

The Merit of the Age (Or, Why I Am an Optimist)

David Balise
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What is this time in which we are living? The rapid changes taking place now are constantly in the news: globalization, the transforming effects of technology and communication advances, the looming possibilities of artificial intelligence, driverless cars, and the increasing ability of machines to do what used to be done by humans, to name a few.

But what about the internal side of this era? Unificationists have a dramatic insight here. *Divine Principle* explains that the great acceleration of external advances we are seeing has an internal cause, a “merit of the age.”

As *Divine Principle* says, “spiritual and intellectual levels have gradually been elevated due to the merit of the age,” “the merit of the age has increased in proportion to the foundation of heart,”

and “with the flow of history, humankind’s spirituality has become enlightened due to the merit of the age in the providence of restoration.”

We are probably much too close to this historic transformation to understand it very well; in time the changes we are living through will become much clearer. But it’s very helpful to have some kind of framework to understand, as best we can, the internal changes taking place, and our role in those changes.



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When I reflect on the work of the Unification movement and of Reverend and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon (referred to by Unificationists as Father and Mother, or True Parents), I find it helpful to think of it in three broad areas. Together, I believe these three areas represent substantial fruits of the merit of the age. In some areas the changes are more visible, while in other areas they are still mostly hidden. Time will show their true worth.

Overcoming Satan and Establishing God’s Lineage and Sovereignty

This first area is the core of Rev. and Mrs. Moon’s activities and we are all well aware of it. I won’t say more except to list some of the accomplishments:

- Blessing of True Parents, 1960
- Marriage Blessings starting with 36 couples in 1960 and expanding to millions worldwide
- Defeat of communism, God’s biggest headache, mostly complete by 1989-91
- Surrender of Satan to God, 1999
- Coronation of God’s Kingship, 2001
- “I have accomplished everything,” 2012
- Foundation Day, 2013

Note that except for the defeat of communism, in which Father Moon and the Unification movement played a widely acknowledged key role, these accomplishments are not easily recognized and at this point can be understood mostly by faith. Even among Unificationists there are different understandings about the meaning of some of these events, but we believe they are substantial and are a hidden cause behind much of what is happening today.

Although this core area of True Parents’ work is mostly unrecognized, there are other aspects of their ministry that can be more readily observed. Their accomplishments in these other areas are substantial and give great hope for the future. Reflecting on these results can also lead to a better understanding of who True Parents are.

Reuniting the Family of God

This second area of their work inspires me the most. *Divine Principle* explains that Satan has repeatedly turned the human family against one another, and even God has needed to make divisions between “Cain and Abel” in order to advance the providence. The mission of the Messiah is to successfully complete the

Cain and Abel process, and then to reestablish unity at every level, healing the divisions that have arisen throughout history.

Until 1988 Father had to focus much of his energy on defeating communism, the worldwide Cain. But beginning in 1988 with the launch of “headwing” ideology, and then for the last 24 years of his life, every new project he launched was dedicated to reconciliation, unification and peace. The accomplishments of these projects are bold and stunning:

The “Unification Church”: In 1954 Father named our movement “The Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity.” As he later wrote in his autobiography: “Unification represents my purpose in bringing about God’s ideal world. Unification is not union. Union is when two things come together. Unification is when two become one.”

Peace and harmony between nations: Father says that when God looks at the world, there are no lines, no “borders.” We are all one human family. Father said that we must put the world before our own nation, rather than think of our own nation first. More and more people are realizing the truth of this, although recently there has been a backlash of nationalism and self-interest. Mother Moon’s creation of the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace is a new initiative to help government leaders work together beyond their own nations.

Reconciliation and forgiveness between religions: Father promoted interreligious dialogue long before it was popular, and pushed for reconciliation and understanding between members of all different religions. He also called for healing and harmony within religions, such as between Protestant and Catholic Christians. Father proposed the establishment of an “Abel UN” of religious leaders to help resolve these deep-rooted conflicts. This goal remains elusive, but the need for interreligious understanding, cooperation and reconciliation has never been greater.

Unity and brotherhood between races: Father said that God is color-blind. And he called for more than just tolerance: True Parents promoted the idea of interracial marriages long before they became common, while they were still illegal in many places. (As shown in the recent movie “Loving,” the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1967 that bans on interracial marriage were unconstitutional, but interracial marriage did not become legal in all 50 states until 2000. Now one in seven new marriages in the U.S. is interracial).

Promotion of equal rights and the equal value of men and women: *Divine Principle* boldly proclaims, in the first section of “The Principle of Creation,” that “God is the harmonious union of masculinity and femininity.” To emphasize this harmonious union, Mother has asked us to refer to God as “Heavenly Parent.” Furthermore, as Genesis 1 states, God created humankind in the image of God, male and female, and Father taught that the highest level of spirit world is where couples, not individuals, live because only couples can fully resemble God. In recognition of this, the highest sacrament of our movement, the Blessing, is given out by couples, not just by male leaders as in many other religions.

Harmony of science and religion: Father started the International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences (ICUS) in 1972, a groundbreaking idea Mother is now reviving as the Hyo Jeong International Foundation for the Unity of the Sciences.

Cooperation between followers of different political ideologies: In 1987, Father announced that the ideology of our movement is neither right-wing nor left-wing, but “headwing.” He said that neither extreme had all the answers, and it was critical for people from all political perspectives to find ways to cooperate and work together. Again, Father’s idea went way beyond tolerance; later he even said the children of the Bushes and the Clintons should get married.

Reconciliation between Jews, Christians and Muslims: The roots of this conflict go back 4,000 years, to the unreconciled relationship between Abraham’s two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. To address this, in 2003 Father launched the Middle East Peace Initiative (MEPI). He asked leaders of each faith to forgive one another and take positive steps towards reconciliation. He asked Christian leaders to humble themselves and take the first step: “take down the cross.” Father recognized that this symbol had become very divisive, and is a symbol of pain for many people and even for God.

Reunification of North and South Korea: Among all the conflicts of the world, perhaps this is the one most painful to Father personally. Father tried many different approaches to resolve it. In 1991, he even met and embraced Kim Il Sung, who decades ago imprisoned him in a death camp. He started economic joint ventures in North Korea, such as Pyeongwha Motors. He tried to organize a peace march from the South to the North. Unifying efforts are resisted by the North as it clings to power, but also by the South, which fears the economic costs of reunification. Sadly, these selfish viewpoints have fed an escalating tension that now makes the border between North and South Korea perhaps the most likely starting point for a major new war.

As a Peace-Loving Global Citizen: The title of Father’s autobiography clearly describes how Father saw

himself, and gives us an ideal that we should all aspire to.

Cheon Il Guk: As Father explained, the name of God's ideal world simply means "two become one." By centering on true love, we can make this real.

All of these projects have the common goal of reuniting the family of God. We can now see substantial progress being made in most of them. Of course the progress isn't just coming from us; many people of goodwill worldwide are striving for reconciliation and resolution of various divisions. It's the merit of the age; God is able to work more and more freely, and people are tuned into this process to a greater and greater degree. But we can be proud of being on the cutting edge of God's effort to reunite the human family.

Father said our Unification movement could never be divided, because we would always follow whoever loved and served the most. Sadly and ironically, our movement is currently divided. But the accumulated merit of the age gives me great hope we will find our way beyond the current intra-religious strife, and back to the core ideal of Cheon Il Guk. We simply need to focus on how we can love and serve more.



Mrs. Hak Ja Han Moon speaks at the Youth for Peace Rally in Bangkok, Thailand on June 12, 2017.

The Quiet Revolution from Selfishness to Unselfishness

This third area of True Parents' ministry is a simple principle that underlies all their work and teaching. Of course this concept didn't originate with them, but they have boldly promoted and lived it, with an uncompromising public mindset.

"Follow your conscience." "The conscience always strives toward goodness and unselfishness."

"Give, forget you have given, and then give again." This simple teaching needs no explanation.

Sacrifice for the sake of others: As Rev. Moon said at Washington Monument in 1976: "God's formula to restore man is for us to become God-like. This means that we must become completely selfless and public minded. Each of us must become a person who is able to sacrifice himself for the sake of others. Such a selfless and public minded person will prosper because he is the image of God. The selfish, self-centered person will decline because he is the opposite of God. This is God's rule."

America's blessings are not just for America: Also from Father's Washington Monument speech: "The United States of America, transcending race and nationality, is already a model of the unified world. She must realize that the abundant blessings which God has been pouring upon this land are not just for America, but are for the children of God throughout the world. Upon the foundation of world Christianity, America must exercise her responsibility as a world leader and the chosen nation of God."

The greater good: Father emphasized that the individual exists for the sake of the family, the family for the tribe, the tribe for the nation, and the nation for the sake of the world. Therefore, when we actively put the greater good before our own self-interest, we find that ironically we prosper as well.

It often seems that living this sacrificial way is foolish. In the past, people have often given lip service to this type of idealism even if they didn't actually practice it, but the new American president has bluntly stated "from now on it's going to be America first." Some other nations are following this example and becoming more self-centered as well. I don't think Rev. Moon would approve of this at all. Are we backing away from the ideal Father called us to?

People may temporarily slide backwards, but too much has already been accomplished for the merit of the age to be lost. And if we look behind the headlines, we see countless daily acts of selflessness from people at every level of society, all over the globe. "The quiet revolution from selfishness to unselfishness" is well underway. It is quiet; it doesn't get the publicity it deserves. But it is making steady progress and cannot be undone.

God's Will is absolute. If people make selfish choices, God's Will can be delayed, but it will still be realized. So every day we have a choice. "What am I going to do, today, to live up to God's ideal? How will I promote reconciliation? How will I serve others? How will I share God's highest truth?"

May we all be inspired to make the best choices possible, every day.

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