

Mainstream Unificationism

Michael L. Mickler
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Mainstream Unificationism upholds two core affirmations. First and foremost, it affirms Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Hak Ja Han Moon as the True Parents of Humankind. Second, it affirms the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity (HSA-UWC or Unification Church) and the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) as the authoritative institutional expressions of Unification faith.

These dual affirmations are central to Unification identity and tradition. They are the *sine qua non* of mainstream Unificationism. Denial of one or both of them places one outside the Unification mainstream.

For most of its history, few within the movement questioned these affirmations. Members varied in their understanding of True Parents. They also behaved differently depending on their cultural background. But mainstream Unificationists did not challenge True Parent's authority and did not seek to undermine Unification institutions.



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That is no longer the case.

Mainstream Unificationism is now under attack. The most strenuous and ongoing attacks have come from Rev. Moon's eldest and youngest living sons, both of whom at one time or another were considered likely successors. They have challenged True Parent's authority, even their identity, and attempted to supplant Unification institutions.

Discord of this sort is far from uncommon in religious traditions. Sometimes, challenges to authority overwhelm communities of faith, especially new ones, driving them to extinction. Other times, religious traditions withstand attacks and root out opponents, stigmatizing them as heretics or schismatics. Occasionally, religious traditions channel dissent and opposition into sharpened or expanded versions of faith. The intent of this article is to consider the structure, purposes and dynamics of mainstream religion as it pertains to religious traditions in general and Unificationism in particular.

Structure

Mainstream religion consists of vertical and horizontal components. Vertical elements include beliefs and teachings. They also include allegiance to persons or institutions believed to be carriers of a tradition's faith. Horizontal elements refer to a religious tradition's orientation toward the "world," i.e., the surrounding secular society. In a classic study, H. Richard Niebuhr argued that Christianity moves between the poles of Christ and culture, and identified five basic patterns of interaction — Christ against

Culture, Christ of Culture, Christ above Culture, Christ and Culture in Paradox, and Christ the Transformer of Culture.

Mainstream Unificationism, like religious mainstems in general, consists of vertical and horizontal components. Core teachings contained in a series of doctrinal texts express aspects of the “new truth” or “Principle” revealed through Rev. Moon. Alongside these, an oral tradition consisting mainly of Rev. Moon’s sermons and speeches, recently expanded to include Mother Moon’s words, is authoritative and understood to extend the doctrinal texts. Prior to his passing, Rev. Moon designated his “last words” to humankind in the form of “Eight Great Textbooks.” Mother Moon subsequently organized these into three Holy Scriptures.

Apart from texts and scriptures, mainstream Unificationists are committed to True Parents as the embodiment of Unification teaching. They also accept the authority or at least the legitimacy of institutions established by them as carriers of Unification faith: HSA-UWC, FFWPU and governing structures being formed according to the recently authorized Cheon Il Guk (“Heavenly”) Constitution. Taken together, these components comprise the vertical elements of mainstream Unificationism.

Horizontal elements are less easily identified. At different times and places, Unificationism manifests varied orientations toward the world. Some Unificationists embody Niebuhr’s Christ against Culture perspective, sealing themselves off from interaction with “fallen” society. Others seek to blend in, adopting a Christ of Culture orientation. Still others see human cultural expressions as needing to be completed or perfected by Unification teaching. They represent the Christ above Culture position. Some Unificationists live in tension with culture, simultaneously embracing and rejecting aspects of it. They exemplify the Christ and Culture in Paradox position.

All of these resonate with Unification experience. However, mainstream Unificationism’s orientation toward the world corresponds most closely with Niebuhr’s Christ, the Transformer of Culture. This position holds that True Parents are redeeming all creation. Therefore, Unificationists can and should work to transform culture. Mainstream Unificationism balances a total commitment to its messianic ideal with a complete commitment to the world.

Purposes

Mainstream religion has dual purposes, one positive and one negative. On the positive side, mainstream religion provides a framework of faith that functions to reinforce coherence and provide continuity over time. Within its overarching framework of faith, mainstream religion accommodates differences of opinion or interpretation so long as they don’t undermine core affirmations. On the negative side, mainstream religion filters out untenable positions and marginalizes persons who seek to undermine a tradition’s core affirmations. In the face of direct attack, religious mainstems commonly harden into orthodoxies. Religious orthodoxies are far less tolerant of deviance but also more difficult to sustain over time as their narrowness invites further division.

Mainstream Unificationism also has dual purposes. On the positive side, it provides a framework of faith that has sustained a diverse, international body of adherents. It does so by being uncompromising with respect to its core affirmations while accommodating a range of views as to their interpretation and application.

Unification Christology, for example, holds together varied opinions as to the ontological status of True Parents, i.e., the extent to which they embody humanity and/or divinity. Unification sacramental theology and theology of salvation accommodate differing views as to the literal or symbolic nature of “holy wine” and “change of blood lineage.” The Unification doctrine of creation has openings for creationist and evolutionist perspectives. Unification politics, specifically its “headwing” philosophy, has room for right-wing and left-wing ideologies as well as a spectrum of views on gender, ethnicity, race, the environment, capitalism/socialism, globalization, and other issues. Unification eschatology or vision of ultimate order accommodates different opinions as to democratic and theocratic governance. Unification institutions encompass centralized and local governance, i.e., “Supreme Councils” and “tribal messiahs.”

Simply stated, Unificationists, of good faith and standing, are free to advocate a variety of interpretations and applications of Unification teachings.

On the negative side, mainstream Unificationism filters out those who undermine its core affirmations. This includes individuals or groups who reject or otherwise seek to displace or supersede one or another of True Parents.

During the last years of Rev. Moon’s ministry, his eldest living son, Hyun Jin Moon, took to lecturing his father on the “needs of the providence,” rejected his authority, and led several break-away organizations. After Rev. Moon’s passing, his youngest son, Hyung Jin Moon, denounced Mother Moon as the “Whore of Babylon,” presented his wife as her replacement, and established a breakaway church. Both of them

reject HSA-UWC/FFWPU. Hyun Jin, who is avowedly anti-theological and anti-institutional, argued that Unificationism needs to get rid of its church-centered framework and re-configure itself as a global peace movement. Hyung Jin, who is intensely religious, charged that mainstream Unificationism is led by “predatory elites,” condemned the world’s “postmodern, humanistic, secular feminist ideology,” and configured his group as a warring sect.

In response to their positions, the mainstream movement did not demand assent to a restrictive orthodoxy. However, HSA-UWC/FFWPU stripped both sons of their positions, took legal action to recover assets or prevent unauthorized use of church symbols, and otherwise marginalized them as schismatics.



The Cheon Jeong Gung Peace Palace, Museum and Meeting Center in Korea

Dynamics

Religious mainstems can be dynamic or stagnant. During dynamic phases, religious mainstems are highly creative, adapting their core affirmations in novel ways to altered cultural and historical circumstances. In so doing, they extend their appeal to new constituencies, develop partnerships and avoid becoming insular. During stagnant periods, religious mainstems stand pat, holding on to certainties and failing to engage opportunities. Often, there is a “crisis of confidence” and religious traditions turn inward, seeking accommodation and carving out denominational niches within which they might self-perpetuate. In the end, mainstream religious expressions are superseded or absorbed by more comprehensive and dynamic syntheses of religion. This pattern might come to an end should humankind adhere to a common mainstream tradition. However, that prospect appears exceedingly distant.

Mainstream Unificationism has been dynamic and adaptive since inception, growing within 60 years into a global movement consisting of religious, cultural, educational, media, commercial and industrial enterprises worldwide. Unificationists embraced a pattern of heroic religiosity and the tradition took shape as a “world-transforming social movement.” At the same time, a pattern of conventional religiosity also emerged and within its first generation, Unificationism took on the trappings of an organized religion. However, this is a creative tension and propelled the tradition forward.

The current discord threatens to undo this dynamic and drive the movement as a whole, both the mainstream and its opponents, into a stagnant phase marked by mutual recriminations, entrenched positions, and preoccupation with survival.

To this point, mainstream Unificationism has resisted the tendency to turn inward, deemphasizing growth and conversion. Mother Moon discontinued some initiatives such as professional soccer tournaments and an automotive plant in North Korea. However, she did not back down from aspirations for growth and vitality, expressing her determination to “liberate all humanity and bring back all 6.5 billion people to Heaven.” She committed the movement to a seven-year course (2013-2020) intended to demonstrate tangible results on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Rev. Moon’s birthday

Conclusion

Unificationism aspires to be a universal tradition, liquidating sin, resolving the fundamental questions of life, unifying religion and science, uniting “into one absolute way all the existing religions as well as all the ‘isms’ and ideas which have existed since the beginning of human history,” and creating a world in which humanity forms “one big family under God.” Its core principle is that of unity (*tongil*). In Rev. Moon’s thought, the ideal of “two becoming one” (*Cheon Il Guk*) or “unification” is a dynamic process. Akin to the Hegelian dialectic, it is the creative principle of the universe and ruling dynamic of any tradition that seeks to be universal.

Unification schismatics, by definition, are divisive. Their intent is to undermine and finally destroy or

displace mainstream Unificationism with a new mainstream fashioned in their own image. To that end, they attempt to drive a wedge between the True Parents or between the True Parents and mainstream Unificationists, depicting one or another of them as defective or deviant. They also attempt to drive a wedge between Unificationists and mainstream Unification institutions, declaring them to be illegitimate or irredeemably corrupt.

Mainstream Unificationism's challenge is twofold: first, to determine whether its schismatics' grievances have substance, and second, to sharpen and enlarge, but not to abandon mainstream Unification faith.

Dr. Michael Mickler is Professor of Church History as well as Vice President for Administration at Unification Theological Seminary. His books include: Footprints of True Parents' Providence: The United States of America (2013) and 40 Years in America: An Intimate History of the Unification Movement, 1959-1999 (2000).