

## **Reflections on the Unification Movement (UM)**

(by Terry Sweeney, UK)

At the recent Saturday discussion forum – hosted by David Rosenblum - on July 13, 2024, at which Thomas Cromwell attended, one person levelled some criticism against him that his four-page essay was ‘much more about the intellect than about the heart’, or some such words. This comment kind of summed up my experience within the UM over the past 48 years, when it comes to free speech. Whenever there was a discussion in which critical thinking was attempted, such as questioning the wisdom of a particular strategy or aspect of DP theology, a conversation-stopper such as the above was inserted.

One might put up with this ‘no-questioning’ mantra forty years ago because we were all united around a common purpose, centred on Father’s directions to us. Now, in our more advanced years, one might need to reflect on a lot of things in the light of what has been transpiring over the past decade or two. Chief among this is the appearance of a Catholic vs. Protestant divide within our movement, and I’ll go into more detail on this later.

For over a year, I’ve been attending David’s fortnightly forum and sometimes staying up to four hours. It’s a mark of his hosting abilities to get everyone engaged and principally to allow for a free exchange of views to emerge. In other FF forums, such free speech seems in short supply. Usually, it’s about 20 people attending but for Thomas Cromwell’s presentation it seemed close to triple that. Likely, this was out of respect for the man and for his writings, and particularly his impactful essay that was circulated a week before.

Back in the day, I remember well the name ‘Thomas Cromwell’ (not his namesake, Oliver Cromwell, who was the scourge of my Irish ancestors nearly 400 years ago!). Within the UM, he was seen as a big UM player in the Middle East and who set up the Middle East Times. In the 1970s, I looked up to my western elder brothers in the movement. They were great pioneers from those earlier days and seemed to be achieving great things. Mike Marshall was another such person and when I heard he was with Preston then recently I’ve been looking into what the FPA and GPF were up to. I saw the headline accusations against Preston down through the years but considered there was more to this than meets the eye.

I have little or no skin in the game in terms of who has the ‘correct’ theology. As long as we have God-given powers of mental reasoning and critical thinking then we’re bound to fall out over our theological interpretation (let alone our politics). My primary loyalty is to Father Moon and to his understanding of the unconditional parental love of the Divine. That was what I joined up to 48 years ago.

An overriding difference between back then and now is that when we focused on the world’s needs then we tended to set aside our differences. However, when we focus on our internal needs, then we tend to clash. Father has been in spirit world for 12 years and his absence has been similar to the loss of my own physical father. When Mother Moon passes, it will be a similar loss as with my physical mother. I will remain loyal to both as my spiritual parents and feel strong bonds between them and my own parents.

Back in the day, we all had confidence that Father would be globally recognised as the Lord of the Second Advent – in his own lifetime and before the millennium had finished. The optimism of youth has perhaps given way to a cynicism of these more advanced years. Nevertheless, we are, for the most part, the ‘wise old owls’ where the more we see then the less we speak, and the less we speak then the more we see. Trying to make sense of things before we shed our mortal coil in the not too distant future.

Into a spirit world of uncertain outcome. Did we back the right horse within the True Family? At the pearly gates, will St Peter be there to welcome us in through the main entrance – or point us around to the side-door where above it reads ‘Re-Education Center’? Personally, I would wish for Father and Mother Moon to be at the main entrance, with my parents standing alongside them, and welcoming me in. Sitting in a coffee shop with True Parents is to me no different to sitting there with my own parents. Each extol the ‘Face of God’, just as we are to our children.

I’ve now read Thomas’s open letter three times, with each time giving something extra to reflect on. Yes, I can intellectually agree with most of its content, but what does my heart say? Too often, God ‘works in mysterious ways’ and perhaps we can get caught off-guard by where the Providence might be going. Did God not endow each of us with powers of reasoning and reflection, and alongside our emotional responses, further endow us with a conscience?

When Father said we need strong ‘heart, intellect and will’ in doing our missions, was he not also referring to how we should respond to his teachings? Why else would he set up Unification Theological Seminary (UTS) and expose his young followers to world faith beliefs and to the range of alternative interpretations out there? The opposite is to be ‘spineless, clueless and lazy’ and that is something to always guard against. Forty years ago, I knew well what to say to the guy on the street when witnessing – but now? Why has witnessing virtually collapsed over the past forty years? Except for Chapter 1’s Principles of Creation, what other compelling messages can we give?

There are times when I wonder if God can work with what appears to be a self-serving organization with sometimes bad strategies. And there are times when I would feel compassion for hard-pressed and under-resourced members trying to answer Father’s increasing demands. He came like a typhoon or force of nature into the world and shook things upside down and now we are the remnants left in its wake. Even now, if I might sometimes struggle with the Christian concept of ‘Messiah’, I still see him as a great anointed man of God, and one that history will be kinder to than at present. As a man, I might feel a natural inclination to look to Father as my role model, just as perhaps it might be for a female UM member to look to Mother in the same way. However, should this mean divided loyalties according to our gender?

I find the dynamics of faith groups interesting to observe. Many are run in patriarchal ways but the backbone of these groups tends to come from women more than men. If we examine the past 50 years of the UM, it tends to be men in positions of authority but often it is the women who did a lot, perhaps most, of the heavy lifting. This is why the Catholic Church has been so successful since it began, despite the Reformation and the many thousands of different Protestant faiths. Very few Catholics join such faiths, for the most part, because Protestants tend to place higher demands on adherence. Catholics

rarely have a Bible in their home, or at least one that they open up. It's a low-demand faith where if you're born a Catholic then you stay a Catholic for the rest of your life, even if in adulthood you rarely attend Mass or take Confession. They got their catechism at school and that was enough. As an Irish-born Catholic, I know how this works. It is the mother venerating not just Jesus but also Mother Mary that makes this work.

The Catholic church's main messaging is for mothers to be like Mother Mary and to build safe, secure, and God-loving homes for children. It was my mother who made sure all her six children went to Sunday Mass, with my father sometimes dragging his feet behind. It was a family-centred communal experience down through the centuries – and that's what makes simple messaging work. Nothing complicated like you'd get in Protestant faith beliefs, with their Bible-reading and intellectualizing. The Catholic church works more on emotion, and this is why I see the same dynamic happening now within the UM.

Father's theology seemed very much of the Protestant variety whereas Mother's Only Begotten Daughter (OBD) theology seems very much of the Catholic direction of travel, complete with its own Vatican in Korea. One could say neither are wrong – they're just two different types of seeking communion with God. Protestants will say the Catholic belief is too shallow in foundation and relies too much on emotion and matriarchal instincts. The Catholics might respond that the Protestants are too caught up in themselves, too intellectual, and too patriarchal. On the other hand, if Mother Moon's messaging is that it's time to tip the balance in favour of this new 'Age of Women', I don't see it much in evidence where those surrounding her and leading the movement are – up to this point in time - men in suits.

So, what's to become of this 'One True Faith' that we supposedly have or had? Is Mother's OBD declaration a Reformation in reverse, and a return back to simple Catholic-like messaging? We may not see it as much while she's alive but I suspect it will turn out that way over coming centuries. Recently, she was in South America and calling for outreach to the predominant Catholic populations there. Catholics are big into OBS (Only Begotten Son) symbolism and there may well be some traction with OBD, who knows. If that fails, there may be traction in the Pacific Rim areas where 'goddess' imagery is ingrained. The story-telling and myths will come later because simple people like such things, rather than reading endless theological books. However, if all this means we get a better world than at present, then who am I to criticize?

If these were two separate people, then you just make your choice according to your conscience and instincts. The challenge for us is that these different faith beliefs are coming from the same married couple. To compound matters, you also have two sons (Preston/a.k.a. H1 and Sean/a.k.a. H2) claiming they are the rightful inheritors of their Father's legacy. Who needs to see Korean historical dramas on Netflix when you have a live show unfolding here? The fact of the matter is that the UM in its current iteration seems on shaky ground, no matter which horse you bet on.

However, we FGs (First Gens) in our late 60s and 70s don't really matter much to how things are playing out now. We may be seen by Headquarters as just old timers gathering under the village tree and reminiscing of the 'good old days'. After all, it is the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Gens that matter because they will have less ties to the old Moses figure that Father became. We have done our 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, never to reach the

Canaan land that our children and grandchildren are expected to enjoy. If only that were so it would be nice, but the world, it seems, is very much facing an existential crisis with talk of possible Armageddon-like wars on the horizon.

Much of our Christian lexicon is of human construction, created many years and centuries after Jesus. It's worth watching some of those early Christian history videos on You Tube to get a sense that the faith beliefs purported to be from Jesus, are anything but that. Even the concept of Only Begotten Son came centuries later. That's why I can't work out if the Korean elders surrounding Mother are theologically dumb or mischievous in intent. Frankly, I am not going to lose a lot of sleep over this. An important message from Mother is in emphasizing more the female characteristics within God, now renamed Heavenly Parent. The implications of a Heavenly Father and a Heavenly Mother are immense in my simple faith, and possibly for the world in learning about the Principles of Creation and how it can apply to the family. For that, I'll be forever grateful.

Within the UM, there is certainly a battle going on between the heart and intellect as well as this Catholic vs. Protestant divide. I might agree in heart with what Mother is saying but I see little intellectual merit or even theological basis for her claims. Anyway, I'll continue to have one foot in the FF camp and one foot in the Preston camp and hedge my bets on all this making more sense in the fullness of time. The fact that his guest speakers pay their own way and don't get honorariums, speaks volumes in my book.

Since Father's unexpected passing 12 years ago, a gap has opened up that seems to have been filled with a lot of questionable theology, both in the Family Fed camp and in the Preston and Sean camps. Surely 'True Parents' trumps all other spiritual titles? This can only be resolved with the True Family reuniting again and steering a clear course for the world, just as Father would have wished for. I sense his presence at times because he sees my motivation to reunite his family. Our whole message is about family and a reconciled family is a powerful message, after all. I remember the photo of Mother celebrating her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday last year, and surrounded by some of her children and grandchildren. How much more special would that be if all her children were present.

She said the 30+ lawsuits against Preston must stop a few years back but they still continued. These must run into tens, if not hundreds, of millions to enrich the lawyers at the expense of the reputation of the UM. This suggests she is not in control and is being put up as a figurehead leader, while the 'men in suits' set about their own agenda. I've done a fair bit of research and seen Preston achieve tremendous results. He saw businesses being run into the ground, whether by gross incompetence, mismanagement or private 'skimming' practices, and wanted to preserve these. These businesses have grown and his employees treated and paid better. He is his father's son in so many ways. He has tried reaching out to his mother but seems blocked by those around her. This reconciliation is what I most wish for, so he can clear the UM decks of any who have been self-serving and deviant to his father's message.

Finally, I am struck when hearing that Preston spends a whole month each year with his family of eight adult children. They go to the wilds of Montana and camp out and bond together. In hindsight, I wish Father and Mother Moon had done the same with their children back in the 1970s, as it would have ensured a lasting legacy united in love and purpose. Our goal now should be to reunite the True Family, whatever that takes.