

## My Unificationist Memoirs Chapter 101

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October 27, 2021



### Companions on the Way

One of the great blessings in life is to have a companion. We are relational beings and our natures can only emerge through give and take action. As Martin Buber noted in his seminal work, "I and Thou," how we relate determines the course of our spiritual lives and the health of the world. If we have give and take action centered on the other as "Thou," our original natures will emerge. On the other hand, if we "objectify" the other as "it," and have give and take action centered on anger, lust, greed, or jealousy, another nature will certainly arise and always one we will ultimately regret. As our True Father constantly and consistently reminded us over the entire span of his public ministry, "Hell is the place of regret."

When I was a junior in high school, a Jesuit priest and future Roman Catholic bishop, Father Carlos Sevilla, gave me Buber's book. His gift changed the course of my life because it gradually shifted my understanding, and thus my perspective, in a manner that radically altered how I engaged the world. The first shift came in my relationship with

nature. Human relations followed but proved more difficult, entrenched as they were in habit and sin.

Since my childhood, I have spent hours on the trail alone--at least physically. I have explored the coastal woodlands of North Carolina and the Great Smoky Mountains; hiked through German forests and in the Alps; wandered in the California desert and through the Rockies, the Sierra, and the Blue Ridge, along the Coastal Range, and on local Sonoma County trails--in all conditions: sunny, stormy, foggy, and snowy. I have survived blizzards and whiteouts. In one winter storm, I sheltered for the night among massive boulders as gale force winds ripped out ancient Pines like a child playing with sticks. I have been surprised by extreme heat and sudden lightning storms. Exposed on granite, I have gone from complacent to harried as the noonday sky darkened and bright flashes struck nearby peaks. Ever the Boy Scout, I have always been prepared with the proper gear to stay dry and the wilderness skill to remain safe. With our improved technology I travel forewarned and thus, a lot more carefully as I have aged. However, I still long for the unexpected and magnificent displays of natural power--"theophanies," what the Psalmist knew as the "Glory of God"--and the profound sense of humility they necessarily engender on the Way.



Though often alone, I have never been lonely; I have traversed many miles in communion with Jesus and True Father. Together, we have shared private moments of hidden joy, even ecstasy. There can be no better companions. In the midst of the Creation, my youthful discovery of the idea of "I and Thou" has, over the years, grown into the substantial reality of "giving and receiving."

Just as immersion in God's creation has worked wonders on me, so too has human companionship--though I must confess, not initially. In my final year of high school, having companions in nature corrupted my experience. We tended to withdraw to the woods to smoke weed or do psychedelics. When I went away to college at Marquette University, my philosophical roommate had a more wholesome view of camping and thus proved to be a much better companion. We retreated to the wilderness to gaze at stars and sit around a campfire to talk about our lives and purpose. Though these days, campfires in the Sierra have

become much less common, thankfully, late night conversations under the stars with a backpacking buddy have not.

Other companions on the way awaited me in the monastery. Though bound by the vow of "stability," which prevented the monks from removing themselves from the monastic grounds, we still had 1,200 acres over which to wander and stretch the "rule of silence." Set on land surveyed by George Washington around the time of the French and Indian War, the wings of the abbey cloister spread out from a house older than the American nation. Fields of alfalfa and Johnson grass flourished alongside the Shenandoah River at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains. As the summer slipped away and autumn storms blew, along the river became my favorite walking and meditation spot. Under the cloud darkened skies, the bright orange, yellow, and red leaves cast a reflected light against the gathering storm. Even at this moment, I can recollect the sense of awe I felt as I traversed the riverbank. During one of these walks (as I have earlier written) the spiritual world opened to me and I became aware of the terrible suffering experienced by dismounted Union cavalry trapped under withering artillery fire and musketry in a brief but bloody battle, after being ambushed by Confederates occupying the bluffs. Accompanied by one of the spirits--well before the older monks had told me about the skirmish--I learned the heart of the matter from a participant, a Union officer. The monks revered these souls and prayed for their liberation.



The monks have always remained my companions on the Way, as have the "great cloud of witnesses" I first discovered there.

Though meeting the Unification Movement felt like a rapture, it actually has been the ultimate continuation of the Way: the realization of the hopes and aspirations of all humanity in general, and with theological particularity, Roman Catholics and Christians. Paradoxically, it was at once the end and the beginning, the "Alpha and Omega." Dead to the "World" but born again, my companions became brothers and sisters committed to Heaven, cultivating the same heart and tradition. Daily we braved the elements, usually not on mountains but in small town parking lots or running door to door--and sometimes on small boats navigating vast and unruly waters. Even after an interlude of more than 40 years, when we meet each other, it is as though no time has passed and our hearts can freely meld. "Strong bond of heart" is more than a phrase we sing.

As deep and as enduring my bond of heart has been with brothers and sisters, my eternal companions, the ones who complete me and make me whole, are my spouse and my children. They are also my preferred backpacking companions. John Muir's "cathedral"--the ridges and peaks of the magnificent Sierra under the infinite starry night--has also been ours. Here, we shared most deeply with each other. Could it be that a creation "groaning in travail" gave birth to moments of joy that, with incremental effect, helped liberate God as well as enlivening, purifying, and renewing our hearts? When I first stepped onto the Way as a young man, I never could have imagined that the destination God designed and struggled to achieve throughout history, would be so close to my own dreams and desires: the embodiment of True Love

through the Marriage Blessing--and that the doorway to an eternity with God was through my wife and family. Each day, I am discovering how little of this reality I know, like the infinite night sky. And each day, I am energized by love and drawn deeper into an eternal mystery that is revealed in flashes like lightning on a peak. In those moments of light, all knowing becomes unknowing--I am left awestruck and with gratitude.



In closing, a Jewish hymn and prayer, composed in the Talmudic period, 3rd to 5th century, CE:

If....

If my lips could sing as many songs  
as there are waves in the sea:  
if my tongue could sing as many hymns  
as there are ocean billows:  
if my mouth  
filled the whole firmament with praise:  
if my face  
shone like the sun and moon together:  
if my hands  
were to hover in the sky like powerful eagles  
and my feet  
ran across mountains as swiftly as the deer,  
all that would not be enough  
to pay you fitting tribute,  
O Lord my God.

--- Elias Kopciowski, "Praying with the Jewish Tradition"