

My Unificationist Memoirs Chapter 96

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Beauty Hides the Hook

Dr. [Chong Sik] Yong has periodically addressed the problem of pornography in his Morning Devotions. Within this single issue resides a universe of pain, frustration, betrayal, and heartrending sorrow. As a former teacher of high school students--and as a former miscreant teenager myself--I have some experience dealing with the spiritual and emotional burdens placed on our youth by our broken and dysfunctional popular culture. With an eye on restoration, not condemnation, I would like to share a few anecdotes and insights which may be of interest to both parents and teens.

Every year, because of the ubiquity of pornography and the immersion of my students in their virtual worlds, I would actively seek out opportunities to stimulate the discussion of these topics. Often, in the crush of daily life, with my students obsessing about grades, their social standing, and seeking approval from their peers, I felt like a lone voice crying in the wilderness. Nonetheless, occasional moments would present an angle or opening to teach, and I would seize them. More proactively, I would design lessons in my curriculum to address these issues--for instance, I would analyze the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis as an example of allegory and symbol. As I have previously written, I would use a literary approach to discuss the Fall of Man. To drive home the universality of that message, I employed a text prepared by the Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, "The Teaching of Buddha." For those unfamiliar with the Nikko

Hotels in America, these Buddhist scriptures are placed in bedside hotel drawers in the same manner as Gideon's Bible. After staying in the Nikko I always brought my copy home as a gift for friends and relatives. But I digress... I kept a personal copy on my classroom bookshelf for teaching.

Below, I quote a selection from the passages my lessons most often used:

"5. Human desires are endless. It is like the thirst of a man who drinks salt water: he gets no satisfaction and his thirst is only increased.

So it is with a man who seeks to gratify his desires; he only gains increased dissatisfaction and his woes are multiplied.

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6. Of all the worldly passions, lust is the most intense. All other worldly passions seem to follow in its train.

Lust seems to provide the soil in which other passions flourish. Lust is like a demon which eats up all the good deeds of the world. Lust is a viper hiding in a flower garden; it poisons those who come in search only of beauty." (166-170)

The symmetry between the allegory of Genesis and the Buddhist text could not escape the students' notice, particularly the presence of the "viper" which we had thoroughly analyzed as a phallic symbol.

When my classes were all teenage boys, the discussions unfolded very differently from when we had a coed classroom. I could be quite blunt without creating embarrassment and the boys could ask questions that otherwise might humiliate them. Importantly, I felt free to share my own struggles as a young male growing up in a time when Playboy magazine became all the rage and was in nearly every household I visited, though it was never allowed under my parents' roof (more about that later). Even though my Irish nuns threatened us with eternal damnation for perusing nude photos (we never even pretended to read the articles and didn't really get the jokes), the deterrent fires of hell held less power over me than the fires of my own passion. As I reflect on my youth, I can easily identify the rationalizing persuasion of the Serpent's whisper. When I first saw a Playboy at age 8, I ran from it in fear--by the time I was 13, I ran with it, having convinced myself I was running with nature and normality. At 15, my coveted magazine was hidden in my room, in violation of my parents' wishes. I freely drank the salt water oblivious to my building thirst.

I think it is a fair question to ask: who enslaved and murdered more people, destroyed more lives and families, and was the greatest enemy of God? Joseph Stalin, Mao Tse-Tung, or Hugh Hefner?

My openness led to hours of productive discussion with my young men. Many sought counsel and we could then explore personal approaches to individual problems. I avoided judgment and engaged them with sympathy: after all, the cards seem to be stacked against us. From the first moments of our infancy, we rested in our mother's arms, suckling her breasts. This is home. God's very design of nature compels us to see beauty in women and to find comfort in their embrace. And though I wished, as did they, I could find that love everywhere, at any time, and without consequence, reality differs. I repeatedly taught: Sexual love only properly matures in singularity, within the confines of absolute commitment. Many came from homes broken by infidelity and out of their personal hurt, they knew the truth of my teaching about sexuality and marriage. Outside of those bonds, the joy promised by the appearance of beauty quickly evaporates, leaving only emptiness and discontent... "Lust is a viper hiding in a flower garden." Indeed.

To drive home the message of restraint, I used a fishing analogy: no matter how attractive the bait, there was always the hook and being on the end of that line can hurt, especially as a person loses control of their freedom. Moreover, even if the catch can "get away," the water has become a fearful place. We swim in a bitter sea of alienation and fear.

That "hook" was especially painful for young women. When our classes became coed, the discussions changed--not better or worse, but different. Moreover, this transition occurred as the technology had become increasingly sophisticated, with iPhone cameras and texting. Thus, we tended to delve into relationship issues and the pressures young women felt from young men. During these classes, I came to an understanding of how coarsened our culture had become. Where Playboy had been the currency of my age, young women were texting pictures of themselves in various stages of undress. Of course, photos given in trust became vehicles of revenge when couples fought and broke up. The prevalence of these photos became apparent to me when I learned a barter system had evolved: nude pictures in exchange for weed or alcohol. The Buddhist observation, "[l]ust is a vine that insinuates its tentacles into human emotions and sucks away the good sense of the mind until the mind withers" (170) seems to have been written exactly for our age. And the good sense did indeed wither. Some young men would text a prospective date and establish ahead of time "how far" she would go. An insufficiently cooperative date would find herself canceled. After a big dance or weekend of partying, wounded children returned to my classroom. Some would approach me to talk. Others withdrew, and seemed as though the joy of life had been stolen from them, which in fact was the case.

To the extent that I could, I taught the Principle and communicated the original commandment to not eat the fruit. Word certainly got back to the priests and nuns teaching at Newman but I never received any opposition for my heterodox materials and biblical interpretations on the subject of the Fall. In this battle, we shared the same commitments and stood on the same side.

As a young man, before I heard the Divine Principle, met True Parents, and joined our movement, I struggled mightily against sexual temptation following the traditional path and disciplines of Catholicism: I prayed and fasted; I served others and kept vigils; I humbled myself and gave all my possessions to the poor. Honestly, though sexual desire could on occasion be redirected, it was impossible to overcome. Not until I heard the Divine Principle could I obtain control of my physical impulses. One of the most clear dividing lines between my life as a Catholic and my life as a Unificationist has been the self control that naturally flows from studying and applying the Divine Principle and True Parents' words. Most importantly, as I mature in my faith, understanding and feeling the heart of God has changed how I see others and engage the world, and how others see and engage me.

I am tempted to close with a list of suggested actions, which is the lawyer in me: Daily Hoon Dok Hae; Always witness; Always share True Parents' words; Mind-Body unity; Cain-Abel harmony; Don't fight with your spouse, etc... These are all essential. But they will naturally follow if we first keep faithful to one single imperative: "Love God with all of your heart, all of your mind, and all of your soul!" So I will close with this: as a teacher, I constantly emphasized our True Father's words that "the kingdom of heaven is the world of heart." The way to cut the Gordian knot of sexual struggle is by coming--and dwell in--the Heart of God. When we know the sorrow and pain of our Heavenly Parent caused by humanity's sexual betrayal and brokenness, everything changes, absolutely.