

My Unificationist Memoirs Chapter 80

J. Scharfen
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The Only Begotten Daughter, Part IX

It has been 700 years since the Italian poet Dante Alighieri ascended to the spiritual world in 1321. All that he imagined in his incomparable verse, the poet can now measure against the substance of his experience in the afterlife. Each moment--if eternity possesses "moments"--is likely pregnant with unfolding revelation. As Dante has moved from the shadows into the light, we too journey from ignorance to understanding as we encounter the extraordinary and even startling new dimensions of Heaven's Providence. Such is the moment in which we live.

I never tired of teaching Dante. There were many years at Cardinal Newman, when I had three classes of Honors English, which meant I would read aloud the same cantos from the "Inferno," three times a day. Each time was different. The students engaged the allegorical text from their varied perspectives, creating a fresh and unique experience in each and every class. Stretched over the years, my "Commedia" became well worn as generations of students passed through these pages with me on their way to deeper understanding, their lives informed by Dante's spiritual wisdom, expressed in brilliant metaphor and symbol.

The timeless poetry of Dante's *Commedia*, can provide us with insight into our own extraordinary times, and may assist us in navigating their dangers. The epic poem opens with Dante the Pilgrim's abortive attempt to escape the Dark Wood of Error, by directly ascending the heights of the Mount of Joy to sunlight, hope, and liberation. Despite his strenuous effort, he cannot reverse his fallen condition, he cannot succeed on his own. Three beasts representing malice and fraud, violence and ambition, and incontinence, repeatedly drive the beleaguered and frightened soul back down into the darkness of sin and despair. The most persistent of the beasts is the "She-Wolf of Incontinence" "...a starved horror/ ravening and wasted beyond belief./ She seemed a rack for avarice, gaunt and craving./ Oh many the souls she has brought to endless grief!" (Canto I, 47-51, John Ciardi translation). At the Pilgrim's lowest point, Mother Mary charges Beatrice--the spirit of an idealized woman whom Dante loved--to commission Virgil, the greatest of the classical Latin poets, to deliver the despairing Dante from his sin and suffering. Thus, in arguably the penultimate poem of Christian civilization, the initial lines celebrate the salvific power of the Maternal Love of God, embodied in the heart of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Not only does Dante's masterpiece pay tribute to Mary's compassion for sinners as the poem commences, her maternal love is a theme celebrated throughout the work. I cannot reflect on the meaning or the beauty of Dante's *Commedia* without thinking of our True Mother. While Mother Mary's character represents the Maternal Heart of God within Dante's epic, as a reader, the emotions evoked within me naturally transfer to the true

and proper object of my devotion, loyalty, and love: Hak Ja Han, the Only Begotten Daughter of God.

As Unificationists, the reason that the struggling Pilgrim cannot ascend directly to the heights of God's love will be quite familiar to us. Dante must spiritually pass through a restorative process in which he recognizes personal, historical, and collective sin, for which he can then repent, before he enters into an ecstatic relationship with God. Virgil, on the other hand, although he assumes the role as Dante's mentor, can only pass through Hell and Purgatory. Having died unbaptized as a pagan, Virgil may not enter Paradise. In the Unification tradition, the Blessing operates in a similar though more complete and final fashion, opening a person's path to a change of blood lineage and the Kingdom of Heaven.

Each step of the way through the differing circles of Hell, Virgil leads Dante as they encounter representative sinners, who suffer the torments of symbolic retribution according to the nature of their offense and the extent of their depravity. The poetic depictions are simultaneously theological and political commentary. A political figure in exile from his native city of Florence, the poet Dante's retribution is to depict his political adversaries--and their ancestors--as tropes throughout his epic poem. We meet figures of historical weight as well as prelates, popes, and literary rivals suffering various degrees of torture in the pits of hell, as well as at the hands of demons. Although each level of the Inferno has relevance to our current times, I will discuss the Fourth Circle as one which might help us to better understand the current providence, and Hak Ja Han's role as the Mother of Peace.

Dante assigns the "Hoarders and Wasters" to the Fourth Circle of Hell. Their infernal predicament is deserving of an extended quote:

Thus we descended the dark scarp of Hell
to which all the evil of the Universe
comes home at last, into the Fourth Great Circle
and ledge of the abyss. O Holy Justice,
who could relate the agonies I saw!
What guilt is man that he can come to this?
Just as the surge Charybdis hurls to sea
crashes and breaks upon its countersurge,
so these shades dance and crash eternally.
Here, too, I saw a nation of lost souls,
far more than were above: they strained their chests
against enormous weights, and with mad howls
rolled them at one another. Then in haste
they rolled them back, one party shouting out:
"Why do you hoard?" and the other: "Why do you waste?"
So back around that ring they puff and blow,
each faction to its course, until they reach
opposite sides, and screaming as they go
The madmen turn and start their weights again
to crash against the maniacs. And I,
watching, felt my heart contract with pain."
(Canto VII, 16-36)

I know of no better poetic depiction of the "politics of resentment" than Dante's. Each side was so consumed by accusation and anger towards the other in life, that in death they are locked in an eternal struggle which they can neither win nor escape. It does not require very much of an imaginative leap to see our present politics in Dante's literary vision above. For instance, in our Congress, nothing productive can be achieved as each side is more obsessed with destroying the other than with the common good. The politics of personal destruction and ideological warfare have replaced real policy debates. Much of this breakdown arises from the left's adoption of Critical Race Theory, a derivative form of Marxism, which elevates persistent struggle above legislative compromise. Sadly, much of the response on the right has been unleashed with vitriol and resentment in a manner which emotionally mirrors their adversaries on the left. And so it goes, back and forth, in a cycle of anger and resentment for eternity. Our political body has become like a crazy man whose mind is consumed by a contest of extremes, wandering the streets shouting obscenities at the world, shaking his fist at the heavens. And so, with St. Paul we cry out, "Oh wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

Only True Mother, the Only Begotten Daughter, and our Queen of Peace, as she advances the Providence of Heaven on Earth, in perfect union with our True Father in the Spiritual World.

We can know the providence of God by observing the "world." For instance, the decline of the institution of marriage and the proliferation of free sex, heralded by many on the left as progress, provide a sure indication of the direction God would have us go: we need to resurrect the institution of marriage and restore chastity, the virtue of sexual restraint. The denigration of the nuclear family and the elevation of single parenthood as a rational, even desirable option is a certain sign that the family must be preserved

and protected. Or the inciting of racial resentment, as noted above, points towards God's desire for racial harmony and interracial marriage. In essence, we need to move 180 degrees opposite to the way of the world to align ourselves with God's will.

How we engage the world on these core issues will be determinative of our success. Though, as citizens, a political response is necessarily required of us, by no means can it consume all of our energy and effort, nor can it become an end in itself. Politics will not yield the changes we seek. Only conversion of heart and the embrace of our enemy will achieve our providential goals. I often need to remind myself that when God led me to True Parents, I was a radical leftist, a peace activist, and from a political perspective, not at all aligned with the will of Heaven. Nonetheless, I was seeking God's will and my mind was open to the truth. My political persuasions were not determinative, my heart was.

True Mother has reached out to all men and women of good will across the political spectrum. We see this in each Rally of Hope, as Mother draws in leaders of all persuasions. As the Mother of Peace, she has transcended national and ideological boundaries, and called upon each and every one of us to revolutionize our love and radically transform our hearts and lives. Thus, neither can we let ourselves become confined by the political antagonisms of our times, and limited to a small comfortable orbit of shared ideological sympathies. Ours is a radical calling which requires us to love those with whom we intensely disagree, even those whose views we find abhorrent. We walk a fine line, and, but for the love of God and the merit of True Parents, it would be impossible to navigate.

This, I confess quite frankly, is very difficult for me. I can easily savor my disdain, relish my contempt, and delight in my scorn for political adversaries. I could happily go on with a perfectly pitched litany of contemporary political villainy. However, I know I cannot hold these feelings in my heart and approach our Heavenly Parent. Moreover, I know I cannot help reverse the current animosities by cultivating the same animosities in myself. If I am going to help True Mother end the age of despair, vitriol, and resentment, I must first radically transform my own heart.

So, brothers and sister, "let us throw off everything that hinders us and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes" on our True Parents, as the "model and perfectors of our faith" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Aju?