

Beyond partisanship: A proposal to end the schism and bring our divided family back together

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At a [recent presentation](#) on the schisms in the Unification movement, Dan Fefferman concluded it is likely current divisions in the Unification movement will continue indefinitely. In this article, I propose a two-pronged approach to end the polarization between the disparate groups and bring them together to fulfill the highest aspirations of Divine Principle. First, I discuss how reinterpreting “true family theology” changes the rules for who can be involved in putting an end to the gridlock. In part two, I suggest how the conflicting groups can shift from position taking to problem solving and move beyond sterile debate to engage in genuine dialogue.

The three groups involved in the conflict (Family Federation for World Peace, Global Peace Foundation, World Peace and Unification Sanctuary) employ a variety of tactics to defend their positions, such as: Assuming their group is always right, giving no possibility the other parties have parts of the answer to end the conflict; Always trying to prove the other party wrong; Listening to find flaws and refute arguments; Defending “our own version of the truth;” Seeing only one side of the argument; Looking for weaknesses in the other’s position; Creating a winner/loser mentality; Seeking a conclusion that supports one’s own position.

This kind of position taking and conflict is found in all types of organizations. For example, in the politics of the upcoming presidential election, we see it’s all about painting a picture of “the other” candidate/party as being deficient, wrong, untrustworthy, dishonest, and unqualified to lead. There is no advantage for the opposing party to “toot the horn” in praise of the other, or to show how their opponent’s solutions have just as much merit as their own. To do so runs the risk of losing votes, and as a consequence, losing power and control that come with winning the election.

Taking a close look at the division in our movement, it’s not a stretch to conclude it has more to do with the desire for power and control by one group over the other to implement its version of “what is best and right” for everyone else. By themselves, the leaders of each group appear incapable of coming together in a spirit of discovering new options and solutions, other than their own original alternatives. This is bad enough, but another thorny reality we have to deal with is how true family theology impedes any progress toward ending the conflict.

In 1993, as part of a world-wide speaking tour, Mrs. Moon travelled to 44 American cities and delivered the speech, [“True Parents and the Completed Testament Age.”](#) Here’s an excerpt from her speech referring to Divine Principle teaching on the true family:

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great privilege to announce to you the establishment of the first True Family. My husband and I, together with our 13 children and 20 grandchildren are absolutely dedicated to serving God and humanity. With three generations in one family, we have achieved, on the family level, the central root, the central trunk, and the central bud of the "Tree of Life" mentioned in the Bible. It is our sincere hope that you will symbolically graft into this lineage by joining us in our efforts to create an ideal nation and world. This marks the beginning of the Completed Testament Age.

Hyun jin and Hyung jin claim (for different reasons) Family Federation members must submit to their positional/spiritual authority granted to them because of their blood ties to True Parents. This view is

connected to the idea conveyed in Mrs. Moon's speech, whereby she likens the physical children of True Parents to "the central trunk" of the Tree of Life mentioned in the Bible. Both sons give specific reasons for creating organizations not affiliated with Family Federation leadership, and level serious charges against Family Federation leaders including financial mismanagement, abuse of leadership power, and veering of course from "God's providential will."

In the midst of this conflict, Family Federation members are encouraged to "stay the course" and remain faithful to carry out Mrs. Moon's instructions in fulfilling "tribal messiahship." Rank and file members have no idea if any of the charges by Hyun jin and Hyung jin have merit, or if the three groups are communicating in an effort to resolve their differences.

Acknowledging current leaders of the three groups haven't been able to come up with a solution to the conflict is important in considering how to end the schism. Armed with this awareness, we can constructively start mapping out a plan of action to end the division. The first step is to address the need to reinterpret true family theology.

Rather than implying True Parent's sons (and daughters) are the literal, physical fulfillment of biblical prophecy about the Tree of Life, we can say the following:

"Rev. and Mrs. Moon emerged in the latter half of the 20th century to reveal how God's love is most profoundly experienced through familial relationships of husband and wife and parents and children."

Using this approach removes the special inferred status laid claim to by Hyun jin and Hyung jin, and allows everyone to relate on more equal footing. This reformulation of true family theology makes it possible for the two sons and Family Federation members to "sit down at the table" and enter into authentic dialogue. That's step number one.

The next task is to articulate a strategy to "move beyond position taking to problem solving." As long as we try to resolve the conflict with a win/lose, right vs. wrong, us vs. them mentality, the schism will continue to play out with little chance of reaching a positive outcome. Ending the division has just as much to do with healing relationships as it does with "coming to agree" about this or that issue.

Anticipating current leaders of the three groups to act as impartial judge in the conflict, is like expecting referees in the Super Bowl who owns stock in one of the competing teams to be neutral observers! Fans expect referees to be impartial observers, able to enforce established rules and make sure all players abide by the same rules. When the leaders of the three groups eventually come together for genuine dialogue, impartial referees need to be "on the playing field," to ensure agreed-upon rules for dialogue and civility are followed by all parties at the table.

It is imperative we allow individuals the freedom to be different, advocate for one's beliefs, to passionately advance one's own special cause; to take firm stands with fierce commitment and resolve, and to encourage loyalty to one's vision. But, if position taking and loyalty to one's vision means holding fast to a pro or con stance with no chance of any change, such noble qualities can lead to exaggerated distortions, like: Always arguing to prove "we are right;" Demanding power and control because "we know what is best for everyone;" Insisting on, "Just listen to me and you'll have to agree with my position," and; "We are on the right side so just come join the winning team."

Instead of endless negative campaigning and opposition to everything the other side stands for, the three groups need to develop the capacity to move beyond their own deeply held views and work together to strengthen America and the larger world. Family Federation, Global Peace Foundation, and Sanctuary

Church of New Foundland, PA, are called to transform their conflicts into opportunities for positive growth, innovation, and change. This is how the highest aspirations of Divine Principle can be manifested. Working through differences with humility, civility, and respect, is nothing less than what Divine Principle calls for in this conflict.

We need to find ways to more deeply connect rather than separate even further. Relationships need to be healed on many levels. Instead of repeating preexisting views, we can commit to learning from the other by actively seeking out multiple viewpoints through a well-managed process of vigorous public discussion (not debate!). We can choose to focus on problem solving rather than staking out and defending a given position; a kind of negotiation that leads to genuine innovation and not stale compromise. We can plan for a time when the conflict is over and former adversaries join together in effective, inspired public service.

Numerous individuals and organization exist dedicated to bridging divides and bringing conflicting groups together to work effectively in solving real problems. [Mediators Foundation](#), [Bridge Alliance](#), and [American Public Square](#) are three such organizations bringing together divergent groups to solve problems “for the greater good” (as Unificationists often like to proclaim).

Effective education on conflict management and practices is a must, if we anticipate better ways to penetrate our amazingly diverse society and work together strategically with divergent groups, who also aspire to societal transformation and cultural renewal.

In my faith community, we are considering forming a small group dedicated to exploring more deeply the best principles and practices that lead to effective conflict resolution and cross-cultural cooperation. I encourage all communities to do the same. Using the current conflict among the three groups we’ve been discussing is a great place to start this process. As I noted earlier, we can’t expect the leaders of the three groups to bridge the “conflict gap” on their own.

On the local level, we can create models of effective leadership that demonstrate how to work through conflicting views and visions to achieve something greater than any one partisan solution has to offer. Such is “inspired living.”