

My Unificationist Memoirs Chapter 53

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The words of Matthew's gospel are uncompromising: unless we love Jesus more than our own father, mother, and children, then we are not worthy to be followers. On MFT, True Father trained us to be worthy of following, providing a dedicated path to surrender our pride, our attachments, and our very selves to become God's beggars. Most of us then endured persecution from our disappointed parents and siblings, as we committed ourselves to heaven's work. In this manner, Father trained our deepest sentiments, which lie at the very foundation of our moral compass. We learned to love the taste of sacrifice and persecution, to experience spiritual joy and peace beneath the sting and the pain of negative encounters.

Of course, the point never was to abandon our parents and our families. On the contrary, the denial of attachments and the distancing from our families, provided the necessary emotional and physical space to cultivate our true selves, redirect our hearts, and be reborn through True Parents, enabling us to return to our hometowns as Tribal and National Messiahs. To this messianic end, Father taught us that we need to love others as we have loved God and True Parents, in contradistinction to the teaching of Jesus.

Father did not want to reproduce ordinary "believers." He sought to create embodiments of the Word. Thus, MFT training served as a process of recreation, and provided us with the internal character to navigate the confusion of the Last Days. Elijah's vigil in the cave provides a good model for how to make our way: discern and listen for the still quiet voice of God. Especially in these tumultuous and emotional times, our training in detachment and love remains absolutely essential. We cannot be the creatures of "zeitgeist" and simply be swept along by the passions of our time. We cannot lose ourselves in the political moment. To orient our moral compass requires both detachment and sacrificial love: we must love God more than anyone or anything and love every person as much as we love God.

And of course, like everything Father taught us, while essential to do, it is not easily done. No matter. The salvation of our families, communities, nations, and all humankind depend on how we accomplish our providential roles.

After September 11, 2001, like many Americans, I wanted blood. I rejoiced at the initial success of our operations in Afghanistan. And like many neoconservatives, I felt (and still feel) that the arc of history bends toward democracy as the system which gives freest reign to our original nature. Thus, when President George W. Bush threatened to open a second front in the War on Terror by attacking Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi Baathists, I wholeheartedly backed the strategy. From my brother on the NSC, I knew that strong bipartisan support existed within the government; that former Clinton appointees, such as Kenneth Pollack, had long agitated for a more aggressive posture towards Iraq; and that shared intelligence from both France and Russia supported administration assertions that Hussein had restarted his WMD programs. Without any deep grounding in Iraqi history, I thought the Iraqi people would seize the opportunity to create an open democratic society.

When I heard rumblings that True Father opposed an expansion of the war, I discounted it. When I heard that Father became sick for three days after the initiation of the war, I rationalized that this military action met the terms of being a "just war." How could I be unmoved by True Father? I was deeply attached to the Bush administration, politically and personally. From the days of Reagan, I had loved George H.W. Bush and later, enthusiastically supported his administration. Over the years, the Bush family had been very kind to the Scharfen family. When George W. Bush came into office, my loyalties continued, as did the Bush generosity.

Thus, it came to be, that on the evening of the first Iraqi elections on January 30, 2005, I was invited to an intimate family dinner by President and Mrs. Bush to honor my sister, Catherine Fenton, in the private residence of the White House. As we gathered, President Bush received multiple calls from world leaders congratulating him on the success of the first fair and free Iraq elections. The spirit that night was buoyant. The President, however, told the White House operator not to disturb him, because "this is Cathy's night!" Laura Bush took us on a tour of the private residence. She had restored the Lincoln Bedroom to its original state. As she was explaining what had been involved, I looked behind me and President Bush was fidgeting with a light over Lincoln's writing desk. I stepped back from my family and stood next to him. He whispered, "I'm trying to fix this lamp. You'd think that things in the White House would work." He then said, while pointing to a document under the desk's glass top, "Look at this, it's pretty neat... It's one of three extant copies of Lincoln's 'Gettysburg Address' written in his own hand." I thought to myself, "No, what's neat is I'm standing by the President who is showing me the Gettysburg Address and sharing his love of Lincoln and American history with me." I then told President Bush I had assigned his recently delivered Second Inaugural Address to my English classes. Our conversation moved to how speeches are written and edited, the role of his speech writers, and how he rewrote their initial drafts many times. He was in the middle of this process for his 2005 State of the Union Address.

As the evening wore on, I sat next to Mrs. Bush during dinner, and my sister Cathy placed the only Democrat in our family, my older sister Kristine, next to the President. They had a lively and fun evening as Kris posed the most challenging questions she could muster, and the President responded respectfully with good humor and grace. Kristine left the evening unconverted but with a new found respect for the President's intellectual prowess. At one point, she noted to the President that he could pick up his phone and call anyone in the world and they would most likely respond. She then asked, "Who is the most interesting person you've spoken with as President?" He thought for a moment, and responded, "Leon Kass, the chair of my Bioethics Committee." Leon Kass is an MD-PhD who taught philosophy at the University of Chicago. One of the texts he used for his classes was the Book of Genesis.

Since I raised Guide Dogs for the Blind, Mrs. Bush peppered me with questions about training dogs and introduced their Scottish Terrier, Barney to us. I later sent her a "Gentle Leader" to help with the puppy's leash behavior.

We closed the evening in the Oval Office. President Bush gave us a tour, explaining his choice of art works, and shared some anecdotes about his father and other world leaders. In particular, he mentioned how important his relationship to Japan was to him, because of his father's wartime experiences. I then reminded him that my father had been a WWII Marine and shared that my father-in-law had been in the Japanese Army during the war - and that they now shared the same grandchildren. This deeply moved President Bush.

However, this extraordinary evening has always been marred for me. Although I hoped that I was laying a spiritual foundation, I never found the words to open a discussion about what was most meaningful: our True Parents and the course of America's restoration. And in truth, I had allowed my sentiments to align with President Bush's strategy for war as opposed to True Father's strategy for peace. My sentiments had compromised me.

And herein lies the crux: if we are going to establish a providential course of politics, Headwing, then it will require greater strength, greater detachment, and greater love than I demonstrated. True Father's concerns have been borne out by the years of war in the Middle East. Even the hope of the "Arab Spring" has turned to ash, as the opening of societies gave rise to extremist jihad, and civil order devolved into civil war, social chaos, destruction, genocide, and starvation. Russia has reemerged as a malevolent force and China has exploited the loss of American stature to expand its influence in the Middle East and Africa. As I write this morning, the Taliban have surrounded the capital city of Kabul and Afghanistan appears lost, America, humiliated.

Our training by True Father will be of no use if we cannot provide new solutions to break the cycle of our world's resentful and violent politics. This can only happen if we can find sufficient detachment from the passions of the moment and embody the peaceful change we long for humanity to accept. In this way, an authentic Headwing philosophy will emerge, as we love others with the same heart and intensity we love God.

Either we will grow into the Abel figures, the Tribal and National Messiahs, expressing the parental heart humanity needs, or the world will continue its endless cycle of violence, resentment, and revenge.