

THE CHARACTER OF UNIFICATION THEOLOGY
AS A MODERN CHRISTIAN STATEMENT

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As I was coming into New York City today where I at one time drove in every morning to teach at a Roman Catholic School, I was reminded of the yearbook in which a caricature of me appeared. I was a man with a long chin, but what was most distinctive about me was that I was standing leaning against a Bible that was bigger than I was. That caricature truly characterizes me. I do believe the Bible is bigger than I am. It is the word of God, and it is that on which I lean and that in which I trust. I have been a student of the Bible all my life. I have grown up to love the Bible from childhood, and at the same time I am a graduate of Columbia University with a Ph.D. in Biblical studies which means that I have pursued the scientific approach to the study of the word of God.

As I read the Divine Principle and came into contact with the Unification Church over the period of a year, the thought occurred

to me that the formation and development of Unification Theology in the heart and mind of Reverend Sun Myung Moon signals the most radical, powerful and constructive force for the future of Biblical studies since the Protestant Reformation.

I say this because principal charges against Reverend Moon and the Unification Theology are that this new religious leader is not Christian, that the theology is not true to the word of God and that the members of Unification Church ignore the Bible. The truth is that the Unification movement is authentically Christian, so much so that it frightens people who like to be thought of as Christians but who know in their hearts that they really are not. The members of the Unification Church are as serious students of the Bible as I have ever encountered anywhere and are devoted servants of the Lord Jesus Christ.

From the time of the Protestant Reformation until now, two distinct trends of interpretation have emerged in Biblical studies. One is called the conservative view of scripture which considers scripture inspired, authoritative, and infallible and to be interpreted and understood literally. Taking its impetus from Luther and Calvin, and maintaining a bond with Roman Catholic interpreters, the list is long and impressive of those who make what may be called a "supernaturalistic interpretation" of the word of God.

An entirely different trend also had its origin in the Protestant Reformation. Sebastian Franck, who was a contemporary of Luther and Calvin, attempted to show that the Bible is full of discrepancies and contradictions when it is interpreted literally. From that time on until now there have been many theologians, philosophers and scientists who developed this kind of approach

to the word of God. It may be called "naturalistic interpretation."

There have been these divergent trends, neither of which has fully captivated the hearts of men and neither of which has brought the word of God in a stimulating fashion to the public in modern times.

When Unification Theology comes into contact with the extremes of supernaturalistic and naturalistic interpretation (and all the varieties in-between) something totally new emerges, and this is what we may call Unification Criticism or the Unification approach to the Bible. The world certainly needs a new approach to the Bible, an approach that is open, intellectual, and stimulating for faith and unifying. The world needs students at the same time who are aware and who are critical, but not censorious.

I have been brought up in these two traditions. The first half of my life was in the fundamentalist-supernaturalistic approach; the second was in the liberal and the modernistic-radical approach to the word of God. In the closing years of my experience in the radical and liberal approach, as I thought back on the fundamentalistic approach, the thought came to me many times, "why can't the essence and the best of the two be brought together?"

In my heart they were not contradictory. Whether I studied the Bible with those who believed in the infallable, authoritative, inspired word of God (that every word of it was true) or whether I studied with the most radical critic who denied historically almost everything that is in the Bible, my faith was always stimulated and I was brought closer to God. I felt that the word was speaking to me and I was always hopeful that there would

be someone or some force that would bring the two together. My confrontation with the Unification Church is the fulfillment of that hope. I have observed with my students and with leaders of the Unification Church that this kind of unity is possible. One of the things that Unification stands for in the Unification Church is the potential for bringing together and harmonizing two trends of interpretation of the Bible which have emerged since the Protestant Reformation and which have not as yet come together. But they are coming together in Unification Theology.

At least five major factors may be observed in this process. They are its contemporaneity; second, its view of history; third, its use of scripture; fourth, its Christology; and fifth, its eschatological perspective.

I

First of all, Unification Theology in its approach to the Bible is contemporaneous. It comes at the right moment in the history of Biblical studies with a new approach to the study of scripture so desperately needed. It is also contemporaneous in that it arises in the modern world as a response to the needs of today's society, but in a unique way. I would like to enumerate seven areas which demonstrate how contemporaneous the Unification approach to the Bible is.

1) The first is the religious life itself, always combining revelation with experience, inspiration and effort, the individual and community, meditation and action, piety and politics, and the psychic and the scientific. This is what should occur in all approaches to the Bible. We should always have all of these

things together, and this is what people who have been brought up in the Unification Theology do when they study the word of God.

2) The second area is to be aware of the unity between science and religion. That is, to receive with appreciation the results of scientific investigation in every area of life including the study of the Bible and to use the results of scientific study to give meaning to life and meet human needs.

3) The third is to be concerned with the relationship between world religions and Christianity; that is, to view all religions of the world not as competitors but as contributors to man's quest for meaning and truth. This is of special importance in Biblical studies in considering the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, and in evangelism for considering the relationship between Christians and followers of all other religions of the world. When members of the Unification Church search the scriptures they are not looking for walls. They are looking for bridges.

4) The fourth area is the relationship between the church and the churches; that is, they seek to discover the basis for unity not only between the churches of Protestantism but also between the four major branches of the Christian church; the Eastern Orthodox, the Roman Catholic, the Protestant Churches, and the Anglican Church. Unification Theology encourages the student of the Bible to search the scriptures looking more for the force than for the form of the church, since like New Testament Christians members of the Unification Church know that Christianity is first of all not a form but a force.

15) The fifth area with which they are concerned in their approach to the Bible is the relationship between male and female, relating the sexes to each other in such a way as to insure the wholeness of each. They are looking to the ideals established in scripture for the relationship between sexes, seeking to make them patterns of life rather than taking from the Bible the record of sinful and evil experiences between the sexes and making them guidelines for relationships between male and female. For example, the ideal is found in Genesis 1. A pattern of experience is found in Genesis 3. They take the ideal of creation as established in Genesis 1 rather than the story of the fall as providing the pattern for the relationships between male and female. We know that the history of Judaism, as well as the history of the Christian Church, is to take the pattern for the relationship between male and female from Genesis 3, the story of the fall, rather than from the ideal of creation as established in Genesis 1 where they are both created in the image of God and both male and female are to have dominion over the earth and together to express their powers in every area of society.

6) The sixth area with which they are concerned in their study of the Bible is the relationship between the races: to show how every human being is a child of God. They deal with every individual human being as an object of God's saving power, that is a soteriological prospect but also as equally qualified to understand God's will and to do God's work on this earth. Equal respect for the thought forms and patterns of life of orientals and occidentals makes possible a bridge between these traditionally opposite and opposing worlds geographically and spiritually.

Openness and acceptance of all national, racial and ethnic groups helps to produce results of Biblical studies that truly relate to all manner of men. They try to make an explanation of Jesus that is meaningful to Indians and Africans, Chinese and Indian, Japanese and Koreans, Germans and French, Scandinavians and English and Russian and Americans.

γ) The seventh area with which they are concerned is politics and sociology, considering the importance of each of these areas of life and their relevance for religion and relating them mutually to each other. Unification Theology insists that religion be relevant to political and social situations, the issues of today. As a result its focus is on the world's foremost enemy of religion, Communism, and seeks to establish and provide a rationale which will effectively combat it and overcome it. At the same time Unification Theology insists that positive social patterns and programs must accompany political idealism. This assists the student of the Bible at all times in keeping his work relevant.

and together to express their powers in every area of life.
These are some of the characteristics that give Unification Theology its uniqueness and contemporaneousness.

II

Among the most unique and challenging aspects of Unification Theology is its view of history. It may be described as structured on a series of parallels. Periods of pre-Christian history are comparable to periods of post-Christian history. At the same time, history moves toward a definite goal which is not a set point in time but an ultimate point in history determined by the relationship which man keeps with God. The

Omega ultimately joins the Alpha. Unification Theology puts together the traditionally conflicting Greek cyclical view of history with the Jewish lineal view of history. At the same time, the Hegelian principle of thesis-antithesis-synthesis and the Darwinian principle of evolution, even when applied to social processes, serve to illuminate the Biblical themes and concepts rather than conflict with them. Thus Unification Theology takes several major patterns of historical thinking in both the pre-scientific and scientific worlds and allows each to cast its own light on the historical process. In Unification Theology history is found to be the unified continuum in which all processes of the universe participate in rhythm and order, affecting each other with diversity and change, and moving from an original perfection to an ultimate ideal.

One of the major problems with respect to the interpretation of the Bible is its relationship to history. When a scientific methodology is applied to the study of the Bible, it is said that much of the Bible is unhistorical. It is also said that there is a strong legendary or mythical element to be found in the word of God, and this is thought then to conflict with our understanding of what the word of God is intended to be. In Unification Theology however, the symbolic and the literal, that is, the mythical and the historical merge into a single unit. Any given idea of a narrative of the Bible may be viewed at any time as having both a literal and symbolic character. Every idea and every incident is a part of the universal process in a unified field in which even beginning and end, origin and goal, ideal and

ultimate are the same. Therefore any of the data in scripture, that is, narrative, poetry, myth (even if it may be scientifically designated as legend) also may be illuminating, inspiring and authentic.

III

This leads us into the Unificationist's understanding of Scripture. Unification Theology refuses to take sides in the traditional scheme that provides the dilemma which has such a divisive force in Christianity; that is, is the Bible the word of God or does the Bible contain the word of God? The Unification Church rightfully refuses to answer the question when it is stated that way. Unification Theology suggests that the Bible cannot be identified with the word of God, since the Bible itself describes the word of God. From the Bible's own description of the word it is also obvious that the Bible does not necessarily contain the word of God. Where is the seal, or the hammer, or sword or the flesh? For anyone to say that the Bible contains the word of God is to imply that some of the material in scripture is not the word of God, and this Unification Theology is not willing to say. For Unification Theology the Bible is the chief literary expression of the word. The word is one of the principles of the universe that has expressed itself in many forms including the Old and New Testaments, has been manifested in what has come to be called extra-canonical Judaeo-Christian literature and which has been perceived and interpreted and expressed in the literature of other religions as well. The Old and New Testaments, however, provide a norm for the interpretations of all other religious literary traditions.

Thus in Unification Theology there is the highest regard for scriptures of all the religions of the world and at the same time the authoritative value of the Old and New Testaments is held in the highest and greatest esteem. In the Old and New Testaments the sovereignty of God, the providence of God, the nature and destiny of man, judgement and restoration are seen most clearly. In the Judaeo-Christian scripture, the script is given for the drama of salvation.

Although in Unification Theology the Bible is regarded with eternal and ultimate value, it is never looked upon as the object of idolatry. Christians are warned not to deal with the Bible in the same manner that the Jews dealt with the Torah. The Bible must be prevented from becoming for us what scripture had become for the people of Jesus' day, that is, a fixed tradition dependent on experts for interpretation.

At the meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature, in St. Louis, in October 1976, Bernhard Anderson from the Princeton Theological Seminary (one of the great Old Testament scholars and author of Understanding the Old Testament) made a speech in which he called for a synthesizing approach to the study of the Bible to bring together the word of God in a more constructive and powerful way to the world and society in which we live. The Unificationist approach to Scripture is a major response to this call.

Another major concern is its major message. One of the Old Testament scholars, Gerhardt Hasel, as recently as 1972 said that the central concern in the whole Bible is the Kingdom of God. Unification Theology states that the central message of

the Bible is the Kingdom of God. Hasel also notes the importance of a revival of an older type of methodology in relating the testaments, that is, the use of typology. Used both by Eichrodt and Von Rad, European scholars, typology is a designation for a particular way of looking in history as the types, beings, persons, institutions and events of the Old Testament which are regarded as divinely established models or pre-representations of corresponding realities in the New Testament salvation history. This is precisely one of the main interpretative processes used in the Unification Theology. Unification Theology posits the Kingdom of God and God's creative and redemptive power as part of a united scheme and considers typology as one of the principle motifs for the interpretation not only of the Bible but of subsequent human history.

In Unification Theology, heart and mind approach the scriptures with faith and love. This is possible since faith is not dependent exclusively on scripture. It is dependent primarily on a personal relationship to God in Jesus Christ. Unification Theology receives with gratitude all the contributions made by all scholars to an understanding of the Bible. It is especially thankful for the results made from two different interpretative procedures. Unification Theology now suggests that these two processes find a basis for uniting; that is, the traditional supernaturalistic and the more modern naturalistic approach. Since Unification Theology uses both procedures, they have already united.

IV

Now let me make another point. The Unificationist stresses the humanity of Jesus. Unification Theology says that Jesus was a man as the apostle Paul said he was a man. He was born of a woman. At the same time the Unificationist avows that Jesus is the son of God. In stressing his humanity, Unificationists also indicate that Jesus undoubtedly had a human father and that his resurrection was not what we call a physical resurrection It was a spiritual resurrection. This is based on their interpretation of I Cor. 15, which is the great chapter on resurrection, where it is insisted, according to their interpretation (which must be considered seriously), that the resurrection about which the apostle Paul speaks in regard to both Jesus and those who believe in him, is a spiritual resurrection.

According to my understanding, everything which the Unification Church says about Christology is very much in keeping with the recent trends in serious Biblical studies. I could name a number of the leading Biblical theologians of the world or of this country who believe in Jesus Christ in substantially the same way as the members of the Unification Church. However, Jesus Christ by them is regarded on a higher level, is closer to their hearts, is much more in their minds and spirit than many Christians that I have known throughout my life who avow to be Trinitarians and who affirm the traditional formulations on the person and work of Jesus Christ. There can be no question that the Christology of the Unification Church, although it is shaped different from traditional Christianity (that is, traditional as we understand the history of Christianity since the

4th century A.D.) has a high regard for Jesus, brings members into very close fellowship with Jesus, and also brings them into an experience of what the apostle Paul calls living "in Christ."

With regard to the work of Jesus Christ, one of the things for which the Unification Church is criticized is their avowal that Jesus failed in his mission. In recent scholarship you will find that some of the best British and German scholars in the last 25-50 years have said substantially the same thing. They said that Jesus failed to complete the mission which he had intended to complete in his own lifetime. Many serious Biblical critics make this statement. Albert Schweitzer was one of them. The Unification Church says that the work of Jesus Christ was to establish the Kingdom of God upon the earth in his own lifetime, and, as you know, this did not happen. For Unification Theology this in no way is any criticism of Jesus, and in no way does this point out fallability. According to their view, Jesus did not succeed in this mission in his own day in establishing the Kingdom of God on earth, because he was rejected by those very people whom he called to follow him. They believe that the Kingdom of God will come upon this earth, as people respond and are obedient to the call of God in Jesus Christ. The Unification Church says that we must get on with the work of completing the mission of Jesus - establishing the Kingdom of God on earth. This demonstrates a very high regard for the work and the mission of Christ.

In June, 1976, Rev. Moon, in speaking to the faculty of the seminary of which I am a member, said people often ask the question "what is Rev. Moon doing, or what is Rev. Moon trying to get

people to do?" Rev. Moon's answer: "I am trying to get people to live the life of Jesus."

V

The final item on which I should like to comment is the Unificationist's eschatology. Although Jesus obviously failed in his mission to establish the Kingdom of God on earth in Palestine, in what to us is the first century A.D., it is not correct to say that Jesus was mistaken in his proclamation of establishing the Kingdom. The will of God did begin to be established in his time. The failure caused by the people's rejection caused the timetable to be changed. Unificationists maintain eschatological perspective.

Eschatology in recent years has been in the hands of the fundamentalists. Only they proclaim with certainty and regularity the message of the Second Coming of Christ. They base their message on literal interpretations of Biblical passages.

In recent Biblical studies in Europe, and especially in Germany, it is predicted that in the 1970's the major topic of concern will be eschatology in specific reference to Apocalyptic literature. The message of Apocalyptic is the message of much of the Book of Daniel, the Book of Revelation, the 13th chapter of Mark, and a good part of Matthew.

One of the essential features of Apocalyptic literature is that it is not to be interpreted literally. However, the message of Apocalyptic literature must also be taken seriously. This is a dictum of critical Biblical scholarship which is accepted by Unificationists.

The Apocalyptic message conveys the conviction that God will save and restore His people and establish His Kingdom. This is the same message proclaimed by the Unification Church.

In the history of Christianity there can be no religious force or dynamic Christianity without the doctrine of the last things, eschatology. This is what gives us and all mankind hope.

I should like to conclude that these are some of the things I have observed and conclusions to which I have come as an outsider, a Reformed theologian and as a Biblical scholar, with reference to Unification Theology as a modern Christian statement.

God bless each one of you and keep you in his eternal mercy and grace as you anticipate the coming of His everlasting kingdom in power and glory.

of this country and believe in the