

Leading America Back to the Center

John Redmond
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After the recent election cycle, America has become more and more polarized. This is destructive to national and social harmony and, at its worst, a prelude to national collapse.

Historically, other nations that have reached this level of conflict and verbal invective have descended into partisan bickering, self-absorption and global irrelevance. On other occasions, they have moved past the argument, re-located

common ground and moved forward. The British debate over slavery was a division that healed successfully but the American Civil War left scars still felt today.

National challenges are to be expected in the growth of a nation. How that nation responds depends on whether it rises or falls. According to historian Arnold Toynbee, most civilizations thrive when they are inspired by a creative minority of their citizens, visionary, educated and engaged. They fail when this leadership group becomes defeatist or mired in conflict or despair.



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This is good news for Unificationists who regard development coming through Origin-Division-Union action and see that they are themselves part of the constructive creative minority. With Toynbee's lens, this deep polarization is a challenge that can be overcome only if the creative minority steps up and meets that challenge with constructive responses.

This breakdown in civic discourse is driven in part by the change in how Americans currently get information they think they can trust -- through the Internet. In the Netflix documentary "[The Social Dilemma](#)," computer scientists discuss how search engines never send a balanced set of results for a search request or news feed; rather, they send information based on one's browsing profile.

Two people sitting side-by-side can type in the same search term and get completely different links to pursue based on their past browsing history and economic situation. Additionally, search engine companies get paid by how long you linger over an article or link, so it is in their best interests to send provocative articles and create an emotional tie to information to give advertisers a few more seconds to catch your eye.

It is ironic Americans are more educated than at any time in history with information literally at their fingertips and yet cannot understand how to find common ground with people who disagree with their political opinions. This is true of both right and left partisans.

It's often been said that politics is a contact sport. However, in the Internet environment, harsh rhetoric rather than reasoned argument has dominated and mob action has "de-platformed" not just extreme or hateful points of view, but any view that disagrees with the demagogues of the crowd. Additionally, caricature, demonization and conspiracy theories have dominated the political dialogue. Many people on both the left and right are unable to articulate the sincerely held views of their political opponents, a necessary precursor to any fruitful discussion or larger agreement.

In the 1700s, debating societies emerged in London as an outgrowth of the Enlightenment. The assumption was that a free exchange of ideas would illuminate the underlying truth of a situation and allow good individual and collective decisions to be made.

A contrasting form of discussion is polemics. This is a type of argument that is one-sided, contentious and intended to overwhelm the listener with facts, force of argument or emotional appeal. It does not seek to find a common ground or underlying truth, but to destroy the credibility of the opposing point of view. Socrates was a victim of polemics when convicted of impiety by the Athenian court. He chose death and martyrdom rather than recant his politically incorrect views.

With the rise of Post-Modernism and a "post-truth" intellectual environment, American public discourse has shifted away from the search for truth through debate and toward the polemical marshaling of facts and words to win by demonizing opponents rather than by establishing a higher understanding. This is a bigger problem for our country than closed-mindedness, where a person is unwilling to listen to another position, because the information he or she receives is channeled to biases and a person may be ignorant

there could be another set of viable ideas based on different assumptions.

This is not only embarrassing for intelligent and thoughtful Americans, but dangerous for the American republic. James Madison thought factions and demagogues could destroy a democracy because they could be mobilized on partial information, fear and anger and be driven to hasty and destructive actions -- think of a lynch mob in Westerns. A second way democracies die is suicide by self-indulgence, voting themselves benefits and luxuries, avoiding hard choices and being very surprised when a hungry neighbor dominates them.

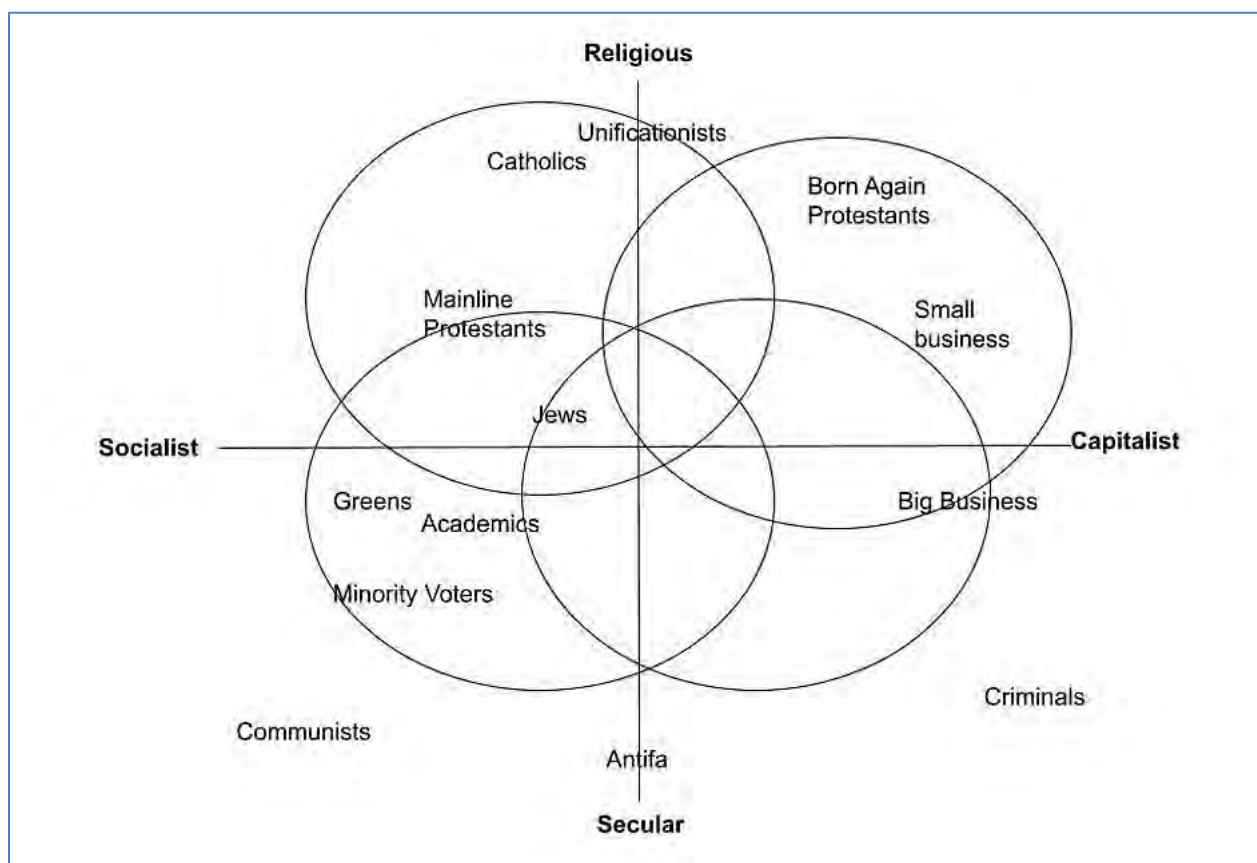
How do we pull back from this frenzy of middle school lunch room behavior? Reverend Moon often spoke about the need for Unificationists to define themselves not as "left wing" or "right wing" but with the awkward term "head wing" -- being above the political tug of war with a larger, more nuanced view.

This is still the aspiration of most thoughtful Unificationists, but that concept has remained undeveloped. I propose a framework to define Headwing common ground.

In its 1994 report, "The People the Press and Politics: The New Political Landscape," the Pew Research Center reported two major axes around which American political factions actually coalesced. One axis is the traditional left/right economic axis of free enterprise/capitalism to the right and socialism with central economic control to the left. This report also identified groups of voters who fit on a values axis with religious and secular values on the Y axis. Values voters include Catholic and Christian voters who vote on moral issues based on religion and on the opposite end of the axis, secular voters who see religion as superstition and people as only biological organisms or consumers. They favor a fact- and science-based approach to social and personal values.

This values axis could also be called an ontology axis. People who believe in an eternal life or consciousness where free will impacts the quality of that life often support policy decisions that are significantly different than their more materialistic counterparts. The lower quadrant of the values are voters who primarily value materialistic reality and think that political policies ought to be crafted to fit the immediate needs of the physical world and the measurable, relatively short term (± 100 years) benefits to individuals and society.

I created this chart of the voting population to get a more nuanced view of the electorate and see some opportunities for Unificationists to steer the national conversation in a more constructive direction. It can be argued that since Unificationists are very comfortable with science, they should be placed toward the middle of the vertical axis, but since Unificationists tend to structure their public programs with spiritual conditions first, their action priority is toward the top end of the axis.



Also, there are two similar recent surveys, from Beliefnet and Real Clear Politics, that support the idea of a complex electorate generally divided along the axes above.

I added a Venn diagram of political interests where one can find tremendous overlap among all the voting groups with a lot of common ground between them. Unificationists are firmly above the line, in that we define human life as primarily spiritual, with non-scientific values like true love and filial piety having priority. We stipulate the existence of an *a priori* First Cause that has embedded a set of values in human consciousness that must be considered in politics and social behavior. Secular believers think humans are primarily biological and material and therefore vote for social policy that is practical and efficient, and short-term rather than idealistic and multi-generational.

On the right/left scale, many religious people are divided between the religious values of compassion and responsibility. Believers who feel compassion is a primary value tend to vote Democratic and those who feel free will and personal responsibility are important vote Republican. Unificationists tend to see this political tension as a reflection of masculine and feminine characteristics.

In a family, the father often pushes for excellence and effort, while mothers are seen as more supportive and understanding. All children and citizens need both aspects of that support and so it is reasonable that those values be reflected in the political debate nationally.

On the left/right scale for secular believers, there is tension between capitalists who believe in free will and choice and end up on the right side of the scale, and Reductive Materialists on the left, who reduce all human behavior to the physical and psychological and think society ought to be managed by scientists the way a park ranger manages a deer herd.

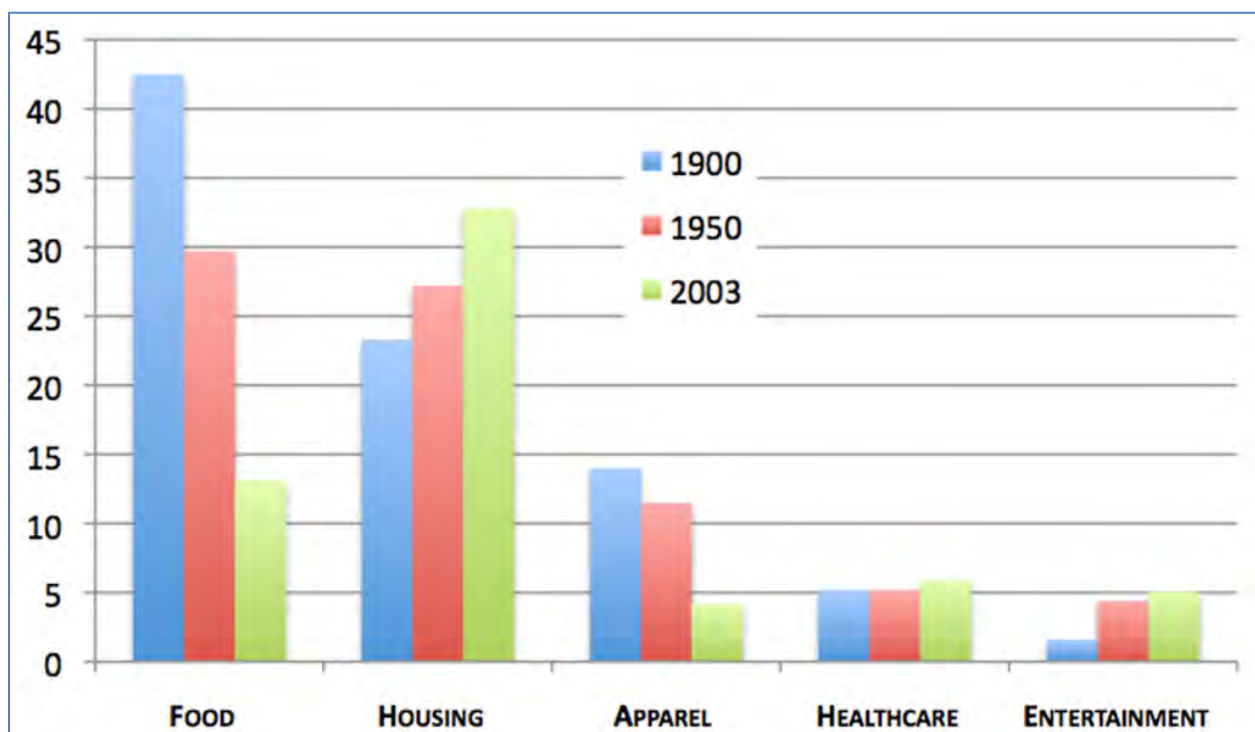
The American Unificationist responsibility is to clarify, identify and promote the truths that will overcome the divisions based on Unification Thought and to reunite America centered on God's will. This will involve developing social policy that is compassionate and balancing those policies with others that require citizens to progress toward responsible, constructive, spiritually fulfilled lives.

What then should be our strategy to heal this rift and inspire America back to its divinely-ordained responsibility to lead the world towards Chun Il Guk?

Balancing 'Mom' and 'Dad'

One way to relax the tension in political discourse is to loosen the purse strings. Globally, the 1990s were a brilliant vindication of capitalism, and governments worldwide now have plenty of money to invest in the poorest of their citizens.

Below is a graph of the relative costs of food, clothing and shelter over the last 100 years:



Share of family spending per category over the 20th century (Source: [The Atlantic](#), April 5, 2012)

Education, housing and entertainment have risen in absolute terms, but the real cost of the fundamentals have decreased over time. Since 2003, we have experienced a revolution in robotics and genetic engineering, both of which will lower the cost of food, clothing and shelter globally to nominal percentages of every citizen's budget. Hans Rosling, a doctor and statistician, outlined the tremendous worldwide growth in prosperity over the last 40 years.

From a Unification point of view, the ancient goal of a prosperous world free of hunger and disease has never been more achievable. In an ideal world of material plenty, filled with conscientious people, every citizen would have security, food, clothing, healthcare, and education given to them as a child of God. Their portion of responsibility would be to multiply the blessings they have been given to increase a world of truth, beauty and love. In practice, many individuals and cultures are at the formation or growth stage, and use their blessings to exploit and abuse their fellow humans and themselves.

This newly-created global wealth is a great opportunity for Unificationists to lead the discussion on how that wealth should be applied to a society that leads toward a spiritually healthy outcome. This will create an opening for constructive discussions on education, healthcare and housing.

The place where we can separate toxic political discussions into right and wrong is on the vertical axis. Government policies that treat people as less than human and discard their free will, divine character and moral obligations should be opposed. This is true whether the initiative is from a large corporation that wants to limit consumer rights, or a political organization that wants to limit free speech or religion.

Historically, selfishness exhibited by warlords, knights or kings created societies full of petty wars and conflict causing untold misery. As societies have evolved, National Socialism, which defines human value by race, and Communism, which defines human value by economic class historically have caused the most suffering. Modern democracies assume that people will act responsibly if given the freedom.

Today, the danger comes from Reductive Materialists. In their understanding of life, they try to reduce every understanding to a scientific one and minimize spiritual experience and intuition. This is certainly understandable since the last 400 years have seen incredible scientific and intellectual progress. Modern science, when experienced by primitive cultures, is as impactful as the miracles of the Old Testament.

On the other hand, religious understanding and activity is often mired in confusing theology, poorly translated texts and historical practice that no longer applies to modern humanity. It is no wonder humans have more faith in the hypothesis about life and value put forward by scientists instead of theologians.

With Unificationists' ability to appreciate both science and religion, we are uniquely positioned to temper cold science-based social policy with the spirit of family. Sometimes it is better to let a person fail at something even though it is more efficient to force them to comply with a government direction. The balance of freedom and responsibility is the essence of the human experience and should not be negated by government regulation, no matter how well-intentioned.

Unificationist efforts to persuade Americans to take up their God-given providential responsibility should center around this understanding. It is not useful to label most Democrats as communists or most Republicans as fascists. A much more nuanced set of understandings needs to emerge as we advance in the 21st century.

In order to move the conversation forward, it is important for Unificationists to make a common base with the constructive elements of both left and right wing thinkers. The compassion Democrats and the responsibility Republicans are seeking the same goal, self-actualized moral citizens. The consumer Republicans and the race-based Democrats are seeking to define humans by their current weaknesses and keep them there.

What are some pragmatic steps Unificationists can take to move the national dialog to a place more favorable to Parentism?

Separate the compassion Democrats from the Reductive Materialists

1. End the marriage penalty in welfare and social support programs. While most programs no longer prevent married people from receiving benefits, social policy should be reversed to favor married couples who are responsible citizens. This will encourage couples to work through their differences and protect children from the well-documented tragedy of single parent families.
2. Focus on Dr. King's message of the "content of their character" rather than the "color of their skin." Most people instinctively see this as a noble goal and it will separate us from those who see "race guilt" as an unchangeable birth defect. Support Rev. Moon's goal of cultural and racial intermarriage as the most hopeful social policy.
3. Argue for the balance between appropriate levels of free will and responsibility and compassion and support. As in a family, irresponsible family members should be challenged and struggling members supported, both emotionally and financially. The same is true for public and government programs.

Keep the capitalists off the moral high ground but listen to them

1. While capitalists at least respect free will, they occasionally forget to be compassionate and treat their customers and employees with respect. Amazon's warehouse workers are a good example of techno-slaves who can be dehumanized in the pursuit of profit.
2. Pay as you go. It is tempting to "run up the credit card" to be nice to people. This can cripple an individual or family and definitely destroy a nation. Venezuela used to be the richest country in South America and now is a socialist hell where kidnapping for ransom is a growth industry.
3. Business is good at recognizing merit. People who are successful at business are useful allies in spiritual matters because they can provide practical and effective ways to communicate and manage the actual work of "selling" the Unificationist ideal.

It is critical we participate in the battle for constructive political dialogue, policy and investment. We need to do it in a way that is informed by the higher perspective of Unification Thought, unencumbered by the biases of history and popular culture. It will not be enough to set spiritual conditions and wait for a miracle. Serious Unificationists need to use the science, economics, business, communications, and politics available to them to shape the world the way we want it to be.

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. He has high expectations for the American Unification movement.