

The Spirit of America

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In his speech this week on Capitol Hill, Reverend Sun Myung Moon emphasized to a group of United States congressmen and guests the significance of America in God's plan for world restoration. His central theme was:

"America's mission is abundantly clear. It is to fulfill the desire that God has had since the beginning, to make this world one world of God, a world in which His ideal will blossom.... Thus Christianity and the United States together are supposed to take on the respective positions of Judaism and Israel. By fulfilling God's expectation, America is going to consummate God's will and lead God's 6,000 years of biblical history to final victory."

In my sermon this morning I would like to share with you some reflections I have had since hearing Reverend Moon speak. In particular I would like to speak about the spirit of America in terms of the tradition or way of life that we are responsible to uphold as Christians of the Unification Church and as Americans.

Because America is predominantly a Christian nation, we must begin by understanding the situation of Jesus within his own nation of Israel 2,000 years ago. At that time, the Jewish religion had been prepared by God to provide the connection between the Messiah, Jesus, and the nation of Israel. If this connection had been made -- if the Jewish leaders had accepted Jesus -- the love of God found in Jesus could have provided the norm of life for the nation of Israel. Jesus could have set a new heavenly tradition for his people. The nation of Israel, by serving the Arab world and the Roman Empire, could have guided them to unification in heart.

Judaism and the Arabic lands represented the Eastern or Hebraic culture, while Rome was the leading Western or Hellenic power. The Eastern culture professed the importance of the inner life in relationship to the living God, while the Roman culture emphasized the beauty and richness of the outer life -- in relationship to nature, the intellect and the physical world. Although Rome was the most powerful nation ever to exist, it had one weakness -- a spiritual emptiness which undermined the richness of its material life. Philosophy and religion in the Roman Empire had degenerated by the time of Jesus, and there was no unified understanding which could bind Romans together in a community of love. Cynicism, political intrigue and a cosmopolitan disregard for religiosity characterized Rome. By the time of Jesus, Israel and the Arabs (blood relatives of the Jews) had endured tremendous deprivation and suffering.

Inhabiting a strategic geographic area, they were repeatedly conquered by stronger neighbors and were under Roman rule at the time of Jesus. For many Jews, their life of faith had been stretched to the breaking point because they had had to bear such an intense burden of suffering. Their deep desire was that God vindicate them through the defeat of their conquerors, and raise them up to the rich and prosperous life prophesied by Isaiah.

God's Strategy

Only Jesus understood deeply the strategy of God beneath the loneliness of Rome and the discontent of Israel. He understood that God had prepared East and West to complement each other. The depth of the

Hebraic relationship to God could provide Rome with the unified heart it lacked, while the high civilization of Rome, cleansed and directed by the heart of God in Jesus, could provide Israel with the promise God had held out for her. But for the unification of Hebraic and Hellenistic cultures to occur in accordance with God's plan, there first had to be a unification of heart between Rome and Israel.

For this to occur, Jesus knew, he had to teach his people God's way. Judaism and Israel had to unite with him, learning their mission in terms of God's principle. To understand this mission they needed Jesus' understanding of God and man and the universe, and to be able to fulfill this mission they needed Jesus' purity of love. These two, truth and love, would cohere in true action. Sacrificial leadership and service, expressing these eternal and universal realities of God, would provide the cement to connect God and man, East and West.

However, the love and truth which Jesus brought were spiritual, invisible realities, and 'could not become influential forces for change and unification unless they took concrete form in action. Jesus challenged Israel to "come follow me."

As we know, Jesus was not accepted by his people, and instead of the unification of this world in heart and culture, God set out to unite the world in faith through the spiritual Israel of Christianity. But the challenge and the responsibility of the nation of God remain, and must at some point be fulfilled. To follow Jesus a nation must discover his way of life, his tradition.

Word and Deed

Before I joined the Unification movement, I felt a kind of resentment in two directions. On the one hand, I felt resentment against Christianity because I noticed worship and piety always seemed divided from God-centered action in the world. I felt there was some hypocrisy in this. I could sympathize with the problem of not knowing precisely what kind of social action was truly Christian, but I could not sympathize with the tendency to reject the struggle to understand what that proper action was. I felt that worship and piety often became an excuse for Christians to avoid responsibility for the world.

I also felt a kind of resentment against my country. I saw that America had a number of great ideals which were clearly stated by politicians and community leaders. These ideals were practically worshipped by citizens, and yet the ideals were not directing the actual policies of the nation. Instead of a pursuit of ideals I witnessed the tendency to idealize our pursuits, whatever they may be, right or wrong.

This struggle to unite word and deed is a fundamental one for every person, church or nation that attempts to live according to ideals. When I tried to understand how this problem was dealt within the Unification Church, I discovered the word "tradition." For me tradition had meant something which ought to be discarded unless it has some practical purpose.

A Way of Life

I discovered that "tradition" in the Unification Church has a very special meaning, indicating a way of life centered on God. Mrs. Sang-Ik Choi, in a sermon at Barrytown, explained the meaning of tradition. The first aspect of living the heavenly way, she said, was a thorough rejection of the satanic way of life. Before we begin to establish norms regulating the life of the ideal community we have to eliminate evil out of our existing community.

The problem is to win victory over the divisive and God-denying elements within ourselves. Victory means that every element of our life is challenged to actively come forward on the side of God.

This clarified for me the problem of the relationship between piety and social responsibility.

I could understand that piety as well as social responsibility involved goal centered action and victorious accomplishment. True piety involves active repentance. Repentance is a continuous battle as we struggle to make our hearts pure before God and to have a clear purpose when we offer our lives to God in prayer.

Without this internal victory we have no foundation for representing God in the world. The humility and dedication which come from a pure piety are the cement which enables people to join together and achieve needed goals within their nation. Without this pure piety humanitarianism easily withers into empty rhetoric, or becomes vulnerable to invasion by false ideals.

Mrs. Choi also raised the question, where do I meet God? At what level can I connect with God? I was reminded of a young American soldier, a friend of mine who had been wounded in Vietnam. He told me of a time when he went swimming with his little boy and his son noticed the large ugly scar on his father's stomach, and asked his father about it. Why was it there? Did the wound hurt? My friend knew his son could never understand the depth of his experience in Vietnam, but he answered the boy's questions in a straightforward way, speaking of his reason for fighting, and the reason others were fighting against him.

He told his son that he loved America and American ideals. How could the young son understand his father's wound? How could he understand the love of country behind that wound? I thought of this when Mrs. Choi spoke. How much can we understand His wounds and the love that lies behind them?

Meeting God cannot come only from prayer or from empathy; it must come from our acceptance of His concern and a willingness to join battle with Him. We must be completely willing to suffer the same wounds in order to know the heart of our Father. This willingness must be steadfast, anxious above all to attain the same goals as God.

The Heavenly Tradition

If this is the heavenly tradition -- to win victory over evil by uniting mind and body, self and other, ourselves and God then how can we as Christians in the Unification Church understand the tradition and role of America in God's providence?

If America has the responsibility today of fulfilling the position of Israel at the time of Jesus, and Christianity must fulfill the role of Judaism at the time of Jesus, there must certainly be a thorough renewal of our nation and of our churches to reflect this tradition of God. Where can we look in America to find the foundation for such a tradition? In the sense of cultural forms or ways of behaving, America has no fixed tradition in the sense that European or even Oriental countries have developed particular ways of doing things. America's tradition lies in the deep, spiritual level of her Christian roots.

Throughout American history there has been a heavy emphasis upon the victory of righteousness and the desire to meet God on a deeper level. Although our country has not always fulfilled this purpose, this pattern is very real in America. The first Americans looked upon this land as God's new Israel, and they sought direction for their life in America by examining God's guidance of the first Israelites.

The Puritan fathers saw the Atlantic Ocean as the Red Sea which the Israelites crossed to escape Egypt. Later, the Revolutionary War was seen as a Red Sea of blood which the American people had to pass through in faith to reach the Promised Land of a Godly nation. The courage and determination of the early pioneers likewise reflected, in a more secular way, this undercurrent of religious idealism.

John Winthrop, first governor of Massachusetts, made a very clear statement about America and his sense of responsibility. The deep desire for victory, and the desire to meet God in a serious way permeates his statement:

"Wee shall finde that the God of Israeli is among us, when tenn of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies, when hee shall make us a prayse and glory, that men shall say of succeeding plantacions: the lord make it like that of New England: for wee must consider that wee shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eies of all people are uppon us; soe that if wee shall deale falsely with our god in this worke wee have undertaken and soe cause him to withdrawe his present help from us, wee shall shame the faces of many of gods worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into Curses upon us till wee be consumed out of the good land whither wee are goeing.... "

Pursuit of Victory

The pursuit of victory in the spirit of America is also reflected in the strong Christian revivalist spirit, which began in the early 1700s and has continued through different forms and periods in national life up to the present time.

The pursuit of perfectionism in the 1800s and the emphasis on the social gospel from the 1880s into the mid-twentieth century reflect deep conviction that the future will bring a victory through faith and determination. Since the second world war, however, America's determination to represent righteousness in a serious and determined way around the world has begun to flag. The power of the Christian churches has also declined since that time.

The question for us is, Where will America meet God today? How can her spirit of victory be renewed, and find its final goal deep in the heart of God?

As was the case with Judaism in Israel, the first step must be made by those who are representatives of the will of God. Just as Judaism should have been the connection between Jesus and the Israelite nation, Christianity today must be renewed to connect the heart of God with our way of life. As in the Roman Empire at the time of Jesus, there is a deep longing on the part of secular America to find deeper meaning behind material prosperity. Like Israel at the time of Jesus, Christians in America are struggling to find in their faith something more -- they yearn for fulfillment.

The renewal cannot come only in piety, nor can it come only in Christian activism. Church piety without responsible activism loses its life and relevance to the world, and Christian activism which is not anchored in an intense search for God on the internal level can easily absorb into its ideal secular values which finally take dominion over its religious content. The renewal must be a victory which can connect these two aspects of the life of faith into one continuous fabric of victorious tradition. This tradition must seek out God at a deeper level, and insist upon victory at each point where the search for God involves struggle.

A Rock-Solid Foundation

Guidelines for action come only on the other side of the struggle, as the fruit of victory. To set up principles of Christian action, bypassing the struggle of faith, is to set up a castle on the sands of an unrealistic idealism. Only by going through struggle and victory can we set up the castle of true God-centered idealism on the rock-solid foundation of the love of God.

America must renew her tradition of victory by uniting with her ideals at a deeper level of heart, relying on renewal in the churches. The American secular ideal focuses today on "humanitarianism." Waving the banner of humanitarianism many Americans cried out in horror against the tragedy of the Vietnam War, insisting that we extricate ourselves from it. The concern many had then for the Vietnamese people was real and intense, but it was vague and not deep enough. Instead we must draw the world into our own family of relations. In this way our concern for the world can become more intimate, more personal, more accessible to the love of God.

Because of our mistaken notion of humanitarianism in the Vietnam War many Americans had only a fairly shallow view of the needs of the Vietnamese people. Americans could not recognize that the true threat to Vietnamese life was not merely the tragedy of war, but more importantly the threat of Communism.

We could not see that the violence of Communism was an ideological repudiation of human dignity before God. We could not see this tragedy beneath the tragedy of war. By uniting with her ideals at a deeper level of heart, those ideals can then reveal to America more clearly the course she must take to serve the world.

Beyond the task of uniting with ideals at a deeper level of heart, America must unite these ideals with a more responsible view of national policy. One very misguided view of American responsibility current in America today suggests that for a nation to actively promote its own values within the world community means that that nation is inflicting itself immorally upon other nations, who have a right to whatever form of life they already have, however barbaric it may be. In this view America must isolate herself from the world because she has no right to impose herself upon other nations. Action itself is looked upon as an evil which is justified only in cases when our own national security is threatened.

Christians' Responsibility

The Christian view of moral responsibility on the national level must be renewed in the face of such a misguided sense of morality. In the Christian view, America is responsible not only for what evil she actively commits, but also for what results come from her non-intervention against evil forces. It is our responsibility to promote God's ideals as best we can throughout the world, otherwise other more sinister ideals will be foisted upon the world. We must either actively take responsibility for the present situation or peer responsibility later for the evil which we have not prevented. In either case we cannot avoid responsibility as a nation.

The challenge to America today is to revive its tradition of victory, to meet God at the deepest level. Victory begins with unity between ideal and practice. We must set as a clear goal the need to embody our ideals in our policies. We must recognize that to accomplish this will involve a struggle, and we must prepare for that struggle. We must meet God at the deepest level, making our ideals more intense, more concrete, more intimate. We must dedicate ourselves to the task of bearing the pain which is the necessary price for understanding and embodying those ideals.

If we go this way we can fulfill the role of the nation of Israel at the time of Jesus. Through the ideal of Christianity which God has planted in the American heart, God's true nation can begin in America. Through this course both the secular and religious elements of our nation can find new meaning and a new role in the world, and the nation *can be bound together* in one unified spirit. On the basis of this unity, our direction of service to the world should become clearer for America. As this direction becomes clearer, God's ability to use this nation for world restoration can be greatly increased. As word and deed come closer and closer in Church and in nation the relationship between God and the world can become deeper and deeper. Ultimately the relationship between God and man can begin to be restored at the world level, and God can find in America a base for His son at the time of the Second Coming.