

Should Unificationists Follow the Mormon and Jehovah's Witnesses Model?

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Mormon missionaries

Most growing churches possess an evangelical mission and congregational polity (self-governance). Churches that are not growing tend to be those with hierarchical structures. For this and other reasons, our churches today should adopt an evangelical mission and congregational polity. But, it behooves me to note exceptions: churches that are growing with centralized structure, specifically the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah's Witnesses. Why should our churches not adopt a vertical model like theirs?



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Let me briefly describe their model. They strongly promote evangelism. They have an assimilation system and excellent evangelical and educational material provided by the central office. Their worship services are standardized. Almost all their leadership is unpaid. They are family-friendly and teach a high standard of morality. Advancement in the hierarchy is by appointment.

What's good about this model is the culture of evangelism, clear membership standards, excellent evangelical material, lay ownership, ministry by volunteers, family friendliness and high moral expectations.

There are two obvious discontinuities with our Unification Church system: we have seminaries and paid clergy; they do not. But those points are not essential. What is essentially wrong with their model is that it is sectarian. They have embedded their message and sacrament into their organization, and admit of no salvation outside their organization. The Unification Church could easily follow this path, but that would be a betrayal of Rev. Moon's vision. For that reason, I would reject their model.

The salvation of the Second Advent, the Holy Marriage Blessing, transcends our sect. That doesn't mean we shouldn't welcome people to join the Unification Church. May it grow and prosper! But one need not join the Unification Church in order to receive the salvation of the Second Advent, although you need to be part of *some* faith community. The salvation we offer is an in-breaking of God comparable to that of Jesus Christ, for which every faith tradition is a preparation and which every faith community can house.

What allows the Unificationist message to accomplish this? Let me draw a parallel with the Gospel of Christ transcending Judaic law. Christ's message fit every culture equally, in that every culture served, or could serve, as a foundation for a person to accept Christ. The message was, "through Jesus you will come to God, no matter your religion." This is True Parents' message, no matter your religion.



Jehovah's Witnesses

The Messiah redefines the playing field. "I came not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it," Jesus said. By establishing his teachings as those of "parents," nay, *True Parents*, Rev. Moon redefined the playing field.

Now, most religions agree that parenting is good, and some religions may claim that they fulfill true parenting. We would say, yes, we applaud that, but at least be honest enough to admit that it was Rev. and Mrs. Moon who shined a light on parenting, provided the definition of it, and claimed to substantiate it — which you now unearth in your teachings and which no one in your tradition ever claimed to substantiate. So too, the Pharisees pointed out that most of Jesus' positive teaching was already in their Scriptures, but no Pharisee ever stood up and proclaimed to have the Father dwelling in him.

Was Jesus the incarnation of the Word, as an individual male? Are Rev. and Mrs. Moon the incarnation of the Word as husband, wife, and parents? In neither case was, or is, the answer undisputed. Was the context of Adam and Eve's emergence in the Garden of Eden completely ideal? As the Divine Principle teaches, the answer lies in the human portion of responsibility.



The band at a Hillsong Church in Copenhagen

The Unification Church can choose to transcend sect-status. I'm being visionary and talking out of the logic of our teachings. Were the Jehovah's Witnesses and Latter Day Saints to decentralize and dismantle their vertical structure, their communities would merge with Christianity. I believe if the Unification

Church decentralizes—maintaining the evangelical mission and congregational polity, it would be able to equip and empower clergy of all faiths to carry forward the Blessing ministry. This would bring out in stark relief the work of God through the Second Advent, something that, despite the mass weddings, remains hidden. Once we get the authentic Blessing out of the Unificationist ghetto, it will transform the world. Rev. Moon's goal was never to create a new religion, but to bring God to the earth through the family.

Would this be to dissolve our church? First of all, for it to happen, our church needs to become a whole lot stronger, in order to provide the model of the blessing community and to establish universal standards that would qualify clergy of diverse faiths to minister the blessing. Long-term, I would look for a culture of peace in which all traditions blossom as communities of vital families celebrating the Blessing. Rev. and Mrs. Moon will be honored, and so will the saints and sages of all traditions whom Rev. and Mrs. Moon themselves honored. But most of all, all parents and grandparents will be honored. God will be honored.

In summary, the Unification Church should not adopt a Latter Day Saints or Jehovah's Witness-style polity because it makes of us a sect. We need to infuse the wine of all religions, knowing that the *eschaton* features the disappearance of all religions, including our own. As *World Scripture*, one of our eight textbooks, shows, the great majority of the world's religious teachings express the Principle. The critical bridge is the contextualization of the Blessing in other faith communities. Our vertical structure suppresses this because it embeds the sacrament into our ecclesiology. We need a big-tent ecclesiology based on what is implicit in the Blessing itself: a community of Blessed families with leadership equipped and empowered to minister the Blessing authentically.

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