

A Unificationist's Reflection on the Legacy of Rep. John Lewis

Lorman Lykes
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I am one of the early black members of the Unification Church in America, joining in 1973. But as I reflect on my identity, I am the product of conflicting messages regarding my true value in the United States vs. the guiding light message of hope, love and truth which shaped me in the Unification Movement.

Unfortunately, there were times when I could not distinguish which message was the loudest. After many years in a leadership capacity in the movement, I became inactive, preferring to focus on personal spiritual growth.

However, since 2020 has so far proven to be a transition year for enlightening people in America toward understanding the heart of black people, I feel I must express my opinion. Especially, I want to touch on the intersection of race and the Unification Church. I see this time as an opportunity not only for the racial reconciliation of America but also for the fulfillment of Rev. Sun Myung Moon's vision for this country.



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I begin with a statement many are familiar with by Father Moon. When asked in a 1976 interview who was the greatest American leader of the 20th century, he answered: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. What was the justification for such praise? His wife, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, speaking at the 1985 acceptance speech for Rev. Moon's honorary doctorate presentation, noted, "At a time when many oppressed people wanted to return hate for hate, Dr. King said, 'We must return love for hate.'" This was a momentous occasion because it was a Historical Black College that bestowed the honorary doctorate upon Rev. Moon -- Shaw Divinity School.

Was it a coincidence that the founder of the international Unification Movement, the embodiment of love for all people, received his honorary degree from a black college founded by ex-slaves? I think not. Black people have had to overcome hate, fear and suffering to learn the lessons of true love, so it foreshadowed things to come.

What can we learn about love from Dr. King, John Lewis and Rev. Moon?

Rep. John Lewis, the great civil rights leader who passed away last month, said many times that his mentor was Dr. King. He learned the secret that loving your enemies is mightier than any opposition, even death. The logic of non-violent struggle as a tactic is not new. It is based on the spiritual concept that in all of us is "the good" placed there by God. It can be awakened when the conscience meets an undeniable righteousness. This is how unconditional love wields its power. The self-sacrifice of the Freedom Riders and others during the 1960s awakened a nation one individual after another this way. This eventually forced the federal government to outlaw Jim Crow laws and over the years led to the softening of restrictions in schools, the media, housing, etc., as integration took hold.

However, even when laws were written to open society they didn't necessarily open hearts. The transformation of the loving heart is the next process in the renewing of America. Dr. King was assassinated before the non-violence strategy could run its course and a new strategy could emerge to mend the American hearts of blacks and whites together. Where do we start in this process?

The most important lesson Rev. Moon taught was valuing and giving true love in everything you do. Dr. King taught us how by incorporating non-violence thinking as we view the race issue. In 2020, non-violence thinking is non-prejudice thinking. Today we understand everyone has implicit bias that resides in the unconscious undetected. We act upon it every day without knowing it. This is the source of much of the division in America. Implicit biases create distrust in blacks and whites as well as a lack of empathy for blacks, immigrants, or anyone considered an "other." Churches are not immune from implicit biases. Love cannot flourish under these circumstances.

My time in the Unification Movement was well-spent learning the ways of love. My Holy Blessing in 1982 led to a happy family with four wonderful children. Then in 2006 when my lovely wife succumbed to cancer, I began to question my life, my purpose and my legacy. In 2010 I entered a comfort blessing with a wonderful widow. This was again an interracial marriage but with a European woman this time.

We have many common bonds, but one, in particular, was our love for history. She came to the U.S. to study black history because of empathy for the plight of slavery and the struggle for social justice today.

The passing of John Lewis as a historical leader in the civil rights movement over the last 60 years provoked us to ponder, "What would America be like without a saint like him?" When you listen to Lewis speak, especially over the final years before his passing, the wisdom of his life's journey delivers a common message. The power of love is the foundation for his calling, civil disobedience and dedication to people. "In life, people are afraid to say I love you, but love is strong," John Lewis would say. This strong love was the underpinning of the civil rights movement and it kept the non-violence ideology and tactics relevant and resilient in the face of beatings, spitting, slander, and foul language.

What kept John Lewis going in the face of such adversity? His faith in the goodness of people and the promise that God's love will win overall. He encouraged others by saying, "It's already done." He visualized the outcome of a nation filled with peace and love for all people in the midst of persecution. His motto was to "make good trouble." This is a perfect motto in the process toward lasting change because it defines the status quo as an intolerant and recalcitrant culture that denies the freedom for all God's children.

This description of the opposition to authority as a course of action also describes the life of Rev. Moon. His path to glory was similarly associated with jail, beatings, torture, and false accusations. The first generation of Unificationists are well-versed in "good trouble" since we learned it from Father Moon. Unfortunately, in the early years of the American movement, black lives didn't matter as much as white lives and the great commonality of unity in suffering with the black community was lost in favor of winning the loyalty and cooperation of white Christians and politicians who didn't want any black trouble. Meanwhile, the great masses of potential black church members who loved Rev. Moon and came to his rallies were lost.

Today we can remember along with John Lewis the many unsung saints who had a loving heart and sacrificed to unite America during turbulent times. To them, Dr. King's 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech in Washington, DC, was a mission: "One day little black boys n' girls and little white boys n' girls will walk hand in hand singing, free at last, free at last, thank God almighty, we're free at last." These black people yearning to be free, their children and grandchildren, are still waiting to see a new movement that will live this dream and make it real. Who will welcome them?

How can the Unification Movement facilitate the inclusion of non-white people?

This is a 400-year-old question that was pondered by the Jamestown colony in 1619 when the first blacks came ashore as slaves. Their servitude was bearable because they were part of a grand opportunity to build a new community free and slave but together with the promise of one day working off their chains as promised after seven years. History tells us that after more slaves arrived and the older ones were freed, it became clear that when slaves were liberated as agreed it was not as economically advantageous as keeping the slaves. More money had to be spent to buy new ones. The period of servitude was increased to 10 years, then 15, until eventually it became indefinite. Thus, greed and selfishness were the new imperative in the New World. Economics mattered more than justice for the good of the colony -- a white colony.

Fast forward to the present. We are still living the remnants of a dichotomous dilemma. The Civil War decided not only the end of slavery in the U.S. but also what side you were on after the war. Today some people are still picking sides for issues based on race, religion and gender. What is God's side? Economy vs. justice or is it something else? Love makes this argument irrelevant. When people love, there is no side; it's not who is right or wrong. It's "what works." What will work for the Unification Movement toward an agenda that facilitates non-white membership?

Love is the determining factor toward an applied practice of inclusion of non-white individuals. The steps in giving and receiving love are predetermined based on a proportional scale of achievement. The levels of love necessary for obtaining parity between the races is a factor equal to the disproportionate level of dissatisfaction of the other side. Put simply, the satisfaction of one side is in response to the satisfaction of the other side. This is based on psychological studies that show happiness achieved by a giver is proportional to the effect it has upon the receiver.

Similarly, once a receiver's index for happiness increases, positive emotions like gratitude, kindness and acceptance are demonstrated. As a result, the receiver is now inspired to be a giver. This cycle continues; if sustained, it will lead to the aggregate satisfaction of the group. The size of the group is not limited to the scale of the giving for happiness to grow in a positive net sum gain. A net sum loss occurs when happiness is interrupted by greed, selfishness or envy.

Happiness can be qualitatively and quantitatively measured by the satisfaction metrics developed in the field of positive psychology. Lack of happiness is a major contributor to dissatisfaction in life.

Dissatisfaction leads to escalating feelings of frustration, anxiety, abandonment, danger, fear, and hate. The first sentence of the Divine Principle informs us about the importance of happiness. "Everyone, without exception, is struggling to gain happiness. The first step in attaining this goal is to overcome present unhappiness... Every person feels happy when his desire is fulfilled."

The Unification Movement is at the threshold of a new era. Necessity is the mother of invention. To grow and develop, it is necessary for the new organization, now known as the Heavenly Parent Holy Community (HPHC), to initiate education and training that will expand satisfaction in its members that creates happiness. This would be the best demonstration for future guests and members that God is building His kingdom for all people. This is more than a marketing strategy -- it's the promise of God.

In the Scriptures, the role of Simon of Cyrene is of a man from Africa (eastern Libya) who carries the cross for Jesus. Rev. Moon said this is a foreshadowing of the mission in the Last Days of the black clergy for the Lord of the Second Advent. The black clergy did indeed uplift Rev. Moon during his most difficult trials in the 1980s with the U.S. government and afterward for religious freedom. However, how did the black community benefit from the support of the black leaders and clergy?

Now is the time for a reciprocal response to the love and loyalty given by them to Rev. Moon. What would be the best gesture of gratitude -- free trips to South Korea, trucks donated to feed the hungry or tickets to a national gospel concert? All these things have been done in good faith before, but they mostly served the purposes of the Unification Church and did not address the heart of Rev. Moon's vision -- the liberation of God and the freedom of all people from fear.

What do black people need most from Rev. Moon and his followers? True love. Now that Rev. Moon has ascended, who is going to represent his gratitude to black people? How is that love going to be manifested? Today we face a great opportunity stemming from the convergence of two complementary circumstances -- the struggle for the end of racism in America and the promise of a new beginning for the Unification Movement in America (UMA; in a subsequent article, I will make recommendations for a new UMA). Will the UMA be part of the solution to racism in America?

How can the UMA evolve to mend America's hearts and emulate John Lewis?

Imagine in a dream you were standing in a pool of loving light after having died and gone to spirit world. Before you are four saints: Jesus, Moses, Mohammad, and Buddha. One at a time they show you what they had done to save humanity when they were on earth and ask how did they do? As you look at them, you suddenly respond, "Why do you ask me this question?" Jesus steps forward as the spokesman for the group and says, "Because everything we did, we did for you."



Mrs. Hak Ja Han Moon delivered the acceptance speech on behalf of her husband, Rev. Sun Myung Moon, of the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity awarded by Shaw Divinity School, Raleigh, North Carolina, May 11, 1985.

Today, we can ask ourselves, "How did we do?" Are we individuals who were committed to a spiritual life which we endured to the end? Or did we take what was given us and made it better? This is the

question before the FFWPU as it contemplates the new era of HPHC. Rev. Moon has ascended and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon is 77 years old. The future of the movement is literally in our hands as the inheritors of the vision. John Lewis's final message, which appeared in *The New York Times* on the day of his funeral, summarized his legacy as one who believed that love was the highest virtue. Just like the four saints who did everything for future generations, we have to think out of the box to understand the responsibility our love gives us to elevate America's heart today.

First, it is necessary to end the old structures that have been perpetuating the status quo. Status quo amounts to more of the same -- no changes, no challenges; no growth, no racial diversity. Just like the declared end of the colonial charter with England begat the Declaration of Independence, the HPHC needs to promptly declare an end to the old era of church. The HPHC is not just a name change. It should be a new way of thinking about the path to the Heavenly Community. Just like the dream of John Lewis and the civil rights participants of the 1960s who had a love for unity, today the UMA should take that dream to the next level with next-level love as its core. That mission will not be easy, but it will be rewarding because unity is its own reward.

But before unity we must have love. Love like Jesus, Rev. Moon and Hak Ja Han Moon have. This is the ultimate goal of true peace seekers. How the UMA measures up to the challenge will depend on how much of its resources it puts in teaching its followers to love unconditionally. Only then can we say that Dr. King, John Lewis, Emmett Till, George Floyd, and many others didn't die in vain. 2020 will go down in history as a transition year for many reasons. We can make it our year of the break from the old to the new.

How will mutual benefit occur from a black agenda going forward in the HPHC? I have already laid out the providential, historical, and biblical reasoning for a shift in priorities from an elite-centered restoration (top-down) to a grassroots-centered restoration (bottom-up). The descendants of slaves have been on the bottom since emancipation in 1864 except for some of the black middle class which is a minor percentage of the overall U.S. population. However, African Americans, despite being 14% of the U.S. population, have an inordinate influence on American culture. In politics, sports, entertainment, art, and academia, blacks have striven toward the top successfully. But these people will not be interested in being tokens to any movement that does not have a plan and promise to "uplift the least of these," as Jesus proclaimed.

Now is the time to put Rev. Moon's plans for a "loving world community" into practice. Just before I joined the Unification Church in 1973, it had been known as the Unified Family. How do we include blacks into that family? The opportunity is here for True Father's vision of a united world of peace and prosperity to be achieved. Since Foundation Day in 2013 we have enjoyed the liberation of living in a world of all possibilities without accusation. We can do it together: black, white, brown, and Asian. We are ready to work together. Let's start now.

Rev. Lorman Lykes was born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1949. He graduated with a B.A. degree in history from Wayne State University and joined the religious movement of Sun Myung Moon in 1973. He served as a missionary, pastor and teacher of the Divine Principle for over 40 years. He has traveled extensively in search of the true meaning of life, love and death. After the transition of his wife, Laura, in 2006, he has taken a special interest in researching and studying neuroscience, metaphysics and the evolution of sentient beings.

Graphic at Top: *A depiction of Rep. John Lewis at the Edmund Pettus Bridge, Selma, Alabama, on March 14, 2018.*