

“Noah”: Reinterpreting Essential Truths in a Modern Context

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April 24, 2014



Since its release, the film “Noah” has generated a wide variety of responses. Reviews range from declarations of triumph to the dismissal of abject failure. This is not so unusual, but it does bring into focus the contrast between perspectives that prevail over religious topics in the world today.

As Unificationists, we have a strong desire to see enlightenment in the world. We know there is a much deeper level to God’s message to the world as it has been presented in history over

millennia. We also know God is alive, that God can speak, and that the spirit world is constantly active in its interactions with humanity.

What can we learn from the film “Noah”? The recent film review by Andrew Wilson points directly to some potential learnings, in his reflection on the limitations of patriarchal religion and how the film highlights these. From a slightly different perspective, “Noah” also points the way to how Unificationists might present the value of the Principle in ways the current generation can accept and benefit from.

As a film, “Noah” is powerfully appealing in presentation. The special effects are top-notch, the location work and settings are spectacular, and the acting capable. There are many elements that reflect unique, cutting-edge forms of creativity, which in and of themselves are highly attractive to today’s generation (Gen Y and Gen X).



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From an educational perspective, one great value of the film lies in how it actually presents the Noah story. To do this, it uses myth and archetype on one hand, and tangible, palpable relationships on the other. While the opening sequences suggest that the film might actually be an exercise in “The Lord of the Rings” meets the Bible, such is the language and context in which today’s generation relates to film and story-telling, and in essence, scripture has always been about telling stories and learning lessons from them.

In this sense, the film is a reworking of the essence of the story using both a medium and concepts relevant to our time. This reworking opens the way for the viewer to think of Noah and his relationship with God in high, mythic and archetypal terms (e.g., the dream sequences, the way Noah receives his

revelations, use of the expression “Creator”). It promotes a perspective that is less than literal, but which is simultaneously mythic and personal.

Despite that old-style religionists want to cling to understandings of scripture that applied to the 2,000 or the 6,000 years leading up to the Cheon Il Guk era, such literal and dogmatic understandings have less and less power to convince a world that has evolved a highly sophisticated level of intellect and reason.

The fact is, the ignorance that permitted a literal interpretation of the Bible is a thing of the past, well and truly buried by the reality of scientific learning in the 21st century. Indeed, much of the conflict that arises between religious people and non-religious people around the world has its roots in the fact that while many religious people inherently know that the stories of scripture have important and critical lessons for humanity, they are often unable to find the essence of these stories and express that essence in forms that harmonize with this generation’s intellectual understanding of the world and universe in which we live.

In this sense, Divine Principle (DP) and Unificationism are actually a form of super-science/technology. They allow us unparalleled insight into the human condition, into God’s condition, and into our place and role in the universe. They provide a key for us to move beyond the superficial dimensions of religious and scriptural history to tap into the essence.

Unfortunately, as Unificationists, one outstanding problem we have is our lack of success in sharing this superior science/technology with humanity. While the fundamentals of DP and Unification Thought hold the keys to resolving humanity’s pressing and lasting problems, we ourselves have not sufficiently learned how to apply the technology (consider the current state of our community around the world) or present the essence in ways that are digestible by the rest of the world. This doesn’t mean the science/technology is wrong. It simply means that we haven’t grown enough in our personal application, as individuals, families, and communities.

Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that old-style religion is a thing of the past. The new style is a life of heart and spirit, based on the fulfillment of human responsibility via relationships with God, with others, with creation, in understanding, not in ignorance. Unificationists must grow internally into a maturity that complements the external maturity that humanity is experiencing today, and we must learn to share the essence of Unificationism in ways that resonate with the current generation.

In the film, one concern that arises as the story progresses is Noah’s obsession with destroying humans and saving the animals. Noah thought that God needed all humans, including his family, to die. At first glance, to the viewer, this idea potentially emerges as a very strong indictment of God and those who follow God, because Noah’s position is so markedly severe, narrow and intolerant. If left on this course, the film would actually become an embodiment of humanistic and anti-God views.

But, if one perseveres with the film, following it to the end, one finds the opposite is true. The final piece falls into place when Ham has gone off, unable to bear the breakdown of his relationship with his father, Noah (This presentation of the split between Noah and Ham rings true to a modern psyche – while the Bible talks of curses, we recognize that relationships are more real than curses, and that a bad relationship becomes, in the end, a curse). After Ham has left, the wife of Shem, Noah’s daughter-in-law, comes to Noah, and in the exchange, she states “God gave that choice to you. He chose you to decide, whether humanity was worthy to live or not... and you chose mercy, and love.”

This powerfully reaffirms the element of human responsibility in determining the completion of God’s will. It also shows how a person can be misguided by his religious beliefs and more external thoughts, and yet, when deeply searching in his own heart, in the inner realm where God resides, the inner mind – the original mind – will guide and win out. It reaffirms and encourages its viewers to consider and decide:

is humanity worthy of living? It shows that Noah, in the end, decided “yes.” It holds up a model for viewers to follow.

The fact is, humanity is not immune to religious blindness or being misled by beliefs winning out over the inner heart. From one perspective, this is the opposite of what True Father stands for. True Father was nothing if not completely committed to his own inner realization of truth as God showed it to him. True Father was not bound by external belief or doctrine but by his inner reality. His projected beliefs reflected that inner reality, not some adherence to doctrinal understanding.

TF taught us to recognize many of those inner truths, by clarifying and illuminating them externally through the DP and his teaching. Such teachings, however, can only be effective as an invitation to follow his path, to follow the way inside to find what and who we are, in relationship to God and others. Religious truths are a help, not the aim. They need to be revised when their usefulness has outworn. Father invites us to walk to the land where we transcend religion and religious belief where we reside in real, tangible relationship with God, with ourselves, and with creation.

This is also what the film “Noah” does. It reinterprets the scriptural story in terms understandable and comprehensible to the current generation. By presenting the story in a mythic, almost fantastic format, it frees modern audiences to consider the underlying implications rather than the literal, superficial interpretations that have dominated the past.

While the film diverges significantly from the literal biblical story, this is not a problem. Rather, it is a clear expression of how humanity needs to revisit our old myths, and give them new life. The truth is not in the words, but in what the words seek to convey. In the end, as Unificationists, how do we explain to the world the Fall and the story of Adam and Eve? Whether the story is literally true or not, the essential content itself is clearly powerful and important: God, children, angels, corruption of love, immaturity, failure of responsibility during growth, destruction of relationships. It doesn't help to hold dogmatically to details that one cannot prove anyway. What matters is what we learn, and how we practice it.

“Noah” is an example of God speaking today in terms the world can digest. It points the way for Unificationists as to how we might better conceive of presenting deeper, underlying truths to a world that needs a new perspective on everything, from the value of the material world to the value of religious scripture.

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Photo at top: Director Darren Aronofsky and star Russell Crowe on the set of “Noah.” (Credit: Niko Tavernise, Paramount Pictures)