

Are UTS Graduates Able to Engage Theologically With Christian Ministers?

Robert Duffy
June 8, 2020



In taking online courses offered by Unification Theological Seminary in the past nine months, my amazement at the theological power of the Divine Principle has been renewed.

In the early 1970s, I was a DP lecturer at the International Training Center at the Belvedere Estate, north of New York City, and had the privilege to lecture many of the state leaders and others who went on to become international foreign missionaries in 1975.

At that time, under Rev. Sun Myung Moon's personal direction, we lectured the DP almost verbatim, but from memory, not from notes, and the most important feature of our lectures was indeed the emotional and intellectual balance in our presentations, much like exists in the DP itself. Passion and logic were close friends in those lectures.



Robert Duffy

Is UTS turning out theologically-trained pastors and ministers of the Word who are able to engage with their Episcopal, Methodist and Roman Catholic counterparts in an informed and cogent way? Are there any Doctors of Theology or of the History of Christian Thought in our camp who can lead the way in helping to bridge the current chasm between mainstream Christianity and Unificationism? Is there a possibility of reviving the incredible excitement generated in an earlier period when UTS hosted theological conferences that challenged and inspired theological discourse in the time after the "Death of God"?

As I see it, our principal issue as Unificationists with regard to our Christian friends is that we don't know how to adequately respond to the centrally-held tenets of Christianity:

- One is stated in the Nicene Creed, specifically that the Son of God was begotten before the Creation, and is part of the Godhead, i.e., the Trinity.
- A second core belief, that God made the Creation from nothing (*ex nihilo*), a doctrine that first appeared in the second century and can best be explained as a defense of the most controversial part of the Christian kerygma, the resurrection of the dead, is a widely-held belief which Unification ontology speaks to, and should be addressed in Unification-Christian dialogue.
- A logical conclusion of the above tenets is the implication that the plan of God before all Creation was to build a corruptible creation around a corruptible humanity that would require the salvific power of the Son whom God would insert into history at some point to redeem us.

While there are a variety of theologies that allow for either a passible or impassible God, these core notions are central to classic Christianity, and are directly repudiated in the Divine Principle. The theory of a God who has, from before creation, planned the insertion of his Son into history to save us from sin presents a problem of the predestination of God, of the freedom of the human will, of the factor of human responsibility as well of God's purpose for his creation. Luther, Calvin and others have proposed that God has indeed predestined some sinners to salvation and some not, from the foundations of the world. From this we can legitimately ask our Christian friends the question, "What kind of God is God?" And "What is God's purpose of creation?"

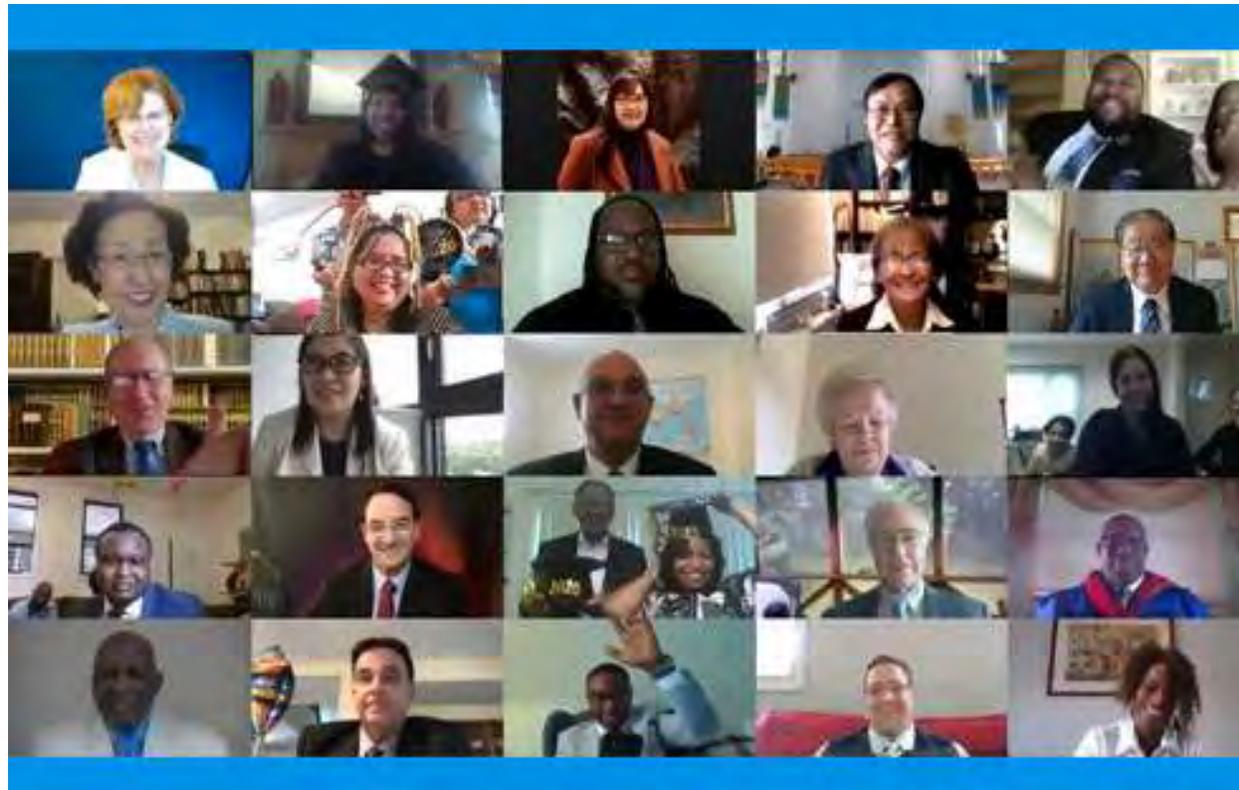
There are, in fact, two audiences for our theological reflection -- Unificationists and non-Unificationists. To effectively engage their mainstream Christian counterparts, Unificationists might wish to sharpen their theological skills to include the basics of early church history, theological development in the primitive church, and the councils which produced the main theological content of what was to become classic Christian theology. Also useful would be the study of the non-static history of Christian thought to the present day to evaluate its evolutionary trajectory.

For mainstream Christians, we should be thinking of presenting opportunities to explore Nicene Christianity as well as historical theological trends for their relevance today. Most mainline Christian ministers have had seminary training and are familiar with a range of theological ideas and history. After establishing friendship, we might propose a series of seminars for clergy from a wide variety of

denominational perspectives in which topics are discussed with a view to enlivening a theological discourse to common ends.

We must strive to make common cause with our Christian brethren. And herein lie the horns of the dilemma: we are challenging, with our own theology, the very foundations of historical Christianity.

I



Unification Theological Seminary's 44th annual commencement on May 22, 2020 was the first to be conducted virtually due to COVID-19. Above are some of the participating graduates, faculty and board members.

In this we have no choice, but we should realize how shocking it is. In spite of this, we cannot continue, with our Christian friends, to bury our theology behind appeals to good works or to peacemaking. It cannot be submerged in "feel-good" programs in which, though we cooperate with them, we remain mere friends, or at best, distant cousins. We must begin the painful but rewarding process of developing our theological output to include well-researched, but non-confrontational, occasions where our theologies can be explored in a nuanced way to reveal similarities and differences. After all, Christians are our natural allies in attempting to raise awareness of our Heavenly Parent in the secular world.

If indeed we turn our attention to the great spiritual hunger and need for spiritual renewal in the world, and ask ourselves what role intellectual work, and specifically theological work, might play in that renewal, we are likely to conclude that our seminary could play an important role in once again revitalizing theological discourse, as it did in an earlier period.

In imagining a vital discourse, it might be useful to work on two levels -- the hard-core theological stream where seasoned academics gather with our theologians to trade notes and ideas around a common theme, and a theologically lighter approach for ordained ministers and pastors who, with our own pastors, would benefit from a refresher in not only their own denominational theology, but in practical subjects like church management. Exposure to other theological perspectives may broaden their outlooks and bring greater maturity to their ministry.

In this effort, I am not suggesting that we should develop in any way as a denominational movement, but rather that our theology should, and I believe does, introduce ideas which can bring a fresh outlook to an existing theological framework, and through it, make creative openings for Christian theologians and ministers to work with us in the pursuit of common goals in the physical environment.

As to the subject of the only-begotten daughter, it is a great challenge to theologically-trained Christian clergy and academics. However, those with whom we have developed a friendship should be able to engage with us in fruitful theological discussion arising from that challenge. I believe it is vital that we pursue theological acuity, not only of the only-begotten daughter, since that is True Mother's chosen title, but of all theological topics which the Divine Principle touches.

In fact, it could be said that the controversy surrounding the title "Only-Begotten Daughter" itself is an indication that our theological understanding is limited. One UTS course, though not perfect, goes a

considerable way to exposing some of the dimensions of a theology of the feminine in divine providence. I suggest that the masculine-feminine dual characteristics have yet to be fully explored in Unification Thought.

And, as a corollary, the expression of Divine Principle ontology organizationally in the Unification Movement is something yet to be realized. I'm thinking of *couple leadership* for example. True Parents are our model for organizational as well as spiritual leadership. Is our organizational structure leaning toward that model, or is it caught in the current worldly model of corporate governance? This is something worth pondering.

In primitive Christianity, much theological debate characterized the first three centuries after Jesus' death. The theological debate subsided when the then-current political power, i.e., the Emperor Constantine, weighed in on the essentials of the faith. Having unresolved theological issues can produce unfortunate results down the road, it seems. We should spend more effort on fleshing out, if not settling, our theological roadmap before the passing of True Mother, so that future leaders are clear as to how the first generation of True Parents' disciples understood their essential message.

It may be that practical considerations don't allow for extensive theological training, such as a lack of students interested in theology, or demographic, financial or other issues. That would be sad. On the other hand, I believe Heavenly Parent wants nothing more than to claim our Christian brothers and sisters who have the highest level of preparation to receive the Divine Principle and subsequent revelation.

Unification Theological Seminary has a unique and proud history in bringing new theological insights and enterprises to the fore. It can once again become that nexus of spiritual excitement if we can meet our Christian counterparts on a more equal level than in the past.

An unthinkable alternative would be a future world in which the loss of the seminary, an uneducated Unification clergy, and an inability to relate with our Christian counterparts had left the Divine Principle, True Parents' signature doctrinal work, as well as their vast repository of sermons and speeches, in the hands of parties with no firsthand experience with the True Parents, to be analysed, interpreted and ultimately promulgated. This is not to suggest that important theological work on aspects of Unificationism has not already been done both under UTS auspices and beyond.

However, there remain many theological stones to be turned, a treasure trove to be uncovered. Leaving this work for future generations could work out, as it did for Pauline Christianity, resulting in a Unificationism somewhat parallel to Nicene Christianity, cobbled together as it was under competing theological interpretations. But what a shame if we direct disciples of the True Parents are not able to give the world of the future a firsthand account of our understanding of the theology of the greatest historic figures of all time.

Born in Ontario, Canada, Robert Duffy joined the Unification Movement while travelling in the United Kingdom in 1968. After pursuing a degree in economics and literature, he joined the Unification International Training Center in Tarrytown, New York, as a trainee, then as lecturer, before being appointed national leader of Canada at age 25. Missionary work followed in Ireland. He and his wife, Johanna, have five children and one grandchild. He holds a number of directorships within the Unification Movement and elsewhere, and was appointed Secretary-General of UPF Canada in 2017.