

Editorial: Rev. Moon, Rest in Peace - His sense of mission remains the guiding light of The Washington Times

September 2, 2012
The Washington Times

The Rev. Sun Myung Moon died in Korea on Sunday at the age of 92. He founded The Washington Times in 1982, and through it maintained a strong voice at the highest levels of national and international affairs. Over 30 years, the preeminent challenges of the day have changed, from the Communist threat during the Cold War to the contemporary dangers posed by suffocating debt. Throughout it all, The Washington Times has remained constant in articulating the importance of the values of faith, family, freedom and service to serve as guiding lights to help the country and world navigate the rough waters. These were the guiding lights ignited by Rev. Moon.

Rev. Moon put not only his treasure – but his heart – into this newspaper. Reflecting on this commitment and the central role The Washington Times plays in the nation’s capital, many curious observers asked and some critics speculated on his motivation. All the while, the simple answer was standing there for everyone to see in those four guiding principles. As the summer of 2012 turns into autumn, the newspaper founded by Rev. Moon sits on the cusp of its fourth decade. Its *raison d’être* is relevant now more than ever, and this institution stands as a monumental legacy to its founder. Because of the timelessness of this message to the future, and to honor the man responsible for it, this is an opportune time to review the mission and how it developed over the passing days.

The most direct, recent public statement of the paper’s mission is the Reverend Sun Myung Moon’s May 21, 2002 speech, “Freedom, Family and Faith: The Role of the Media in the 21st Century.” Rev. Moon said he founded The Washington Times in 1982 “as an expression of [his] love for America and to fulfill the Will of God, who seeks to establish America in His Providence.” At that time, the Post was the only major newspaper in town, which meant that “the capital of the Free World had a limited perspective on news, issues and policy, which ignored the danger of communism and its threat to the entire world at that time.” Rev. Moon believed that “there needed to be a newspaper that had the philosophical and ideological foundation to encourage and enlighten the people and leaders of America.” Thus from the beginning, the paper was intended to be a beacon of enlightenment, not merely a source of information. It was this commitment to the greater calling of freedom – and the shared belief that America is a shining city on a hill – that made The Washington Times President Ronald Reagan’s favorite newspaper.

In its first decade, the mission of The Washington Times was to “provide leadership through thoughtful commentary and objective news and information to make clear the harsh reality of communist tyranny.” At the time, at the dawn of the Reagan era, few analysts expected the Soviet Union to collapse any time soon. Moscow was at the height of its imperial power, with the communist ethic taking over in countries around the world from Eastern Europe and Africa to Asia and Latin America. The conventional wisdom still sought accommodation with the Soviets, and the liberal establishment howled in 1983 when President Reagan described America’s most dangerous adversary as the “evil empire.” Like Reagan, Rev. Moon drew attention to what many in Washington would rather ignore: that the Cold War was at base a moral struggle between two competing, mutually exclusive values systems. The conflict could not be won without acknowledging and reaffirming this fact. This war between two opposing values systems couldn’t be settled through accommodation but had to be won through an all-out showdown. President Reagan drew the line in the sand; The Washington Times helped to deliver the message of freedom.

In 1992, with the collapse of global communism, this first mission to defeat the exponential growth of tyranny was accomplished. Rev. Moon then defined a new mission, in the context of the challenges of the “Culture War,” to “promote ethics and moral values in our society.” In this way, he was acknowledging the most important function of the conservative movement: to combat and counter the most dangerous threats of the day. Society isn’t saved by continuing to fight yesterday’s wars after they are over. A movement must move on and adapt to continue to be relevant and to serve the needs of the times. The 1990s saw a breakdown of family values, the rise of accepted levels of sexual content, profanity and violence in the media, and a general breakdown in public morality. Sexual promiscuity became the norm at alarmingly earlier ages, unborn babies were aborted by the millions and divorce was no longer taboo. If America was to survive, Americans had to decide if they still believed in anything anymore. Thus, the Cold War gave way to the Culture War. As the external threat receded, the enemy within came to the fore. The Washington Times became “a newspaper that helped people understand the importance of strong moral, family values.” As we look around at the collapse of the family today and the onslaught of attacks on traditional morals that come from statehouses across the country and even from the U.S. Capitol itself, it is painfully obvious that this is still a fight that needs to be waged with more intensity than ever.

In the paper’s third and current decade, its mission has been “to emphasize and support spiritual values that are based on the faith of each individual.” After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, discussion of the role of faith in public life took center stage. A misguided belief arose that the Judeo-Christian world had to bow to the sensitivities of fringe fanatics in order to combat radicalism. This was aided by the increasing secularization of American culture and hostility to religion in politics. As recent legislative battles have revealed, the federal government is now actively forcing religious institutions to go against the dictates of their faith or face severe consequences. This includes forcing religious medical facilities to provide abortion, contraceptive and other services against their will. As a recent editorial in this newspaper explained, “This is the latest salvo in an ongoing battle over religious issues such as the banning of cultural manifestations of belief like the 10 Commandments in courtrooms or manger scenes in front of firehouses. What ties the tussles together is [the government’s] mission to force faith out of the public realm.” This is another call to arms. As Rev. Moon stated, “The media must stand at the very forefront in the defense of human dignity and freedom and the crusade against all forms of injustice.”

Facing such a danger against America’s “first freedom” – the freedom of religion and the freedom of individual conscience – the third mission of The Washington Times to defend spiritual values was a natural successor to those of the previous two decades: “Freedom at the world level, moral and ethical values at the family level, and faith at the individual level.” Rev. Moon called these “the three great imperatives for our lives and for the media as well.” He said that “freedom, family values and faith are America’s most fundamental spiritual virtues,” and that “the reason The Washington Times is called ‘America’s newspaper’ is that it leads the way in putting America’s philosophical tradition into practice.” This profound responsibility continues as attacks on religious freedom escalate and threaten to force belief underground. It is more important than ever not to give up the fight. Polls show what those behind this newspaper have always believed: There is hope for the future when there is hope in God, a foundation of faith that has always bolstered Americans during times of crisis. According to Pew, 67 percent of adults, “say it is important for the president to have strong religious beliefs.” That’s just one indication of how deep America’s spiritual roots run.

As a newspaper, what has been going on in “The Fourth Estate” has served as a backdrop to these ongoing ideological, philosophical and existential showdowns. When locking horns over the meaning of life and the purpose of humanity in the world, how a message is communicated is as important as what that statement is. The news media has undergone a revolution of change in recent years, with each period of adaptation raising new questions about the efficacy of the industry. No doubt, in some ways, the

medium can become the message. Many of our competitors are fascinated with all the emerging technology of news dissemination, placing primary value on the latest, most fashionable means for distributing content and focusing less on the content itself. But as Rev. Moon said in 2002, “in the midst of this quantity, there needs to be responsibility for the quality of people’s lives.” He said that “while the media can provide all the facts, they also have the responsibility to provide values to prevent confusion and to provide leadership and direction, especially today when the entire world is flooded with news and information.” Technology is only a means to an end, not an end itself. It is important to be at the cutting edge of new technologies, but regardless of how we reach people, if we lose sight of the mission it will be a meaningless exercise. This gets to the ultimate question about why Rev. Moon concentrated so much effort on The Washington Times. “The electronic and print media are the most powerful and influential means of communication the world has ever known,” he explained at the 10th World Media Conference in 1989. “I founded this important organization to promote the spirit of truth.”

Faith. Family. Freedom. Service. The conservative values that have guided The Washington Times also serve as a poignant memorial to the wisdom of the man whose foresight and courage sounded the charge to fight the battles of the day. As Neil Bush, chairman of Points of Light and son of President George H.W. Bush, told The Washington Times, “I got to know [Rev. Moon] as a man whose heart was focused on bringing together people of different faiths to bridge divides. His call on people of faith to serve others is an important legacy.” Rev. Moon may have passed from this Earth, but his values, his legacy, his sense of mission are alive and strong. It is his vision that continues to provide the motivating force for this newspaper, and The Washington Times is committed to continuing the fight for what is right that he laid out. There is plenty of work yet to be done to make the world a better, more humane, more peaceful place for all of God’s sons and daughters. It is with reverence and respect that these pages offer a profound thank you for the support, direction and sense of purpose provided by Rev. Moon. May he rest in peace.

The Washington Times