] Dr. Sebastian Matcak's remark given in a UTS class when I was a seminarian, that Protestantism dissolves into secularism, is apropos.