

Reimagining: Getting Back on the Bus

Jeff Kingsley
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The red carpet had been unraveled, and the enthusiastic crowd greeted the bus as it rolled onto the Belvedere holy ground last summer. As it came closer, I could read the words clearly emblazoned across the front, “God’s Hope for America: Remember · Revive · Reimagine.”

Reading those words made my mind wander back to a time when I was 24 years old and was listening intently to a lecturer, not much older than I, speak about how God had intended the world to be a much better place — a place in which God’s love and heart would be at the center of all societal interactions (i.e., political, economic, artistic, medical, etc.) rather than a never-ending quest for more money or greater power and prestige. I was so inspired by those words because several months earlier I had taken a leave of absence from my

graduate program in search of such a group, and I knew then that I wanted to become part of this noble crusade.

Now, seeing this bus, 34 years later, I wondered if, through all the difficulties and disappointments, both on a personal and institutional (church) level, this vision were still possible to achieve. And if we should keep striving to achieve it, how can we “reimagine” in order to accomplish that?

As part of a “reimagining” process, I think we need to begin by asking certain questions. How can we present a consistent message to the public which reflects our unique Unificationist perspective? What could someone who walks into one of our churches for the first time see, feel and experience which could not be found anywhere else? How can we express our message in a way which will inspire more people inside and outside (even those who have left) our Church to want to take an active role in our Movement?



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The distinctive message which I believe we should clearly and consistently present to the public is that God’s desire, from the very beginning, has been to realize the kingdom on earth in a substantial way. Reverend Moon emphasized that message in many of the early holy songs that he wrote, such as “Garden of Restoration.”

That song was written on a label of one of the toxic ammonium nitrate bags he was forced to carry in the death camp at Hungnam. Despite the death and devastation around him, he spoke about a resplendent future, a “true garden in bloom,” a “heavenly land” in which “we shall always live.”

In the footsteps of our Founders, we would present ourselves as the messengers of this vision of hope in a world lacking such vision, as people “filled with perfume of the heart” who are endeavoring to “spread his glorious joy.” We would emphasize that all of our teachings (i.e., Three Blessings) and activities (i.e., Marriage Blessing, symposiums, etc.) revolve around making this a reality.

Based on that clear and consistent message, let’s “reimagine” the type of experience a first-time visitor might have when encountering our Church center and/or Movement for the first time. This is what a tour in this hypothetical Church center might be like.

First, we could take them to the Founders’ room. We might, in keeping with our central message, make this room into a luxurious garden room, with comfortable chairs, waterfalls, beautiful fauna and flora thriving and growing throughout. We could explain that this unique and beautiful room was a reflection of our Founders’ vision, and that we envision the whole world one day in such a light (“true garden in bloom”). A garden metaphor would be very apropos because Rev. Moon had spoken about how, after Foundation Day, we would be living in a time, providentially speaking, of reentering the original garden before the fall.

More specifically, we could then show a blueprint of the “true society” by comparing it to a “flower” in which the “petals” were the individual sectors such as world religions, arts, architecture, education, health, psychology, etc., and the “core” was God’s truth, beauty and goodness. In my hypothetical or

“reimagined” Church center, the Founders’ room would be like the “core,” and the rooms surrounding it highlighting each of the sectors, the “petals.”

The first “petal”/room we might explore in the tour could be called the “God” room. Pictures of the great founders of world religion and philosophy would grace the walls (i.e., Confucius, Buddha, Socrates, etc.). In this room we would discuss our concept of God as male and female and the implications of that for us as individuals and as a society, along with how the major religions are like a “family” in which different aspects of God’s personality are reflected in each religion. We could have lectures and discussions led by our Unificationist professors as well as other first and second generation with a passion for this.

Then we could take them to an arts room in which first and second generation musicians and artists would share (physically or digitally) our concept of the arts and some of the projects they are doing in line with that vision. They could highlight our vision of what the arts would be like if they inspired people to live lives of truth, beauty and goodness rather than glorifying a world of dishonesty, perversity and self-centeredness.

We might hear from Unificationist filmmakers who would draw the contrast between what movies are emphasizing today (2015 releases such as “Home Sweet Hell,” “The Hateful Eight,” “Lethal Seduction,” and “Hot Tub Time Machine 2”) and the types of movies which they and other like-minded individuals are producing which could have a more positive impact on society. We could also talk and lead discussions about legendary writers (i.e., Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy) and what they can teach us about becoming virtuous people and creating a virtuous society.



The “God’s Hope for America” tour bus at the Grand Canyon in June 2014

We might then venture over to an architecture room in which our first and second generation Unification architects would share our vision of future cities and towns. This vision might include building houses in such a way as to promote family unity, and organizing town centers that would promote relationship and unity within the community. Then we might visit our education room in which some of our education luminaries could speak about our philosophy of educating the “whole” person, mind, body and spirit, and how we are putting our vision for education into practice in Unification-led schools throughout the country.

And we could spend some time in the medical/health room in which we would have discussions about how it might be possible to combine the best of both alternative and standard medical practices as they are reflected in Eastern and Western medicine. Based on these discussions, we could develop cutting-edge conferences in which we could invite leading practitioners in both communities to brainstorm together ways of improving the overall efficacy of healthcare which is provided in our country. The purpose of these conferences would be more than just providing photo ops but would be intended to have a real impact on society.

We could keep going from room to room highlighting headwing politics, business, psychology, science/technology, etc., from a Unificationist perspective. The point is that we would be presenting our

distinctive message to a world in which such a vision is sorely lacking.

Whether we made these specific rooms or not (it doesn't hurt to dream), all of our Church centers would be actively engaged on a daily basis in discussing and promoting activities relating to building the kingdom on earth substantially in all these areas of human endeavor. And this would have the potential to hold the interest of some of the first and second generation who may not be currently involved in Church activities (or have left) as well as some non-members who may not "fit into" the standard theologically-based witnessing framework. From an idealistic standpoint, rather than dividing through schisms, we would come together to focus on presenting our vision to the world for how we would like to transform society to fulfill God's dream.

In his essay last year on this Blog, "Movement, Church or Business?," John Redmond laments that we are lacking a "clear sense of direction and purpose." He poses the question, "What is the larger mission or vision that pulls all these elements together to let them work as one?" While there are certainly many elements involved, I believe this worldview-type approach could go a long way in fitting this bill. It would strengthen and add to (not subtract from) our current activities while potentially plugging up some significant gaps in our current approach. To the extent we are not doing this now, we are like a "sleeping giant."

My hope is that from now going forward, our Church/Movement will climb back on that bus (at least figuratively) and heed the call to "reimagine" where we are going and the way to get there. The world is waiting for us!

Jeff Kingsley currently works with UPF in New Jersey and would like to pursue, with like-minded individuals, a Unification worldview ministry. He has previously helped organize conferences on "Headwing Theory and Policy" and the "Interface between Religion, Science and Technology."

Photo at top: FFWPU-USA's "God's Hope for America" tour bus in Tempe, AZ in July 2014.