

## Introducing Parent to Parent: Being the parent of a Unification Church member

Anne Edwards  
September 1977



*Joan of Arc being burned at the stake*

*This is the first installation of an important new series, "Parent to Parent." The purpose of the series is to provide a forum for parents of Unification Church members, not only to relate their experiences as Unification Church parents, but to express their own ideals and philosophical or religious perspectives about life. The format will usually be that of telephone interview, though all are welcome to submit articles for the column as well. To initiate the series, I have written a few thoughts about what I feel it means to be a parent of a Unification Church member. These thoughts also represent some of the ideas and feelings that you as parents have shared with me during the past two years. - Anne Edwards*

It is not easy to be the parent of a Unification Church member. Members of the Church are well aware of this and empathize with their parents far more than their parents realize. Was it easy to be the parent of St. Francis of Assisi? of Joan of Arc? of James and John of Galilee? I don't think so. Yet these young people made a difference in history. Their lives had eternal value, in the sight of God and of men. Many others, nameless in history, have taken a similar path, seeking to give their total commitment to a religious cause. Their lives were difficult, full of stress, struggle and sacrifice. Then, could the hearts of their parents be at peace? Only if they could share the vision of their children and see meaning in their sacrifice.

Looking back, at a safe distance of 2000 years, give or take a few hundred, it is easy for us to be inspired by the lives and actions of religious saints and pacemakers. We admire them and, of course, believe in their integrity and validity. For has not time borne out the truth of their visions? And the lasting value of their actions? Yet how did they seem to the people of their own time? St. Francis was mocked and derided by his peers; Joan of Arc was deemed a witch and burned at the stake; though John may have been only persecuted, James was probably crucified. These significant figures were not just saints, they were people, and people who had parents. Their parents must have suffered. According to what we can glean from the Bible, Zebedee, the father of James and John was puzzled and bewildered by their actions, but their mother, Zebedee's wife, supported their radical decision to leave everything for Jesus of Nazareth. Joan of Arc's family discouraged her but finally relented. St. Francis' parents believed him to be mentally ill and rejected his actions to the end. I believe it was they who suffered the most. For them, their son's sacrificial life had no meaning, and was just a waste.

Then how can we understand parents and members of the Unification Church in this context? First we must accept the fact that the Unification Church has not stood the test of history. Until it has, no one can objectively state whether or not its direction has eternal value. Only subjectively, within our own hearts, and in partnership with God, can we determine its validity at the present. We stand in relationship to the Unification Church as the parents and the entire generation of St. Francis or James and John stood in relationship to them. The righteous and upstanding people of Jesus' day, who rejected him and stood by while he was crucified, believed he had been judged a rabble-rouser, or worse, by a valid, objective

standard. Yet people of all faiths today believe that Jesus was at the very least a man of God. It was only the men and women who followed their hearts, uninfluenced by the popular view of Jesus, who could see his value in his day. Similarly, as the Unification Church was initiated by Reverend Moon in this generation, we must look to our hearts again, instead of drifting with the popular view. What do we know, objectively and subjectively about this new movement?

Certainly the Unification Church inspires its members to be constantly aware of ultimate concerns. Since the central purpose of the Church is to bring God's Kingdom on earth, this purpose becomes the central purpose of our lives when we join the Church. Many parents support the goal of the Unification Church to restore mankind to God. They support the strong moral direction it stimulates in its members. That the members do not drink, do not smoke, do believe in the sanctity of marriage, do view themselves as responsible for the country and world in which they live, are all deemed good by most of our parents, and perhaps by most of the public. About what, then, is the controversy? What are the real objections which promote such opposition to the growth of the Church?

Oddly enough, the aspects of the Unification Church which are opposed by the media, some of the public and some of our parents, are those we share in common with St. Francis, Joan of Arc and James and John of Galilee. Like St. Francis, the Unification Church calls its members to a life of selfless service to God and mankind. Personal goals of careers, education, high positions, material possessions, are often, though not always, put aside; and talented people accept humble tasks as preparation for receiving greater positions of responsibility within the movement. Generally, food and clothing are simple and residential Church Centers are not elaborate in their decor.

Like Joan of Arc we follow what we believe to be a present-day revelation from God. For us, the revelation received by Rev. Moon deepens our understanding of the entire Bible, of Jesus, and of God's will for this age. Like James and John, many of the core members of the Church have left everything and have become full-time members of a new religious movement, following a man who speaks, acts and lives as though he represents God's will for our time.

I sincerely believe that it is these elements which raise the real objections to the Unification movement. Yes, there are many rumors of political or financial wrongdoing, but these are unsubstantiated. Indeed, if we have erred in any way, we must change. But were there not many rumors and suspicions around St. Francis and his movement? Around Joan of Arc and her revelations? Around Jesus and his close associates? In our hearts we know that the real reason these people and their actions were persecuted was not because of the rumors of wrongdoing around them. It was because they stood in an unrelenting manner for what they believed was God's will, and they challenged others to do the same. This was why they were really resisted. If rumored wrongdoing is the real reason the Unification Church is being opposed, then we have to ask ourselves another question. Why aren't organized crime, instigators of drug abuse, or individual perpetrators of acts of violence publicly opposed with the same vigor? Licentiousness, drug abuse, and even murder, are accepted by our society without less rage than is expressed against the Unification movement. I believe that this is because the world has more resistance to God's ways than it does to the ways of men -- even of evil men. By an objective standard, only time will tell if the Unification Church is of God. Within our prayerful hearts, we can know today.

If Unification Church parents do not directly have difficulty with the elements of the Church so opposed by some, surely they feel the chill of the public rejection of their son or daughter's chosen way. This, too, is painful for all of us. But if we truly believe in what we are doing!, and if we have abiding faith in those we love, this pain yields to something deep and precious: an intimate trust, in God and in each other. Even in the face of superficial differences, perhaps there is a possibility for real unity between members of the Unification Church and their parents about the deepest issues. If we can look within ourselves, whether we be parent, member or otherwise, do we have a concept of the central purpose of our lives? Do we have a concept of God's will for our lives? Perhaps if we can ferret out what values we hold most dear and what problems we see in realizing our ideals, we will find that the members of the Unification Church and their parents have many common beliefs and goals.

In the last two months I have visited with Unification Church parents in three states, discussing with them our way of life, and the ideals which motivate us. Most essentially, I have tried to share with parents that it is a sense of God's presence and will which keeps us going in the face of any obstacle. If we lose that, eventually we lose our own will to continue. Again and again, I meet parents who, without a deep knowledge of our faith, intuitively feel a bond with the Unification movement. Perhaps our children can bring us inspiration and a vision of God's Kingdom we have yet to see. They in turn need the guidance and support which only the wisdom and experience of years can supply. Parents are in the position to reject, support, or join the direction their sons and daughters have conscientiously chosen. Whatever our religious beliefs, we all want to see God's Kingdom. Unification Church members believe that the fundamental unit of that heavenly society is the family, whose bonds are eternal when centered on the love of God. If we move toward His will together then, we might know a deeper unity and joy than we hoped to realize in this life.