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**MITTELBERG'S VALUE #1:  
PEOPLE MATTER TO GOD**

The first point is also the most simple. Evangelism begins with knowing in our hearts that each and every person matters to God. Because God loves everyone, we should love them as well. "This belief—that all people matter to God—is the hardest one to fully absorb into our value system," Mittelberg writes. We say we agree with this value, but we don't practice it. What we do with every other concept in his book, he says, will depend directly on the degree to which we own and apply this first value, the reality that people matter to God, in the very core of our being.

Rate yourself, says Mittelberg. Look at your calendar and checkbook. They will tell you where you are investing your time and money. Are you investing your time and money trying to reach people outside the family of God? Or are you doing everything *but* that? One is reminded of Jim Collins's conclusion in *Good to Great*, that the "stop doing" list is more important than the "to do" list.<sup>23</sup> In order to spend more time with unchurched people, one needs to spend less time with church people. So healthy churches invest in getting their members out into the community, to rub shoulders with new people.

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When you start to rearrange your life, or your church's life, the priority of saving lost people will be tested immediately. The question naturally arises, whether aloud or below the surface: what is really important to my church? Other values start competing with and crowding out witnessing. The most difficult ones to deal with are the habits of one's own church, the routines that we associate with godliness, the offerings that we think will get us to heaven. The tasks are endless; they multiply themselves. The problem is, these all happen inside church walls, out of sight and out of mind to the unchurched world. The response of people who have heard of Reverend Moon is, "Is he still alive?" or "I heard he's very sick." Back in 1976, I introduced myself to a lot of people in parking lots as "Tyler," and one gentleman deep in the West Virginia coal country responded, "Tyler Moon?" Rev. Moon was definitely alive back then, because we were out there. When I asked a Jehovah's Witnesses member this spring why his church is growing, his answer was simple: "We're out there."

People matter to God, and so they should matter to us. The Divine Principle is eloquent on this matter. In its General Introduction we read that Unification believers have a truth that "should be able to reveal the Heart of God: His heart of joy at the time of creation; the broken heart He felt when humankind, His children whom He could not abandon, rebelled against Him; and His heart of striving to save them throughout the long course of history."<sup>24</sup> Cain did not matter to Abel. If Abel had loved, valued and served Cain, would Cain have killed him? Esau mattered to Jacob. Reverend Moon teaches that Jacob spent his 21 years in Haran longing to reunite with Esau. All

<sup>22</sup> Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000). I have shifted the order in which Mittelberg presents these values.

<sup>23</sup> Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>24</sup> EDP p. 8.

people, the poor, the outcast and lame as well as society's leaders, mattered to Jesus, and they matter to True Parents. For Mittelberg, this awareness that all people matter to God is evangelism value #1.

**MITTELBERG'S VALUE #2:  
PEOPLE ARE SPIRITUALLY LOST AND GOD IS SUFFERING**

In Luke 19:10, Jesus said his mission was "to seek and to save what was lost." Lost is not derogatory or an insult; it is just stating a fact about life without God. Jesus was saying that there is a deep chasm between fallen human beings and God, the chasm of sin. The world is not at all as God intended it to be, and government programs, education or medical services cannot fix it. Sin is a radical problem, deep in the root of human existence. In Jacob Dylan's words, evil is alive and well. Divine Principle is more specific: "there is one social vice that human efforts alone can never eradicate. That is sexual immorality. Christian doctrine regards this as a cardinal sin. What a tragedy that today's Christian society cannot block this path of ruin."<sup>25</sup>

In his mud hut, True Father did not design a social movement or self-help society. No religion grows because it models on the Elks Club or a Scout troop.

Reverend Moon teaches relentlessly that there is a huge chasm between human beings and God, and it has to do with the spiritual dimension of human sexuality, the relationship of man and woman. No matter how "good" people are, if they do not have this resolved, they are caught in the satanic blood lineage, "children of your father the devil" (John 8:44), and will be unable to access God's deepest love in eternity. No matter what the occasion, this is his message.

To generate energy in the direction of sharing the truth and love that saved one's life from degradation and despair, one needs to penetrate the superficial appearance that everyone is okay, that people are really doing well, and grasp the insight of Paul when he wrote, "There is not one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." Divine Principle states that people "have become like refuse, fit to be discarded."<sup>26</sup>

So the second spiritual value is to be fully aware that people, no matter how ship-shape we appear, are spiritually lost, far away from where God created us to be. Dr. Bruce Wilkinson gives a sterling example. As a result of his "Jabez prayer," God guided him to approach a well-dressed businesswoman at in an airport terminal and ask her, "What can I do for you?" He persevered through her attempts to brush him off, and then she disclosed that her marriage was on the rocks and she was about to file papers for divorce. Through his counseling in the terminal and on the plane (where God intervened to put their seats together), "she was still hurting, but she was at peace, determined to give her marriage the commitment it deserved."<sup>27</sup>

We should be sensitive to human pain and, even more, that God is suffering in loneliness. God is in the wilderness with men and women, crying out for His lost children, enduring agony separated from us. Unification evangelism begins with Reverend Moon's heart of the 1940s to comfort God in the midst of prison. His motivating energy came directly from his contact with

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p.5.

<sup>26</sup> Rom 3:10-12; EDP ch 6, sec 4.

<sup>27</sup> Bruce Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2000), pp. 79-82.

the Father's lonely, loving heart, knowing that people are suffering and God is suffering. Mittelberg tells us we need to clear away the curtains that conceal from us the suffering of others and the suffering of God, and to be vulnerable to this aching need in the world. This is evangelism value #2.

**MITTELBERG'S VALUE #3:  
PEOPLE NEED GOD'S INTERVENTION**

This is another fact that people tend to avoid, but Mittelberg is all over it. Forget relativism, he says, the view that every path is the same, that every religion is okay. Religion rides on the personal and particular. For him, every person needs Jesus. Unificationists agree and add the breaking news that Jesus sent True Parents and that everyone we know needs to receive and own the Blessing. In the words of Divine Principle, "fallen people [need to] restore their heart toward God through God's life-giving Word, [be] saved both spiritually and physically, and inherit God's lineage."<sup>28</sup>

Christians who are growing their churches are dealing with an equally confrontational message. "We have an unpopular message, and we have been commissioned to present it boldly," says Mittelberg. Unificationists need to own this desperate attitude that is necessary for effective evangelism. Unificationists attribute to True Parents the power of God's salvation. We proclaim that True Parents are the bridge across the gap separating fallen men and women from God. That Jesus and the Holy Spirit are working on earth for complete salvation through True Parents. There is no doubt about this; it is not one truth among many, one path among many. There are dead ends, and people and cultures do end up in them and need to back up and get on the right path.

From a sociological viewpoint, Hadaway's research shows that churches whose members are *clear about their mission and purpose* and *have a plan to recruit new members* grow, whereas the members of dying churches respond that they are not clear about their church's mission and purpose and lack such a plan. Moreover, churches with a strong conviction in their faith grow, while churches with a middle-of-the-road theology do not.

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In his mud hut, True Father did not design a social movement or self-help society. When people joined, he called them to offer their lives, their schooling, their careers, and their marriages. Through him, God intervened in people's lives decisively. Religions grow because they offer a radical vision of what it means to be fully human and on that basis empower people to solve real problems in their life and in the world, as well as find inner peace. Growing churches include this life-changing faith experience as normative. In the final accounting, the world needs God's truth and love incarnate. Because we believe ourselves to be graced to be a messenger of that which every human being needs, that will liberate and release them into full humanity, we can generate the heart to talk to someone about it. This is evangelism value #3.

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<sup>28</sup> EDP, p. 379.

**MITTELBERG'S VALUE #4:  
PEOPLE NEED CULTURAL RELEVANCE**

The fourth value has to do with strategy—strategy not for its own sake, but for the sake of expressing heart and love effectively, and clarifying that what we represent is the pure, unadulterated love of God and not our own cultural tastes.

The value that “people need cultural relevance” is based on the perception that *if* your neighbors recognize they are standing next to the chasm, and *if* they can see down the gaping hole and they know that there is something wrong with the world and themselves that no religion has solved, then they *might* be ready to hear the gospel of True Parents. The problem is that secular people do *not* live close to the chasm of sin. There is an expanding spiritual landscape, and they wander all over the map. Mittelberg addresses this practical reality.

Before getting into it, a proviso: the target audience for growing churches is not people who are actively committed to their own faith. We have para-church organizations to minister to and with members of other faith communities. The target for evangelism is people who are seeking, searching for a new community, who are not satisfied with traditional answers, or just plain uninspired about the religions they encountered. Such folks tend to adopt a secular worldview. Between unchurched people and the truth are walls of secularization: anti- or unreligious narratives, explanations, solutions, entertainment, diversions and values.

These worldviews and their entertainments and benefits are formidable competition to the message of any church, including ours. Contemporary culture rejects many godly values, like sexual purity, marital fidelity, chastity, honoring parents, the sanctity of life and so forth. A few decades ago, a couple could not rent an apartment without a marriage certificate and proof that they attended a local church. We live in a post-Christian age. How do we reach people in this culture? First, we have to come to grips with where the vast majority of people are

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at. Next we have to determine to make our message understandable. To do, we need to speak in a language the hearer can understand. Listen to Elijah Waters, of “Generation Church,” a campus ministry in Seattle. His sermons are a lot like our Founder’s: earthy, honest, in-your-face and totally from the heart, and his following is in the thousands.

My experience with an activist neo-Buddhist movement illustrates the value of cultural relevance. I encountered the group in 1969, when Japanese women speaking broken English physically pushed me into a car to take me to a lecture. An American gave the lecture, but all the other members I saw were Japanese. After the lecture they gathered around me and pushed me to buy a prayer scroll, which I did. I won’t continue the story except to say that I didn’t join and not many others did either. This particular movement has a negligible presence in America to this day. Why? Because they never adapted to this culture. Pushing people into cars and selling them prayer scrolls does not make it in this country, even in Berkeley.

In the Unification context, too, members in the past associated church growth with standing on the street trying to strike up a conversation. Reverend Moon himself has tried to revise this concept. He told members in the 1980s that church growth will not happen by witnessing on the streets.

If you witness to someone on the street, it has only the significance of that individual. ...it is a one-to-one relationship that does not go beyond that level.

Do not witness so much in the street because you don't know anything about the people you meet. You may meet many people in the parks but most of them do not stay and those who do often have many problems. You know that people [with potential] are always busy and don't hang around parks, while those who have nothing to do go to the park all the time. We want to witness to the best people. We don't want 1,000 people who can follow a leader; we want one leader who can lead 1,000 people.

So far you have worked very hard and found one thing: even when we work hard the fruit of our witnessing is often dispersed and leaves little benefit in the center. We have done all kinds of pioneering work and witnessing on the streets, but somehow the people who come into the Church do not understand clearly and soon leave again. Then we get some more people and then they leave. The results do not remain here for good.<sup>29</sup>

In the experience of the growing churches, new members do not come through short-term encounters. To succeed in America, a group from another culture needs to translate its message and practices into forms that Americans can relate with and become part of their world. It's not just good manners; it's the only way to accomplish the mission.

Mittelberg writes about a man named Jim, who had a passion to reach people for Christ. The people God called him to reach were not like the normal people of his church, so he decided that he would have to change to fit their culture. He shaved his head, except for a ponytail that he grew. Then he dyed the ponytail. He gave up business attire and dressed like this crowd of people. He ate their food and learned their street vocabulary, read their papers and got to know their points of view. He moved into their neighborhood, although they didn't seem interested at all in what he had to say.

As offspring of the same parents, all of us have the same feelings of joy, anger, sorrow and pleasure. Yet we cannot share our deepest feelings with one another because we speak different languages.

Jim's church associates were upset. They maligned Jim for giving up the true gospel, watering it down and changing it just to make it convenient for these strange people who nobody cares about anyway. But today, countless people from those neighborhoods now know and serve Jesus Christ. Jim—or as he's more widely known, James Hudson Taylor—is the man who more than a century ago built the China Inland Ministry. More than anyone else, he is credited with bringing Protestantism to China.

To put one's message into the common language is called "contextualization." In Aubrey Malphurs's words, "Many older churches reflect the culture that surrounded them some thirty or forty years ago and clearly aren't in touch with the culture around them now. The result is that the unchurched lost in our present culture see this and reject the biblical beliefs of these churches because they sense that they're out of touch with reality and what's taking place in the world. They know a dinosaur when they see one!"<sup>30</sup> The Divine Principle is clear about the need for

<sup>29</sup> *Home Church*, pp. 12, 412 ff, 411.

<sup>30</sup> Malphurs, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

contextualization, as it pleads for the establishment of a common language for all people to share their hearts and deepest values. “As offspring of the same parents, all of us have the same feelings of joy, anger, sorrow and pleasure. Yet we cannot share our deepest feelings with one another because we speak different languages. Is not this one of humanity’s greatest misfortunes?”<sup>31</sup>

Contextualization is necessary because secular America is a foreign culture and speaks a different language. Before people can even get a glimpse of our theological message, we need to cross the “culture chasm.” Culture is *spiritually neutral* but separates people from the Blessing. How do we cross the culture chasm?

In the words of Bill Hybels, Senior Pastor of the Willow Creek Community Church, this means to “crack the cultural code.” Mittelberg discusses language (make what you say easy to understand), clothes (wear the same styles as your target audience) and music (use the style they like—which probably is one you like as well). For example, when I encountered the Unification community, I heard music with which I could relate. I remember Phillip Schanker singing a Cat Stevens song with an acoustic guitar before the message was given. This went down well with me. If they had had Phillip’s 50-year-old father playing “How Great Thou Art” on a pipe organ, my spiritual mother would have had to tackle me to keep me from leaving. American members in New York chuckled for years over an otherwise esteemed elder from overseas who persisted with the expression, “follow my behind.” Such a small verbal miscue, especially repeated so often, would turn a counsel to humble obedience into a moment of eye-rolling levity.

I did not join a book; I joined a community. I joined because of the love and value I felt from the people and from a strange warmth within my heart. This was love from *a community plus spirit world*, the community on earth and in heaven.

Mittelberg counsels us to utilize cultural points of reference that are familiar to the audience. We cannot expect new people who do not know or care much about us to cross the culture chasm from their side. We have to cross it from our side. Bridging the chasm of sin is God’s responsibility. Bridging the culture chasm is our responsibility. I will deal with this topic more fully later. This is evangelism value #4.

**MITTELBERG’S VALUE #5:  
PEOPLE NEED COMMUNITY**

More and more families are broken. Even intact families spend less and less time together. “The Annenberg Center for the Digital Future at the University of Southern California is reporting this week that 28 percent of Americans it interviewed last year said they have been spending less time with members of their households. That’s nearly triple the 11 percent who said that in 2006.”<sup>32</sup> People are scattered far and wide from their loved ones. People need friends, community and cultural identity. When I visited neighbors in Barrytown in June of 2010, I asked what they would like to see in a local church, and everyone’s first response was, community.

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<sup>31</sup> EDP, p. 410.

<sup>32</sup> “Family Time Eroding as Internet Use Soars,”

[http://www.thechurchreport.com/mag\\_article.php?mid=1784&mname=JuneSurvey](http://www.thechurchreport.com/mag_article.php?mid=1784&mname=JuneSurvey): (June, 2009).

If the Unification Church is to grow, it must provide meaningful community. Mittelberg states, “Our responsibility is to build churches where true community can flourish.” When I joined, I did not join a book; I joined a community. I joined because of the love and value I felt from the people and from a strange warmth (to borrow John Wesley’s term) within my heart. This was love from *a community plus spirit world*, the community on earth and in heaven. So we need to build community that welcomes and offers a place at the table for new people. We should note well that the most successful evangelism in America was done where our family organized as the “Creative Community Project.” In a recent survey of members of my church, the provision of community life for one’s self and one’s family was the strongest positive value.

Communities have general characteristics. One, they are local. You see people regularly; you don’t need to make a great effort to get together. Two, the community offers an identity that people want to share. Third, communities provide personal enrichment. Four, communities embody implicit or explicit values, norms and ideals. Five, communities are more about friendship than beliefs. Five, communities are fun. Six, communities, at least healthy communities, are transparent, open and inclusive. They contain windows for people to enter and exit. Churches today are realizing that more than teaching truth, they need to help people make connections and form community. Hence successful churches provide comfortable coffee shops, gathering places and other venues for people to connect. One reason for the success of Starbucks and the thousands of independent coffee houses is that they provide space for community life.

In Taylor Clark’s study of what makes Starbucks attractive to customers, “the interviewees talked very little about the coffee itself, but quite a bit about *feelings* and atmosphere. . .they craved a sense of relaxation, warmth, and luxury, all within the safe coffeehouse social sphere. ‘The coffeehouse, when it’s as good as it gets, is much like a public living room.’” A good coffeehouse is “a quintessential ‘third place’” between home and work. Churches are advised to pay heed: growing churches, seeking to become that third place, often install comfortable coffeehouse environments. In January, 2010, Jason Mitchem, author of *Revivify: Restoring Failed Leaders*, disclosed to the author his team’s strategy to plant a new church in Augusta, Georgia. They are going to conduct Bible studies in coffeehouses, six evenings a week. Patrons who are interested in the subject are welcome to sit in. Some will be invited to join their celebration worship on Sunday morning.<sup>33</sup> Community is evangelism value #5.

**MITTELBERG’S VALUE #6:  
PEOPLE NEED ANSWERS**

People are dummies. My evidence? The enormous success of the “How To...” books “for dummies.” The last time I checked there were 75 and counting. The success of this series is due to the fact that the books respect people enough to address their questions with straight, simple answers. There are thousands of evangelical books that make the Gospel clear and simple. Unificationists need to do the same with their core text, the Divine Principle. The Divine Principle not only has to be declared, but it has to be defined, defended and dumbed-down.

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We have to remove the intellectual roadblocks. People are programmed in school to question everything, especially God and traditional values. So we have to learn what the questions are and

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<sup>33</sup> Taylor Clark, *Starbucked: A Double Tall Tale of Caffeine, Commerce and Culture* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Co., 2007), pp. 90-92.

how to answer them. Even with the finest theology, if one doesn't know how to use it to answer people's questions, it is of no value. The great American evangelist, Charles Finney, got his start in the small towns of upstate New York, where people said that "he doesn't preach; he explains what the other fellows are preaching about." So we need to slow down and get into the listener's shoes. To love the enemy, we need to know their questions and respect them. Everyone has simple, basic questions, such as "Does God really exist?" "Why is there so much evil in the world?" and "What is the purpose of my life?" The Divine Principle has answers, including to the biggest one of all: "How can I be happy?" These are the same questions that drove the teenage Sun Myung Moon to God and Jesus. His ministry is one of answering these questions.

The most successful Unification evangelism in America proves the point. The introductory presentations were simple to a fault, laced with humor and common sense. One great virtue was that they gave the listener nothing with which they could possibly disagree. They called it "conscientious common sense," and it talked about the truth being something that holds at all times, in all places, in all cultures and is practical and useful. It talked about human responsibility and freedom being the reason that God could both be loving and suffer the existence of evil. It resolved profound theological dilemmas that block people from faith in God. They made it very simple and returned constantly to the issue of individual responsibility. Then they opened people up for prayer and people met God.<sup>34</sup> This is evangelism value #6.

***MITTELBERG'S VALUE #7:  
PEOPLE NEED TIME***

Mittelberg's culminating value is a simple one: effective evangelism allows people to move ahead at their own pace. Today's society is far more structured and confined than the America of the 70s. He writes, "Pressing people to take steps for which they're not yet ready will backfire. In some cases it can even short-circuit the whole process." Conversion of one's life is a process. It is not accomplished through one event, but rather by deepening trust and understanding over time. During this time of patient support, the church community is desperate in prayer and fasting. Churches do prayer walks, fasting, vigils, counseling, outreach, service, Bible study—spiritual disciplines. Unificationists in our periods of growth did the same. The world is saved by ideal families, not idle families.

I recall the testimony of a young man who joined in New York City in the mid-70s. His spiritual mother one evening brought him seven rice balls, and encouraged him to enjoy them. He was a student living in a apartment in the city by himself and he enjoyed the delicious meal. When he finished, she informed him that those seven rice balls represented a seven-day fast she had just completed for him. The emotional love this ministry inspired in him brought him to True Parents.

The Holy Spirit is a feminine presence that gives rebirth. I want to suggest that we take a cue from the advent of the age of women, the age of the heifer, or age of the wife. The Divine Principle explains this in terms of the biblical story of Samson. Samson could not be defeated by masculine means. He was defeated by the soft, feminine voice of his wife. The way to bring a positive outcome is through the Holy Spirit, utilizing the populist style.

This is evangelism value #7.

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<sup>34</sup> Author's experience joining the Unification Church, October, 1972-January, 1973, and as a participant-observer, Bush Street Center, San Francisco, and Camp Kay, Mendocino County, summer, 1980.



## **Conclusion**

Willow Creek outlines a seven-step path for members to trace as they walk the way of heart with newfound friends who might like to become part of their church community. The first step is to build a personal relationship of trust. This can take months and years in itself. Once that trust and personal rapport is established, the second step is to share a verbal witness. Willow provides seminars for members to help them overcome their shyness about this and develop skills to help people turn a horizontal relationship in a vertical direction. If the friend responds positively to the verbal witness, the third step is to bring them to a seeker event, a program guaranteed to be designed with the new friend in mind who doesn't know anything about the church or its teachings. This leads to (4) a process of education, step by step, and ultimately acceptance of Christ and a joyful, public celebration of baptism. The next steps bring the person into a deeper walk with God, entailing (5) joining a small group, (6) discovering one's personal gifts for ministry and finding a way to apply them by doing ministry, and (7) supporting God's work in His church through tithing.

Generating a world-transforming movement, the Unification Church owns these core values. It is activating, inculcating and rewarding the spiritual values that all people matter to God, are lost without Him and need His intervention in their lives in a language they can understand, in a supportive community that gives them the time and respect they need to make up their own mind. These are apparent in our True Parents' ministry and should be in ours.

### III. The Populist Model

We see that to grow, churches need to inculcate a strong conviction that my church is here to save people, which implies that people who are not in my church are not saved and need me to save them. Some people take that to be a militant stance that leads to warfare among faith communities and point to the history of war among religions—which continues among some religions even today. I'd rather look at a more positive scenario, that of the religiously plural American society that enjoys a separation of church and state and, on that basis, freedom of religion. The Divine Principle views freedom of religion as the *sine qua non* distinguishing the Abel-type society from others. Religions in a free market of faiths succeed by competing with their peers to win people's hearts and souls. What is wrong with the makers of Jones's pickle relish believing that theirs is the best, better than Smith's pickle relish? As long as the market is refereed impartially, the public benefits by constant improvements in relish as Jones and Smith compete to excel. The public also benefits when churches compete. That is why it is in such societies that religion is popular and the largest percentage of the people believe in God.<sup>35</sup> Let's review how religions grow in an open society.

#### Historical Background

American religion has grown by populist principles and practices from the colonial times. I want to highlight the work of two scholars of Protestant church growth in America, Nathan Hatch on the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and Donald Miller on the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. By comparing the two, we see that not much has changed in the spiritual dynamics of American culture over the span of two hundred years. Two hundred years ago, successful churches tapped into the spiritual and social dynamics imbedded deeply within American culture. When they did so, revival came. Contemporary church growth is tapping into the same dynamics.

Nathan Hatch called this the “democratization of Christianity in a popular culture.” With the American Revolution, he writes, “turmoil swirled around the crucial issues of authority, organization, and leadership. ... Respect for authority, tradition, station, and education eroded. ... To be an American citizen was by definition to be a republican, the inheritor of a revolutionary legacy in a world ruled by aristocrats and kings. ... This left an indelible imprint upon the structures of American Christianity.” British historian Paul Johnson calls this “the specifically American form of Christianity—undogmatic, moralistic rather than creedal, tolerant but strong, and all-pervasive of society.”<sup>36</sup>

“Increasingly assertive common people wanted their leaders unpretentious, their doctrines self-evident and down-to-earth, their music lively and singable, and their churches in local hands.” (Nathan Hatch)

The churches had to relate to the American character and culture, symbolized by slogans such as “no taxation without representation” and “government of the people, by the people, for the people;” a culture in which leaders are “public servants.” This is, in fact, part and parcel of the American ideology. Hatch cites 19<sup>th</sup> century French visitor, Anthony Trollope, who in 1863 wrote of the Americans, “They are willing to have religion, as they are willing to have laws; but they

<sup>35</sup> Rodney Stark, *Discovering God: The Origins of the Great Religions and the Evolution of Belief* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), Ch. 3: “Rome: An Ancient Religious Marketplace.”

<sup>36</sup> Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 6. Johnson, op. cit., p. 109.

choose to make it for themselves. They do not object to paying for it, but they like to have the handling of the article for which they pay.” And what sort of religion did they make for themselves? They “wanted their leaders unpretentious, their doctrines self-evident and down-to-earth, their music lively and singable, and their churches in local hands.” Hatch goes on to state, “The rise of evangelical Christianity in the early republic is, in some measure, a story of the success of common people in shaping the culture after their own priorities.”<sup>37</sup> As owners of their faith, naturally they “threw themselves into expanding its influence.” By this energy and ownership, America enjoyed an “explosive combination of evangelical fervor and popular sovereignty,” and this combination has sustained religious expansion in America ever since. Johnson perceives “an ecumenical and American type of religious devotion which affected all groups, and gave a distinctive American flavor to a wide range of denominations.” He sums them up under five heads:

- Evangelical vigor
- A tendency to downgrade the clergy
- Little stress on liturgical correctness
- Even less on parish boundaries, and above all
- An emphasis on individual experience.<sup>38</sup>

The term “democratization” must be explained, because it is a hot-button word for Unificationists. What it refers to, in Hatch’s analysis, is the recognition of three points:

- The religious authenticity of each person’s experience
- The allowance for common people to define their own faith, and
- The use of Christianity as a force for liberation and popular sovereignty

For better or worse, the age of the authority of the common man and woman dawned and religion changed forever. One is reminded of the buildings in Manhattan that display not saints, scholars or political heroes, but mechanics, draftsmen, carpenters and farmers. Rockefeller Center’s Fifth Avenue artwork celebrates in bronze the production of basic commodities—wheat, wool, cotton, sugar, molasses, tobacco and so forth. This, not the generals, emperors and philosophers, is what is enshrined in American architecture. Hence the American “tendency to downgrade the clergy,” pointed out by Johnson (an English scholar). Consider Joel Osteen, Senior Pastor of America’s largest congregation, Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas. He is famous, fashionable and fantastically wealthy, but what are Joel’s sermons about? He talks about his friends whose batteries die, who lose their jobs, whose parents are struggling with depression or illness, whose marriage is on the rocks, whose boss is a tyrant, who can’t figure out how to get the remote to work. He eulogizes his father, who had a small church and a large family. Joel is someone like me, the listener feels, who succeeded and wants me to succeed. Tens of thousands identify with him and participate in his church.

Joel Osteen is someone like me, the listener feels, who succeeded and wants me to succeed. Tens of thousands identify with him and participate in his church.

The Americans enjoyed an abundance of space and it was impossible to police the frontier. The easiest social organization for the pioneers to take west with them was their church. Churches were the primary agents of social organization on the American frontier and ultimately for the

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<sup>37</sup> Hatch, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>38</sup> Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1999), p. 116.

nation as a whole.<sup>39</sup> This was abetted by the separation of church and state and what Hatch terms “a climate of withering ecclesiastical establishments.” Therefore, the people were free to organize their lives through their churches and religious associations. It was the Massachusetts Bay Puritans writ over a million square miles. The common people of their own choosing set up missionary societies, Bible societies, women’s benevolent associations, the Sunday school movement, reform movements, rooted in *the experience of the Holy coming into their farm, their village, their church* and making Himself known *in their language*.

The result was the explosive growth of the churches. While Christians in Europe were struggling over control and power, America enjoyed an “incredible growth of ‘upstart’ denominations with new styles of church life between 1800 and 1850. The Methodists in 1820 had 250,000 members; they doubled in the next ten years. Baptist membership multiplied by 10 between 1783-1813 as the number of Baptist churches grew from 500 to 2,500. By 1850, the *new* denominations—Baptist, Methodist, Christian and African American churches—constituted 2/3 of Protestant ministers and members in the country. In 1775 there were 1,800 ministers in America; in 1845 there were nearly 40,000. A completely new church body, the “Freewill Baptists” had as many ministers as the Episcopalians in the early 19th century. “Antimission Baptist” preachers “far outnumbered” RC priests and Lutheran ministers; the Christians, a new movement created by Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone in the 1820s, had as many preachers as the Presbyterians. The church of the Puritans, Congregationalism, had twice the number of preachers of any other American church in 1775. But

it set itself up as a state church in Connecticut and Massachusetts. By 1845 Methodist preachers outnumbered Congregationalists by more than ten to one.

The state churches stifled creativity and responsiveness to the changing environment. Religious entrepreneurs roamed the countryside, inspired by the Spirit, gathering multifarious crowds, paying no attention to parish lines or church traditions.

The state churches, by their doctrinal rigor, institutional formalism and insistence on having a thoroughly educated clergy, stifled creativity and responsiveness to the changing environment. Religious entrepreneurs roamed the countryside, inspired by the Spirit, gathering multifarious crowds, paying no attention to parish lines or church traditions—other than to challenge them. These self-taught Baptists, Methodists, “New Light” Presbyterians and Independent Congregationalist preachers focused on delivering a direct experience that proved God’s authority. They developed new delivery methods, revivalism referred to as “new measures” developed by Charles Finney, the altar call, the “anxious bench” designed to convert the hopeful, face-to-face recruitment, camp meetings, new musical styles based on what people liked to sing, plain messages, “muscular Christianity” that led to dramatic conversions of individuals, families and entire communities.

As we see from the fact that almost all mega-churches are independents, not affiliated with mainstream denominations, these populist dynamics continue today.

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<sup>39</sup> See Donald G. Mathews, “The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830,” in John M. Mulder and John F. Wilson, *Religion in American History: Interpretive Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978), pp. 199-218. First published in the *American Quarterly*, XXI (1969), pp 23-43.

## Contemporary Examples of the Populist Approach

### *I. The Key Church Strategy*

Timothy Ahlen and J. V. Thomas are Baptists who work with two Texas Baptist churches, the Gambrell Street Church (Fort Worth) and the Cliff Temple Baptist Church (Dallas). These churches have adopted the so-called “key church” strategy to cross cultural divides. I will review some of the testimonies about their strategy.<sup>40</sup>

A member couple, Nancy and Jerry Sayers, started a church by visiting their neighbors in their apartment complex. At first the neighbors rebuffed them, but the Sayers persisted and within a few weeks had 15-20 adults meeting for Bible study in the manager’s office. In a matter of months, the group decided to constitute of itself a congregation and take offerings.

Pastor Ben Lopez began a Hispanic congregation in a complex of duplexes and fourplexes, in an apartment that the owner donated. The 15’x15’ living room was overfull within a few weeks, and Lopez had to run two services every Sunday. The group reached 170 and began to rent space in a local church.

A Spanish-speaking church-planter in a Hispanic community could not attract the local adults. The local parents would only send their children to his Bible classes. But when a *local* leader got interested and agreed to pastor, then the adults started coming. Over forty adults became regular attenders within three months.

In a white, “country-western lifestyle” area, the “Country Church” was started. The rowdy young, working class community was disinterested in church as usual. Adapting to what this market would bear, the church planters set up a “sanctuary [that] contained tables and chairs instead of pews” with a country-western band. “Addiction recovery and emotional stability” were entry-level discipleship programs, answering the immediate needs of the attenders. They grew a congregation of about 100.

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In my *Family, Church, Community, Kingdom*, I summarized the story of John Shelton, a Cliff Temple youth minister whose youth brought boxes of fruit to an empty lot frequented by the poor and homeless. Within a few months, he created the “church on the lot,” eventually garnering support from the city.<sup>41</sup>

Another member, Tillie Bergen, started two Bible study groups by asking ladies who came to her for help if she could start one in their apartment. One of the two, led by Virginia Maanani, who had come to Tillie asking for help paying her electric bill (which Tillie paid for her) grew to 60 members. Ahlen and Thomas call such a Bible study group a “single cell church,” and elaborate:

“It became a church in the true sense. These were rough, tough kinds of folks—like the people Jesus preached to—and they weren’t about to come to church. We decided to take the church to them, which is what He did. Virginia Maanani...grew in her faith rapidly,

<sup>40</sup> Timothy Ahlen and J. V. Thomas, *One Church, Many Congregations: The Key Church Strategy* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), passim.

<sup>41</sup> Tyler Hendricks, *Family, Church, Community, Kingdom*, pp. 103-4

and soon found people coming to her for answers to their spiritual problems. She never asked to be a spiritual leader; it just happened. She seemed to understand her neighbors and the problems they encountered on a daily basis. She could relate to the residents in way that a professional minister never could.”<sup>42</sup>

Members of the Cliff Temple Church planted the above congregations. Using the key church method, this church started 28 congregations in about 5 years. Cliff Temple is one of 300 Southern Baptist churches that have adopted this strategy since 1979. In the 18 years that elapsed until the writing of the book, these churches each average 600 Bible study attendance each week. By 1998, more than 165 Texas Baptist churches adopted the strategy. That represents 2% of Baptist churches in Texas, but those 165 churches account for 36% of new church starts among Texas Baptists. I will discuss the key church strategy further later.

## ***II. The Saddleback Community Church***

Rick Warren developed a successful Southern Baptist congregation in a wealthy Los Angeles suburb. He translated the “Bible thumping” Southern Baptist tradition into an expression suitable to “Saddleback Sam” with his “mobile me” life. His is an evangelical congregation of Hollywood executives and Valley Girls.<sup>43</sup>

Warren’s philosophy is based upon the common sense notion that to live for the sake of others, one needs to know where they are coming from. To catch fish, he says, you have to understand them. This knowledge determines your equipment, bait and timing. Analogously, we have to study the ways and tastes of the people whom we are seeking to bring into God’s kingdom. We have to know where they hang out and how they think. Human culture has history, so we need to understand something of the traditions of this world.

Just as there is no “one size fits all” in fishing, one evangelistic style will not work for everyone. Also, different fishers prefer different types of fish and fishing environments. Some prefer cold mountain streams, some rivers, some the surf and some the deep sea. But all fishers agree, we have to go where the fish are biting. A fish that isn’t hungry will not bite your hook.

Learn to think like a fish and reach out in terms they understand. To discover the terms, don’t go into theorizing. Just go out and talk to people.

Learn to think like a fish and reach out in terms they understand. To discover the terms, don’t go into theorizing. Just go out and talk to people. Growing churches encourage their members to maintain friendships with unchurched people. Churches tend to stop growing after a few years, because believers tend to stop developing relationships with non-members. A quick remedy is to go out and meet a number of unchurched folks by going door-to-door with a survey for the unchurched. That’s what Warren and a small group to which he personally witnessed did. They met weekly in his kitchen and developed a plan for door-to-door outreach of an unusual sort.

In his initial door-to-door questionnaire, Pastor Rick asked five questions:

- What do you think is the greatest need in this area? (Icebreaker)

<sup>42</sup> Ahlen and Thomas, op.cit., pp. 64, 77-78

<sup>43</sup> Most of this material was derived from chapter 11 of Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995).

- Are you actively attending any church? (If yes, he said thank you and moved on.)
- Why do you think most people don't attend church? (This is less threatening than asking why the person him/herself doesn't attend.)
- If you were to look for a church to attend, what kind of things would you look for? (In other words, how should I design my program to make it something in which you would be interested?)
- What could I do for you? What advice can you give to a minister who really wants to be helpful to people?

Warren discovered the general reasons that the people in his community were not going to church. The answers are classic complaints against religion. The church is boring, especially the sermon. Church members are unfriendly to visitors. The church is more interested in my money than me. Parents worry about the quality of the childcare the churches offer.

Warren and his small Bible study group sent out a mass mailing inviting the community to attend their inaugural service. With the wisdom of a serpent, the letter promised that the service would be precisely the opposite of what the residents did not like. They would be a friendly group of neighbors offering lively, engaging worship with excellent childcare, and with no pressure to give money.

He called it the “church for the unchurched.” His commitment to break down all barriers and set aside traditions in order to bring in new guests is revealed in the fact that his letter did not mention Jesus or the Bible. Why? Because it would have been culturally jarring. He didn't use his denomination's name (Southern Baptist). Warren simply calls it being polite and respecting where people are at. Some church-going Christians who received the letter reacted negatively and accused him of faithlessness.

Warren's commitment was to break down all barriers and set aside traditions in order to bring in new guests.

But Warren and his kitchen group persevered. Their determination was rewarded, as 75 people showed up by mistake at their rehearsal one week prior to the actual first service, and 205 people attended the first service. Within ten weeks, 82 converted, and the Saddleback Community Church was off and running.

### ***III: Willow Creek Community Church***

Bill Hybels was 19 years old in 1972 when he encountered kids playing rock music in church, and liked what he heard so much that he joined the band. Dave Holmbo, the band's 20-year old leader, however, saw that Bill was suited more to biblical teaching than rhythm guitar. The band, “Son Company,” had more need of a Bible study than another guitarist.

And Bill did have a gift for connecting to kids his age. He would assign them topics to research in the Bible, and design his teaching in response to the questions of the 80 kids in the band and Bible study. The band practiced on Sundays and the Bible study was mid-week. The music and empowerment they felt from the adult church of which they were a part, an independent church called South Park Church, clicked with the Holy Spirit, and the group jelled and grew by word of mouth among peer-networks. When Bill's future wife encountered the group, she remembers it as “a page straight out of the book of Acts ... a community of love.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> This narrative was derived from Hybels and Hybels, *Rediscovering Church: The Story and Vision of Willow Creek Community Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), Ch. 1.

God led them to reach out to more of their peers, and they decided to get into evangelism. Before starting, they examined what they were doing and made plans to improve. The group criticized the church basement's décor and Bill's long Bible lessons. So they moved to a location nicer than the church basement, and Bill promised to limit his message to one main point, to give new folks "a manageable dose."

Others said their friends would not be much inspired by singing "Kumbaya" and "Pass It On," so, in a major move, they combined the rock band with the Bible study. One girl asked if she and her friends could create a skit. Another volunteered to make a slide show with a background of recorded music.

In working through this transition, Hybels recalled his experiences as a youth bringing a friend to his hometown church. He recalled how the church had not helped their unchurched friends at all. Those friends had family problems, or problems with substance abuse, and left the church with nothing more than a reconfirmation that Christianity is irrelevant.

He realized that traditional church is designed for the already convinced, not for new people, whose spirit it kills. To new people, church services "seem grossly abnormal." They designed their upgraded Wednesday night meetings, which they entitled "Son City," to penetrate the defenses and skepticism of their unchurched friends. 125 attended the first night.

Kids who became new Christians were funneled into a Sunday night meeting called "Son Village." Bill started the first Son Village meeting teaching from a book of theology, but within five minutes stopped, apologized, and told them to come back next week to hear something relevant to their lives.

"...our strategy includes a regularly scheduled, high-quality, Spirit-empowered outreach service where irreligious people can come and discover that they matter to You and that Christ died for them."

In addition to the arts skills imbued in the local high school, the kids were moved into a life of prayer for their friends. They held their own baptisms in a local park district swimming pool. Reflective of American youth culture, there was no distinction between leaders and followers. Son City would begin with sports to drain enough energy to enable the kids to settle down and listen to a Bible study. During bad weather, they held their Frisbee competitions in the church sanctuary.

The meeting started with an opening jam ("our version of a prelude") and pop songs with altered lyrics. This was followed by a skit and multi-media slide show on the theme of the message. Then came the message, and then the group divided up into huddles for prayer and talk.

Again, the group was empowered by sharing ownership. All the kids had a role to play, making posters, sets, sound, lighting, photography and slides, cooking, phone calls, music, and so forth. "Core kids were forced to keep growing in order to shepherd the new kids they brought." As a result of this volunteer spirit and peer affinity, "Hundreds of kids spent nearly every night at church or at a team activity." And they covered their own expenses.

Once they promoted a special program to which everyone would invite their friends. They did a good job and 300 were in attendance. Hybels read the crucifixion story, explained it, and asked those who wanted to receive Christ to stand up. So many did, and he was so nervous, that he



thought they had misunderstood, and told them to sit down. He repeated it all, and asked again, and all 300 stood up.

At the end of the evening on his way out of the church, Bill broke down in tears, and heard God's voice. He recalls the main point: "Where would those kids who received Christ tonight be if there hadn't been a service designed just for them, a safe place where they could come week after week and hear the dangerous, life-transforming message of Christ?" He pledged from that night to "always make sure that our strategy includes a regularly scheduled, high-quality, Spirit-empowered outreach service where irreligious people can come and discover that they matter to You and that Christ died for them." This is a good definition of the "seeker service."

"I remember walking into South Park for the first time, into a church [building] that looked like the church I had walked away from years earlier. But the band was playing loud and kids were having a great time. It just floored me. Then I went to a Son City retreat, and everyone I met seemed to care about me. They seemed genuine. That weekend I heard a message about the Gospel and about true discipleship. I was ready to hear it. I said, 'OK, this is it.' And I trusted Christ." This testimony is from one kid who joined the group and later became director of their wilderness camp.

One of Hybels' Bible college professors, Gilbert Bilezikian, was a visionary believer enamored of the New Testament church. He challenged his class, "What if a true community of God could be established in the 20th century? It would transform this world and usher people into the next." Bill reacted deeply, concluding, "Every other goal I had considered seemed to pale in comparison to the thought of establishing the Kingdom of God here on earth."

Back in 1975, they say, "It was rumored we were backed by the Moonies."

Hybels had married, and felt it was time to transition from being a youth group to being a church. Maintaining their intense idealism, Lynne Hybels writes, "We dreamed about how to *be the church*." After all, if we are going to build the Kingdom, "How...can we really make a difference in the world unless we reach the entire family?"

Son City had reached 1,200. The Hybels, with 100 from Son City who lived in another town, set out to start a full-fledged congregation. They fundraised with baskets of tomatoes to buy equipment. This was 1975 and he was 23 years old. Like Pastor Rick, they started door-to-door asking unchurched why they didn't go to church and got the same answers as Warren.

The group rented a theatre, which they used as their Sunday worship space for six years. They rented a nearby warehouse for office space, conferences and midweek services. 30 people contributed all the necessary money, each going into debt in the process. The first service took place in October of 1975, with 125 attenders. "The music was loud, the drama was raucous (sometimes crossing the line of acceptability)." Over the winter, most of the initial attenders fell off. People didn't know what to make of it. Was it a youth group? A church? A performance? In the first winter, sometimes there were more on stage than in the seats. But they persevered and were rewarded with success. The Willow Creek Community Church, named after the theatre, now has some 17,000 members and wields enormous influence educating and training thousands of pastors and lay leaders from churches around the world, through its "Willow Creek Association."

It is interesting to note that in the mind of the public, the UC of the 1970s was clumped together with such hyper-creative, start-up youth groups. Hybels comments, in fact, that back in 1975, “It was rumored we were backed by the Moonies.”

Now, what about that rock worship music? How did that arise? Living in Berkeley in the early 70s, I met my share of what were called Jesus freaks. These were counter-culture youth who found a “natural high” in Jesus. The nascent Jesus culture didn’t make a huge impression in my community up north, but southern California youth gave Christianity a different reception.

Smith eschews seminary education, which only teaches people “how to keep their congregations down to a manageable size.”

#### ***IV: Calvary Chapel***

One pioneer in southern California, Chuck Smith, was a pastor in the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, a Pentecostal denomination. Smith grew weary of the church growth programs pushed by his ICFG headquarters, and began to ignore them and do what he did best, teach straight from the Bible. Finding himself constrained by denominational strictures, he accepted a call to pastor the Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California, a church of 25 members, “deeply divided and on the verge of disbanding.” He pulled the congregation together and was led to minister to the youth drifting around the beaches of his area. These were youth of the late-sixties counter-culture movement, in other words, hippies. He opened his home and then his church to them. He allowed them to come in their own garb and hairstyle. He let them play their own music. His sermons were simple expositions of the Bible, which was his gift. The kids filled the church. He had to tear down the walls inside the building, and filled it to overflowing. “Every month or so, the church would double.”

To accommodate the crowds, they bought a parcel of land and set up a tent. The story is worth repeating: “The night before their first service in the tent, Smith and others set up sixteen hundred chairs and planned double services. ‘I looked out at that sea of folding chairs.’ Smith recalled. ‘I had never seen so many folding chairs in all my life!’ He asked an associate: ‘How long do you suppose it will take the Lord to fill this place?’ The associate looked at his watch and answered, ‘I’d say just about eleven hours.’ He was right. The next morning every seat was filled and people stood around the perimeter of the tent—for both services.”<sup>45</sup>

The movement gained national attention with its beach baptisms at Corona del Mar in 1970. Thousands of kids attended and enthusiastically spread their faith throughout the town. “They’re knocking on doors and telling people about Jesus and hugging them. . . . These kids would just sit down and talk to them about the Lord. They had no pretenses whatsoever.” Some householders called the police. The kids witnessed to the police. It took four pastors two and a half hours to baptize everyone who wanted it. Beach baptisms were held monthly for years, serving with volleyball and hot dogs along with a gospel message and baptism in the Spirit and the water.

Smith’s Calvary Chapel spawned dozens (now hundreds) of daughter churches. The movement is rapidly expanding and includes numerous mega-churches, but the average size of a Calvary Chapel is 138. In a 1997 survey, it was found that 25% of the Calvary Chapels were established since 1995, and 3/4 were less than 12 years old. In 1996, there were 711 Calvary Chapels worldwide.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, pp. 19-21

<sup>46</sup> Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, pp. 194-6

Calvary churches multiply through a natural indigenous approach. “Converts who feel a call to the ministry...are sent on their way with prayer and a blessing--but seldom with money.” Church planters have to figure out how to reach the people to whom they feel called to minister. Intuition and common sense, or, in Warren’s thinking, politeness, leads to respect for local people. Desire to avoid burnout leads to delegation of ministry tasks. Each church is separately incorporated and there is no reporting to higher-ups. The pastors of the mother and daughter churches have a mentoring relationship, and the up-line goes no further than one level. I’ll say more about this flat organizational style later.

Church growth is largely a result of word-of-mouth. As the church develops the means to support the pastor, many will market their teaching through audiotapes and books. Some churches give rise to bands that meet commercial success and indirectly serve as a witness to their church and others like them. Smith eschews seminary education, which only teaches people “how to keep their congregations down to a manageable size.”

### ***V: Hope Chapel***

In 1971, God spoke out loud to Ralph Moore in a restaurant, telling him to start a church in Redondo Beach. He targeted the community youth by setting up a hotline and putting up small signs saying, “Need help?” and providing a number to call. Within a few years he had 2,500 members worshipping in a former bowling alley. Hope Chapel grew out of the same beach culture as Calvary. As sociologist Donald Miller observed, “They seemed to be having fun! Their religion might be filled with commitment, but it was not at the expense of celebration. I didn’t sense, even among the youth, that they were there out of obligation.”

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Miller observes that Hope Chapel stays under the Foursquare denominational umbrella, dealing with “archaic rules and bylaws,” and opines that this explains why its growth is slower than Calvary’s.

### ***VI: Vineyard Fellowship***

The Vineyard was founded in 1974 by Ken Gulliksen and has been led by John Wimber since 1982. Gulliksen was with Calvary Chapel when he started a Bible study group in his house. His testimony is typical of many. “I played guitar and sat on a stool and led some worship and taught the Bible, answered questions in homes, and at the end invited anyone who wanted to receive Christ to come for prayer, which they did in droves.”

Wimber was a professional musician who became a Quaker. He led home groups that became too charismatic for the Friends, and eventually connected with Calvary Chapel. He met success as a church planter, but was more charismatic than suited Calvary’s temperament. At a meeting of several leaders to discuss this, Wimber met Gulliksen. Gulliksen and he clicked and combined their ministries. The Vineyards, that had been part of Calvary, separated. Gradually Wimber became the main leader of the Vineyard Christian Fellowship, taking with him 30 Calvary churches. These churches take a more spirit-filled approach, accepting speaking in tongues and healing. By 1996, some 22 years after its founding, there were 579 Vineyard churches

worldwide.<sup>47</sup> A glance at their websites reveals that the movement is healthy and growing in 2009.

The growth of local churches like the Baptist key churches, Saddleback, Willow, Calvary Chapel and the Vineyard reflects strategies and values that have always worked in the American religious environment. One measure of a movement's vitality is its number of new congregations. For example, at the end of his study of these "new paradigm churches," Miller states that his Episcopal church in southern California is doing reasonably well. In the last thirty years, in fact, it has grown in membership. Then he notes that it had not spun off any daughter churches. This tells the tale. Among Evangelical Protestant congregations, 58% were established after 1990. Among Roman Catholic churches in America, 5% were established after 1990.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Miller, *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Hartford Institute for Religion Research, published in *The Citizen* (Rhinebeck, NY), 1/7 (Fall, 2002)

#### IV. The Differences Between Populist and Denominational Churches

If a congregation or group within it has decided it wants to grow, the next question is how to go about it. My answer is that we should look at other churches that are growing and figure out how they are doing it. Fortunately, it's not rocket science. The Divine Principle envisions that Christianity will divide between dying and rising segments, and history is bearing out the truth of this prophecy.<sup>49</sup> I propose that if we want to grow, we should figure out the differences between the two and emulate the churches that are growing.

It is not a mystery as to which churches are dying. Historian Paul Johnson refers to them as the "Seven Sisters"—American Baptist Churches of the USA, the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ), the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the Presbyterian Church, USA, the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church. Johnson cites one study that calculated that the Methodists were losing 1,000 members a week for thirty years. The seven denominations "as a whole lost between a fifth and a third of their members in the years 1960-90." His perception as a historian is that they declined "chiefly because they forfeited their distinguishing features, or indeed any features.

After the Episcopal Church's General Convention of 1994, marked by a bitter dispute over the right of practicing homosexuals to become or remain clergy, one official observer commented: "The Episcopal Church is an institution in free fall. We have nothing to hold onto, no shared belief, no common assumptions, no bottom line, no accepted definition of what an Episcopalian is or believes."<sup>50</sup> A neighbor of mine, a devout Episcopalian lay minister,

A neighbor of mine, a devout Episcopalian lay minister, believes that the church's stance on homosexuality and abortion will lead God to destroy it. This does not bode well for church growth.

believes that the church's stance on homosexuality and abortion will lead God to destroy it. This does not bode well for church growth.

Different outcomes arise from different causes, and church growth has identifiable causes. The growing churches are going about their work differently than the dying churches. They know what is causing their growth. They know the dying churches are in trouble, and they reject their ways. Any church that desires to grow would be foolish to ignore this.

Table 1 sets forth a number of ways in which dying and rising congregations differ.

**TABLE 1: CHARACTERISTICS OF GROWING VERSUS DYING CHURCHES<sup>51</sup>**

	Dying Churches	Growing Churches
Age of congregation	In existence more than 35 years	Founded in the last 10 years
Ethnic mix	Homogeneous Anglo	Multi-racial

<sup>49</sup> E.g., *EDP*, pp. 4-5, 98-9, 340.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Johnson, op. cit., pp. 968-9. For current Episcopalian statistics, see [http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~lcrew/ecusa\\_history.html](http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~lcrew/ecusa_history.html)

<sup>51</sup> Derived from C. Kirk Hadaway, "Facts on Growth," based on the "Faith Communities Today 2005" Hartford Seminary national survey of 14,301 local churches, synagogues, parishes, temples and mosques. <http://fact.hartsem.edu/products/index.html>.

Gender mix	60% or more regularly participating adults are female	60% or more regularly participating adults are male
Mission clarity	Unclear to the members	Clear to the members
Congregational spirit	Feel like a close-knit family	Little sense of being a close-knit family
Congregational atmosphere	Not spiritually vital and alive, “we do not encounter God”	Spiritually vital and alive, “we encounter God”
Attitude toward change	Not willing to change to meet new challenges	Very willing to change to meet new challenges
Scheduling	One worship service each weekend	Three or more worship services each weekend
Use of media	No local church web site	Have a local church web site
Polity and tradition	Mainline Protestant or Catholic style	Evangelical style
Latitude	Broad, accommodating, middle-of-the-road	Narrow, whether on the right (large majority of cases) or on the left (in other words, if you are going to the left, go all the way and be clear about it)
Church politics	Major internal conflict	Little or no internal conflict
Character of worship	Reverent	Joyful, exciting, inspirational, thought-provoking
Worship music	Drums and percussion seldom if ever used in worship services	Drums and percussion are used in worship services
Program target	Few or no programs or events to attract non-members to become members	Regular programs that attract non-members to become members
Planning	No plan for growth, to recruit members	Plan for growth, to recruit members
Member support	No support groups such as bereavement, marriage, divorced, wellness, 12-step	Have support groups such as bereavement, marriage, divorced, wellness, 12-step
Attention to visitors	Do not follow-up with visitors, or do so in only one way	Follow-up with visitors in many ways
Historical position	Mainstream Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox	Evangelical, “other” Christian

I leave it to you to peruse the chart and come to your own conclusion about the particular differences between dying and growing churches, and whether your experience in your own congregation fits these general statistics, and why and how to change it. I will simply underline a couple of points.

One, this survey of 14,301 local churches, synagogues, parishes, temples and mosques, shows that members of plateaued and dying churches reported that they were like a “close-knit family” to an extent much greater than members of growing churches, who emphasized factors such as supportive ministry, joyful worship and willingness to make changes.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Hadaway, op.cit.,

Two, the evangelical and “other” Christian churches are growing, and the liberal mainline Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox denominations are not.<sup>53</sup> Based on that, I want to drill deeper into the differences between these two types of churches, based on my readings and observations.

**TABLE 2: TYPICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LIBERAL AND EVANGELICAL CHURCHES**

	<b>Liberal Mainline</b>	<b>Evangelical</b>
Leadership	Seminary graduates	Preachers and organizers educated in the local churches and Bible schools
Location	Always a church building	Often an alternative to the traditional church building, such as a former grocery store, warehouse, theatre, storefront, house, rented space in a public school, etc.
Membership	Mandatory, based on infant baptism	Voluntary, based on believer’s baptism
Target market	Members by birth, committed to the denomination	People with no commitment to a church
Mission	Social causes and traditional practices	To save people
Worship and liturgy	Formulaic, theologically-generated, by the book, liturgical	Innovative, flexible, aspires to move the emotions through praise and worship, contemporary art forms and relevant messages
Worship music	Organ, traditional hymns	Electric guitar, bass and drums, praise songs
View toward other faiths	Ecumenical: God is working through everyone	Evangelical: God is here; we are called to save you
Spirituality	Spiritual experiences are not expected	Open to spiritual healing, prophesy, extemporaneous prayer
Marriage and family	Affirming personal choice	Strict traditional guidelines
Governance	Governed by a multi-level national hierarchy	Flat; empowerment of local leadership
Polity	Parish system	Free church—no parish lines

Throughout its history as a free society, the American main street has served as an environment for religious innovation. Upstart religious leaders have met the market’s demand for religion that fits their culturally shaped needs and interests. On Sunday mornings, people vote with their feet. The result is the growth of locally governed, populist churches and rapid decline of traditional mainstream denominations.

Donald Miller, a religious scholar at the University of Southern California, writes, “Historians and sociologists of religion widely acknowledge a substantial restructuring among American religious institutions.” The contemporary culture, unlike the post-World War II generation, values

<sup>53</sup> By “other Christians” the survey means chiefly the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah’s Witnesses. They are growing and yet have some characteristics very different from the populist model. Sociologically the Unification Church would be categorized with these “cults.” I present a brief analysis of these groups in the Appendix.

on-the-ground leadership. “Consider the values of baby boomers,” writes Miller—values, I add, that they have passed on to their offspring:

- They don’t like bureaucratic structure
- ‘Brand’ loyalty has very little meaning
- Tradition is more often a negative than a positive word...
- They want to be involved in running and managing their own organizations
- They tend to be local in their interests<sup>54</sup>

Thus, Miller argues, the new paradigm churches speak to the contemporary culture, and this helps explain their popularity and growth. This is no surprise; denizens of the popular culture *created* these churches. We have seen that it has been the story of religion in America since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Unification Church with a populist model that gives responsibility with ownership to the members will stimulate vision, creativity and teamwork.

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<sup>54</sup> Donald Miller, *The Reinvention of American Protestantism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), p. 17.



## V. How to Develop the Populist Model

### Flatten the Organization and Focus on Spiritual Experience

Peter Drucker, a leader of contemporary management strategies, wrote “Post-capitalist society has to be decentralized. Its organizations must be able to make fast decisions, based on closeness to performance, closeness to the market, closeness to technology, closeness to the changes in society.” How do traditional churches apply this principle? First, they intentionally decentralize. This means that those with power give it up, and those without power take it on. Wise leadership inculcates leadership skills in the members and gently releases control. Second, the churches restore spiritual life to the members, the life-giving experience of the sacred, transcendent presence of God in their lives and in their community. “If the mainline churches are going to regain their leadership,” Miller writes, “they must do two things that the new paradigm [populist] churches already have mastered: first, they must *give the ministry back to the people*, which implies *creating a much flatter organizational structure*; and, second, they must *become vehicles for people to access the sacred in profound and life-changing ways*.”

Miller with many others believes that it is more effective to start new churches than to renew existing ones. Aubrey Malphurs cites research from the Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, MS, that “in just the next few years, 100,000 of the 350,000

Mainline churches must do two things: first, they must give the ministry back to the people, which implies *creating a much flatter organizational structure*; and, second, they must *become vehicles for people to access the sacred in profound and life-changing ways*.

churches in America will close their doors. Consequently, church planting will be the future for the American church because it’s far easier to plant a new church than to renew a dying one.”<sup>55</sup> I draw this out to remind us of the radical nature of the changes that must take place in stagnant churches if they intend to reach the people they believe God has prepared for them.

Miller’s several years study of new growing church bodies led him to realize four steps to abet a shift to the populist model.

One, “**radically decentralize organizational structures**, abandoning central offices and locating themselves in local churches, especially those flagship churches that are demonstrating leadership.”<sup>56</sup> By downsizing denominational headquarters, churches cut overhead, reduce bureaucracy, engender quicker response to challenges and opportunities in local settings and, most importantly, put their most valuable resource—their people—on the frontline.

Two, **put young leaders in positions of responsibility and allow them to spin-off experimental ministries**. I can mention churches such as SpiritGarage, a Lutheran spin-off in Minneapolis, the Community of Joy, another Lutheran church in Arizona, or the Willow Creek Community Church, which grew out of a Dutch Reformed congregation. The Saddleback Community Church could be considered a spin-off Southern Baptist group, as they never identified themselves as Southern Baptist. It is the same story with The Journey Church, a Southern Baptist ministry in mid-Manhattan. Can you imagine a congregation growing in that urban center with the name “Southern Baptist”? The youthful leaders use a name that is comprehensible to their youthful target market. The Vineyard in lower Manhattan calls itself “the

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 17, 187. Malphurs, op.cit., pp. 15-16.

<sup>56</sup> Miller, op. cit., p. 188.

River.” It meets in a science institute’s space that is available on Sundays, forty stories above Ground Zero, with floor to ceiling glass. It was planted by a young Korean couple.

The populist churches of the early 70s broke the mold by inviting young people with long hair who liked rock music and a lot of nasty things into their churches. They found that with the message of the Gospel, they could get rid of the nasty things, as long as they kept the rock music and let them keep their “hair like Jesus wore it.” To grow, young Christians in America are *shaking off the bureaucratic overlays*, and the wise headquarters are allowing them to do so. I note, therefore, with approval the adoption of new names for next generation ministries in the Unification community: Two Rivers VIP, iUnificationist, uMove, the Hub, the jUnCtion, Up and Coming, Go (God’s own), ESPN (Extreme Saturday Party Night), Charge, How To Get Everything You Ever Wanted, REAL Relationships, Lasting Imprint and Lovin’ Life Ministries.

The vast majority of new worshipping communities launched in the 1990s are *not* being started by “denominational systems,” .... That is, they are not getting started by a headquarters staff assigned to build new churches.

Three, **empower existing clergy to turn control over to the members.** This is most critical; it partners with what is called “gifts-based ministry.” To carry it out, Miller recommends some simple steps. Clergy should abolish at least 80 percent of their committee meetings, thereby freeing up people to join small group home fellowships. Help members discover their own spiritual gifts and apply them in the church setting—thereby reshaping the church. Empower pastoral care, evangelism, and cross-generational bonding in small groups, which are led and organized by laypeople. “Mirroring democratic values, [populist churches] encourage members to initiate new programs and projects, which thus reflect the members’ own needs and interests. Indeed, so long as these programs fit the values of the congregation, enormous latitude is granted in what ministries are started and how they evolve.”<sup>57</sup> Within the core principles and goals of the faith, let the members themselves shape the local church. This is also, as I discuss in the last chapter, the key to interfaith peace building.

Four, **reconsider the process of leadership preparation.** Miller states that the mainstream should “radically restructure seminaries, allowing more theological education to be done in the local churches... Seminaries should be professional schools where people are mentored and taught while they serve within a local congregation.” In this context, a seminary should not be isolated from the communities and churches it is preparing people to serve. It should include in-house apprenticeships, intensive workshops and hands-on training programs in its curricula, and always be asking the question: “how would this work in my church?”<sup>58</sup> American church historian Timothy P. Weber states, “No seminary can effectively educate missional leaders without being missional itself. The commitment to local church ministry will have to permeate all parts of the curriculum, not just the ministry courses. Thus an important question: can the training or orientation of current or future theological faculties support such a missional emphasis?”<sup>59</sup> I note that this is not from an evangelical think tank or rambunctious mega-church, but from the journal of the Association of Theological Schools.

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<sup>57</sup> Miller, pp. 187-188.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>59</sup> Timothy P. Weber, “The Seminaries and the Churches: Looking for New Relationships,” *Theological Education*, 44 / 1 (2008): p. 85.

Current initiatives from Rev. Hyung Jin Moon move in a populist direction. As international president, Rev. Moon is focusing on strengthening the common members' and visitors' experience of God. He calls for and personally engages in prayer and praise ministry, home visitations, street witnessing and joy-filled worship services, with multiple services each weekend. He is devoted to improving the quality of church leadership and ministry. When he spoke in Manhattan at the Lovin' Life Ministries pulpit, he praised Rev. In Jin Moon's putting ministry in the center. He, with his wife, and Rev. In Jin Moon with her husband and entire family, warmly embrace and speak to visitors, individuals and families during and after church services. They strongly call members to witness their faith boldly with confidence that there are countless people waiting for their message and ministry.

Don't look at the rise of variations as "denominationalism;" look at it as creative adaptation for the sake of advancing God's providence.

The American church president, Rev. In Jin Moon, is investing significant resources in creating life-giving worship. Worship is, after all, the center of church life but for decades has been an afterthought in the Unification Church. She is also focusing her attention on developing the next generation of ministry leadership. Finally, she is bringing in new leaders who ask the tough questions and bringing the American church to assess its own performance. This begins with gauging members' confidence and opinions, identifying areas of need, addressing practices that inhibit growth, adopting practices that promote growth, and supporting the spiritual growth of both guests and members. Consistent with populist thinking, the church seeks to "drive continuous improvement in the field" through a "participatory process model" that will "enhance collective thinking around the important objectives of church growth and leadership education."<sup>60</sup> Heather Thalheimer, Director of Education, made it clear to a church leadership conference in January, 2010, that growth takes place in the local churches and so that is where our attention is fixed.

### Results of Flattening the Organization

Unificationists live and work in the same spiritual marketplace as everyone else. By flattening the organization and focusing on personal spiritual experience, the following kinds of developments are taking place.

**Heaven's mission and authority are being substantiated in the local church.** Reverend Moon calls this "settlement," "home church" and "hometown." All religion is local religion. Members will applaud and learn from success throughout the world as they focus on success in their own location. In the words of Heather Thalheimer, UC Director of Education, "Think Cosmically, Act Locally."

This means that members will work where they are, reach the people who are nearby and make their faith relevant to them. The church will applaud local achievements that might seem small on the universal scale but nonetheless **create value for real people**. Speaking of this generation, Gary McIntosh writes, "many prefer to focus their ministry efforts in local arenas, where they feel they have more control and can see the results of their work...Churches can focus on the needs in their immediate neighborhoods and the concerns important to their community"<sup>61</sup> This will move

<sup>60</sup> Heather Thalheimer, et. al., HSA America Department of Education, "Evaluation of Performance Using Key Performance Indicators," distributed to church leaders at the National Leadership Conference 2010 (January 22-25, 2010, New York City).

<sup>61</sup> Gary L. McIntosh, *Three Generations: Riding the Waves of Change in Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1995), p. 105.

our eyes away from distant horizons, where we will find no new members, and toward our neighbor. Growing churches focus on “religious education for [people’s] children and some kind of religious experience that helps them make sense of their own lives.”<sup>62</sup>

The mission of **saving the neighborhood first** means faith in the autonomous power of the principle acting everywhere. It is an admission that it is God, not us, who changes hearts and changes the world, and it happens in the quiet, small spaces. America and the world will be influenced from every locality. We all know the “six-degrees of separation” principle. To give two examples local to my setting, a New York City financier hosted a campaign fund-raiser attended by Hillary Clinton, at his home in Barrytown, New York, which is not even on most maps. In Red Hook, New York, my local village, lives a brother of the head of National Public Radio and a top executive with SONY music.

So the national organization will let churches strengthen their roots locally and **encourage innovation and creativity** in the local context. It will provide broad parameters, equip local leaders and then get out of the way. Each church will be a frontline laboratory, creating solutions for their own problems. The national church will have not only one laboratory; it will have a hundred. It will benefit also because problems, kinks and potholes will be repaired on the local level without doing a lot of damage.

The church **gives the members ownership**. It encourages local planning and local styles of worship. Above all it mandates that the local church sustain itself through local funding. No funding will come from above. But in return, it will respect local ownership by curtailing national programs that extract funds and members from the local setting. According to McIntosh, our society tends “to prefer churches that have a clear focus [and] a narrowly defined vision...”<sup>63</sup> By not being subsidized financially, the local congregation will be forced to figure out how to succeed. By owning its mission and strategy, the local congregation will have the resources necessary to succeed.

The church utilizes the principle of **gifts-based ministry**. It will let ministries arise from the members out of their interests, gifts and needs. It will provide training or encourage members to gain training from any resource. It will provide validation, moral support and encouragement, and share success stories and best practices.

A radio ad for a local church in northern California informs listeners that the liturgical service starts at 8, the mainstream service at 10, the contemporary service at 1 and the youth service at 3.

In order to multiply energy, it gives the ministry away to the members, not by increasing control, but by releasing control. As Rev. Jim Edgerly reminded a recent Witnessing Summit, quoting Rick Warren, “you are organized either for control or growth. You can have one or the other, but not both.” **The church will empower all the members** who are willing as lay ministers and let them find their own resources for parenting, marriage, church growth, small group leadership, skills in media and the arts, worship support and leadership, relational evangelism and all kinds of personal ministries.

We will **expect diverse varieties of religious experience**. We will not look at the rise of variations as a problem, but as creative adaptation for the sake of advancing God’s providence.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 149

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 100, citing a Lilly Endowment Occasional Report

We will encourage different styles of worship. A radio ad for a local church in northern California informs listeners that the liturgical service starts at 8, the mainstream service at 10, the contemporary service at 1 and the youth service at 3. The church will allow different styles of organization, different styles of dress, food, music, prayer and venue, even for a Frisbee competition in the sanctuary. To make room, it will let go of old formats, properties and styles.

**We expect major changes.** Young people change things, and the Hartford research shows that growing churches are “very willing to change to meet new challenges,” while dying churches “are not willing to change to meet new challenges.” The Willow group could not have emerged other than with youth leadership. Further, growing churches report that they made *significant*, not just minor, changes in worship format or style in the last five years, while dying churches had made no changes or just minor changes.

**We drop the concern about positions and titles.** We allow members to have a significant voice in choosing their own leaders, as Rev. Hyung Jin Moon is now doing in Korea.

### **Expand Your Social Surface: Go Native**

All these characteristics lead churches to open their doors to the larger society. Rodney Stark, credits “open networks” as critical in the rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire. The reason is that religions grow according to the number of contacts each of its members has with non-

members, the attractiveness of the religion, and the ease of joining. In Stark’s words, “as movements grow, their social surface expands proportionately. That is, each new member expands the size of the network of attachments between the group and potential converts. ...However, this occurs *only* if the group constitutes an *open network*.”<sup>64</sup>

“As movements grow, their social surface expands proportionately. That is, each new member expands the size of the network of attachments between the group and potential converts. However, this occurs *only* if the group constitutes an *open network*.” (Rodney Stark)

The allowance of Christians to abrogate Jewish dietary laws and marry non-Christians made the early church an open network. According to Stark, Christians maintained an ethic of inclusive love to a degree greater than its rival faiths, by such things as granting full membership (and leadership positions) to women, servants and slaves, staying behind in plague-infested cities to tend to the sick *non-Christians*, and calling people of all racial and national origins to share the same communion. Open networks that expand the network of attachments between members and non-members are crucial to church growth.

Open networks naturally make a church indigenous, which means “originating in and typical of a region or country, natural or inborn.”<sup>65</sup> In the words of Ahlen and Thomas, an indigenous church is “a group of believers who live out their life, including their socialized Christian activity, in the patterns of the local society, and for whom any transformation of that society comes out of their felt needs under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the scriptures.”

<sup>64</sup> Rodney Stark, op. cit., pp. 20-21.

<sup>65</sup> Encarta® World English Dictionary © 1999 Microsoft Corporation.

Rev. Paul Rajan, a UTS student who planted fifty five churches in India and more in New Zealand, expressed this point with utmost bluntness: “Cross cultural evangelism does not work.”<sup>66</sup>

The New Testament churches were indigenous. They were *self-propagating*: they raised their own workers and spread using their own resources. They were *self-supporting* and did not receive funding from Jerusalem; in fact, Paul’s churches sent funds to Jerusalem. They were *self-governing*. The members were the owners.

Ahlen and Thomas’s “key church” strategy is a means to indigenize the church. Once an outside church (the key church) makes a base with a small group in the new culture, it allows a new church to develop within that culture. The key church doesn’t export its own culture into the target community.

Rev. Paul Rajan, a UTS student who planted fifty five churches in India and more in New Zealand, expressed this point with utmost bluntness: “Cross cultural evangelism does not work.”

It expects the new congregation to be different. It separates out its beliefs and ideals from its own cultural expressions, trusting that God can work in the new culture just as well as in the original culture. When a church is indigenous, it engages the interests of local people. Therefore, “Congregations are healthier and more productive, and require little or no outside support, when started and developed in the context of the socioeconomic conditions and culture of the people who are to be evangelized or congregationalized.”<sup>67</sup>

This takes us to a point that seems obvious but is exceedingly challenging to put into practice once a church settles down: **the church is not a building; it is a “collection of believers”** who cohere around a message. Reverend Moon concurs, “There are many cathedrals much greater than this [Belvedere garage], all over America. ...I do not want to build a great church. I’m looking ...for one person who under the worst conditions can still truly hold the heart of God and truly give his entire self. That is the real church, not the building.”<sup>68</sup>

**The Key Church Strategy** Ahlen and Thomas elaborate, “When church is defined as people rather than as real estate, the ceiling on creativity is raised several notches.” Once the members are ready to take the church outside of their familiar walls and restrooms, they can begin to strategize for growth. They boil down two basic components of this strategy. One, go to where the people are rather than waiting for them to come to you. Two, cultivate, encourage and trust indigenous leadership. Keep in mind: we are not just talking about whites reaching Hispanics or African Americans reaching Filipinos; we are talking about 50-somethings reaching the young people who reside physically in a bedroom down the hall but culturally on another planet.

Therefore the key church strategy begins with a small mission team. (A large mission group becomes an intrusion that overwhelms the target people.) The small team teaches locals to lead, and *withdraws within a year*. They let the people determine the strategy, programs and ministries. They put the focus on what the locals think is important. In the process, the new group naturally plugs into local resources. The missionaries reject “the arrogant assumption that the people lack the capability, discernment, financial resources and leaders to minister to one another and start a

<sup>66</sup> Conversation with the author during directed study class, May 10, 2010.

<sup>67</sup> Ahlen and Thomas, p. 32

<sup>68</sup> “A New Breed of People” (Sept 15, 1974, Tarrytown, NY)

church.”<sup>69</sup> After the team wins its first two or three converts, the early adapters will, if allowed, take ownership of the message and reach their less adventurous peers.

Growth comes when missionaries let the local leaders take this initiative. This liberates energy, for, as Ahlen and Thomas put it, “no one is lazy except in the pursuit of someone else’s idea.” Of course, they counsel, “some initiative needs to be taken by the sponsor church in order to make progress, but too much initiative from persons outside the congregation takes away ownership. When ownership is taken away, local initiative stops.”

Ahlen and Thomas reject the view that “Until the daughter church can be trusted to behave just like the parent, the parent maintains tight control over the church’s finances and activities.” New churches that develop under such control, they contend, are sterile and out of touch. In the key church strategy, sponsorship is partnership. The sponsor provides doctrine, leadership and initial resources. The new congregation provides a cultural base and local relationships. In effect, *the sponsor should work itself out of a job.*

In the area of funding, Ahlen and Thomas advise that it is easy to help too much, in the name of benevolence. At the beginning, one might initiate fundraising projects, with matching gifts from the sponsoring church. But long-term support communicates a welfare and entitlement mentality. It removes the sense of ownership, responsibility and incentive and makes the pastor accountable to the funding agencies, not to the community.

I believe that the starting point is the understanding that the growing churches are able to identify *the message* and adapt it to different *cultures*.

### **Set the Message, Release Control**

I am convinced that doctrine is not the main determinant of health and growth. All church doctrines are strange in the eyes of an unchurched person. The growing churches are able to identify the core message embedded in the doctrine and let it work its way into new cultures. They separate the message from the home culture. Just as the message of Jesus stands independent of first-century Palestine, the message of True Parents needs to stand independent of twentieth-century Korea. This happens when people *in a new culture take ownership* of the message. At that point they naturally express it in their own language.

Now I need to gently point out that our Unification Church has assumed some characteristics of the mainline denominational churches, and suggest that this has been detrimental to our growth. But we are a people of deep faith and ability to sacrifice for God’s will, and so we can quickly transition into a populist faith community. In the next chapter, I will draw out some affirmations of our theology and practice that make it right and good for us to do so.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 35; all citations from Ahlen and Thomas.

## VI. The Unification Church and the Populist Style

The Unification Church has its roots in populist faith. I will explain how the Divine Principle calls for a populist church, how Reverend Moon began as a populist church, and current trends toward popularizing our faith.

### The Divine Principle calls for a Populist Church

**Principle of Creation** The Principle of Creation explains that churches grow via the populist approach. The process of “realizing the Kingdom in the hearts of believers” is set forth in the Divine Principle explanation of how groups come about and grow:

When the body acts according to the will of the mind, and the mind and body thus engage in give and take action, the individual will live a purposeful life. This individual will then attract like-minded people. As these companions work together productively, their group will grow.<sup>70</sup>

This passage from the Principle of Creation describes the growth of any group, including a church. We can divide it into four parts. It begins with an individual living a purposeful life with the mind and body united. Everything begins with the unity of mind and body, centered on God. Such a person will attract like-minded people and, given good management sense, they will work together productively and the group will grow. This is the populist model. It describes how True Father began the church. It is Principle 101.

**Principle of Restoration** Principle 201 comes from the Principle of Restoration, where we read:

“...the universal tendency to seek out good leaders and righteous friends stems from our innermost desire to come before God through an Abel figure who is closer to God. By uniting with him, we can come closer to God ourselves. The Christian faith teaches us to be meek and humble. By this way of life, we may meet our Abel figure and thus secure the way to go before God.”<sup>71</sup>

This tells ministers and members to be “good leaders and righteous friends” in order to attract God-seeking people. It also says that we need to *meet* our Abel figure. I’ve seen many presidents on television, but have I ever *met* one? No. I’ve heard Billy Graham preach in a stadium, but did I ever *meet* him? No. Change comes from human touch, human contact. To the new person, the usher whom they meet is more important than the senior pastor in the pulpit. I applaud, therefore, Reverend In Jin Moon’s practice of personally greeting and shaking hands with all members after her worship services.

We need to *meet* our Abel figure. I’ve seen many presidents on television, but have I ever *met* one? No. Change comes from human touch, human contact.

**Preparation for the Messiah** In its analysis of the late medieval Catholic Church and Protestant Reformation, the Unification movement extols the populist model: a *flat organization* focused on

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 194.



*spiritual experience.*<sup>72</sup> At first glance, the *Divine Principle* speaks of the Protestant Reformation in glowing terms. “After the Protestant Reformation, the way was open for people to freely seek God through their own reading of the Bible, without the mediation of the priesthood. People were no longer subjected to the authority of others in their religious life, but could freely seek their own path of faith.”<sup>73</sup>

The *Divine Principle* points out that in order for the people to seek God freely, the denominational style Catholic church, including dysfunctional religious rites and bureaucracy, had to flatten and focus on encounter with God. “The people... rebelled against the ritualism and rules of the church which were constraining their free devotion. They fought against the stratified feudal system and papal authority which deprived them of autonomy. ... They protested the medieval view that faith required unquestioning obedience to the dictates of the Church in all areas of life, which denied them the right to worship God according to the dictates of conscience based on their own reading of the Bible.”<sup>74</sup>

As a student of the Unification teachings, for much of my life I considered this to be a celebration of the Reformation wrought by Luther and Calvin, but it is not that simple. The Protestant Reformation was a multi-faceted event involving conflict between the magisterial reformers, such as Luther and Calvin, and the free-church radicals. The magisterial side, the Lutheran and Calvinist state churches, maintained the “only one church” point of view, with the church and state united. In that system, all people are legally required to attend the church according to location. Tithing is a tax. Church parish lines and political boundaries are the same. Baptism is tantamount to citizenship in the state and so happens at birth; membership in the church is involuntary. The Protestant mainstream denominations, as well as Roman Catholic and Orthodox bodies, maintain this approach to this day. Each operates a system of parishes, districts and regions.

The Divine Principle praise of Protestantism is not for the state church style; it clearly calls for the free-church approach.

The Divine Principle praise of Protestantism is *not* for this denominational church style. The Divine Principle identifies with the other side, the free-church, populist approach. The Divine Principle exalts the house church movement of Pietism, in which believers sought authentic spirituality in small groups. It points to the parish-busting neighborhood movement of John Wesley, who later turned his “Methodist society” study groups into a church. It praises the strongly anti-establishment church leadership of George Fox, who was imprisoned for refusing to bend to any human authority, the new age spiritualism of Swedenborg, and the free-range revivalism that characterized the Great Awakenings.<sup>75</sup> Thus the Divine Principle finds God

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<sup>72</sup> “The first human ancestors, Adam and Eve, call God ‘Father.’ Should their children call Him ‘Grandfather’? They too should call Him ‘Father.’ Why is this so? From the viewpoint of God, the vertical center, all object partners of love are equal.” Sun Myung Moon, “The True Owners in Establishing the Kingdom of Peace and Unity in Heaven and on Earth” (April 10, 2006 - Seoul, Korea).

<sup>73</sup> EDP, p. 341.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 352.

<sup>75</sup> “The Reformation spawned philosophies and religious teachings which developed a multi-dimensional view of life seeking to realize the God-given, original nature of human beings. ... the Abel type view of life guided modern people to seek God in a deeper and more thoughtful way. ... opposed the prevailing influence of rationalism in religion and stressed the importance of religious zeal and the inner life. They valued mystical experience over doctrines and rituals. ... Pietism, Methodism, Quakerism and communication with the spirit world... in these diverse ways, the Abel-type view of life was maturing to form the democratic world of today.” (EDP 356-7) In contrast, Luther receives scant praise and Calvin is criticized over the predestination issue.

working not through the mainstream churches, Protestant or Catholic, but through the populist trends in Christianity in the “period of preparation for the Messiah.”

### **The Unification Church Started on a Populist Model**

Reverend Moon practiced this populist religious style as he planted his churches in Korea. Few young, visionary church leaders attempt to transform old bureaucratic denominational wineskins. Instead they abandon the old wineskins and make new ones. “What makes this reformation radical,” Miller writes, “is that the hope of reforming existing denominational churches has largely been abandoned. Instead, the leaders of these new paradigm churches are starting new movements, unbounded by denominational bureaucracy and the restraint of tradition—except the model of first-century Christianity.”<sup>76</sup> This description of the re-invention of Protestantism in the 1970s applies perfectly to Reverend Moon’s ministry of the 1940s and 50s.

When established churches in Korea rejected this young country preacher’s radical call and maintained their traditions and hierarchies, he separated from them. He established a model that resembled first-century Christianity. He did not go out and witness; he focused on his purpose and his teachings, and generated a powerful relationship with the Father in Heaven and desperate heart to care for people on earth. He consistently has sought to establish it by his sending out pioneer missionaries and in the “home church,” “family church” and “break through in the neighborhood” themes.

What he created in the early years exemplified the two characteristics of successful post-modern religious movements. One, it was a *flat organization* allowing local ownership, not controlled by the western missionaries or Korean hierarchies. Reverend Moon (then called “Teacher”) dressed in casual clothes, took members into the mountains for retreats and recreation, planted rice with members and slept and ate with members. As do all emerging spiritual movements, the group developed its own music, with songs written by the local members. According to Rev. Zin Moon Kim, in the 1960s Reverend Moon resisted his clergy’s pleading for the construction of church buildings.

What Reverend Moon created in the early years exemplified the two characteristics of successful post-modern religious movements.

Two, the church focused on imparting *spiritual experience* by emphasizing prayer, fasting, street preaching, pioneer evangelism with no cash in hand, and so forth. His worship services featured extended singing repeating the same songs over and over,

generating a Pentecostal atmosphere in which people felt electricity. In Reverend Moon’s words, “People who attended called one another *shik-ku*, or family member. We were intoxicated with love. Anyone who came there could see what I was doing and hear what I was saying. We were connected by an inner cord of love that let us communicate with God.”<sup>77</sup> Individuals would be guided spiritually through the streets to the church. Reverend Moon dressed in “laborer’s clothes” and waited in the back of the room unnoticed until coming forward to deliver his message straight out of the Bible. He had no seminary training and did not model his ministry on traditional doctrines or liturgical forms. He fashioned his faith tradition through direct give and take with God and thorough reading of the Bible, while experiencing a life of service to others as a poor student belonging to an oppressed nation.

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<sup>76</sup> Miller., p. 11.

<sup>77</sup> *Global Citizen*, p. 124.

Reverend Moon once described the ascendance of the Messiah in this way: "... he guides them with God's character and true love, [and] they will come to understand the true reality of religion and the universe and they will [receive him]. This will happen because all beings in this universe desire to be absorbed into the sphere of a lord of love on earth who is higher than they. Even birds and dogs will go to a village that loves them more and takes care of them. It is the same for all beings."<sup>78</sup> Clearly Reverend Moon's fundamental model is that of ministry providing direct truth, love and care greater than people can find from other sources.

### **Home Church is a Populist Model**

Through home church, True Father called the membership to create a network of hubs in a pluralistic society without parish lines. Thus the Unification spiritual community was to be a network of locally-generated hubs, each of equal authority. "Now is the time when the period of national level organization is over. If you are a Kim, Kwak or any other clan, you should start *hoondokhae* first with your own families."<sup>79</sup>

Since any number of Blessed couples may live in a given geographical area, with each free to develop their community, this is a *pluralistic religious society without parish lines*: "the standard of activity is not in the province. It is the leaders of the district and the neighborhood... The problem is how to educate the district and the neighborhood and have it sink in... Everything comes into the district and the neighborhood."<sup>80</sup>

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This echoes Rev. Moon's words that "There should be a family in that neighborhood... The mother and father have to believe Heavenly Father absolutely; they have to love sons and daughters like Heavenly Father loves the mother and father. We have to love our neighbors and the nation that is connected..."<sup>81</sup> We note the personal ministries of Rev. Hyung Jin Moon and Sun Jin Moon, visiting members in their houses in Japan, sharing meals with them, sleeping in their spare bedrooms.

Churches grow by placing responsibility in the hands of local families and small groups. They are responsible to initiate viable ministries, attract new people, assimilate them, raise them, and liberate and release them as blessed central families. The Witnessing Summit's terms for the "membership process" are "meet, member, mentor and ministry." With this responsibility we have the freedom to figure out the best way using our own resources. Church growth theory and practice tells us that there is nothing more effective than this.

Why does decentralization energize a church? One reason is that it enables a local church to cross cultural barriers. But there is another reason. Decentralization is effective because it places responsibility in the hands of people who are on the frontline. This puts church leadership and decision-making with the people actually in touch with the market. It is there that the churches will figure out what really works in bringing their neighbors into communion with God through True Parents. Through a new generation of leadership we see that now coming into place.

<sup>78</sup> *Cheon Seong Gyeong*, p 200; from a talk on 1978.10.04.

<sup>79</sup> Rev. Sun Myung Moon, "Our Responsibilities to Establish Cheon Il Guk," in *The Vision and Mission of Cheon Il Guk* (Seoul, Korea: Interreligious and International Federation for World Peace, 2005), p. 10.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126, 118

<sup>81</sup> Reverend Sun Myung Moon, *Way of Unification*, Part 2, pp. 123-4

## VII: Methods for Transitioning

Gary McIntosh presents five methods for American churches that want to shift into the populist style.<sup>82</sup>

- The “rebirthed model” discontinues the old style and begins a new one.
- The “blended model” combines old and new styles into one format.
- The “multiple-track model” offers old and new style church side by side, separately for different segments of the congregation.
- The “seeker model” keeps the old style, with some enhancement, but develops outreach based upon the needs of a target audience.
- The “satellite model” is when a church plants a new congregation.

I can comment on specific Unificationist efforts of which I am aware that represent these methods, beginning back in the 1970s and culminating today. I am sure that the reader can bring to mind similar examples from their own church life.

Oakland was a **rebirthed model**. Mrs. Durst discontinued the style of San Francisco and Berkeley, although located within the same metropolitan area, and began a new one. The separation was radical and complete; there was no intermingling of members or programs between Oakland and the other Unification groups in the Bay area. Oakland did not have Sunday service or international cultural nights and did minimal outreach to city officials as were practiced in San Francisco. The group focused on witnessing, running an introductory dinner program designed for young travelers every night, and bringing guests to workshops. It inculcated an intense discipline to talk to every person one met, no matter where.

This is illustrated by an incident that took place in May, 1973. I was one of a group of missionaries from Oakland being driven across the country to bolster new centers in various states. We had arrived in Wilmington, Delaware, one afternoon and no one was home at the center. Our captain, Sheri Sager (nee Rueter), phoned in to report this to the leadership back in Oakland.

The direction that came back was: send the members out witnessing. In pairs, we wandered this suburb of Wilmington for thirty minutes, seeking the lost. That is what you call relentless, unflinching focus.

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I tried to develop a **blended model** in New Jersey, 2001. Focusing on the worship service I invested in the worship band that already was in place, added drama and dance on occasion, moved to a bigger location (a rented school across the street from the church that could house our Sunday school classes as well as worship), added visual illustrations for the sermon, an after-program for new guests and tried to create guest-oriented sermons. This was launched with an 8-week series of discussion meetings with interested members, every Thursday evening, which about 30 attended each week. We experimented with a Catholic liturgical style one Saturday morning; it showed promise but was ill-timed with regard to other demands upon the

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<sup>82</sup> McIntosh, op. cit. *Three Generations* is a good introduction to the field. See also Dan Southerland, *Transitioning*. Timothy Wright presents a valuable discussion on transitioning worship in *A Community of Joy: How to Create Contemporary Worship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994).

congregation. We talked about services for whole families to attend together and generated some small group activity.

There resulted a growth in attendance and tithing, but the church did not add new members. As is the case in all churches, the old style and the new style differ significantly, and so much energy is consumed in making the blend that it is a challenge to find time to do ministry. (Also I was only serving part-time, commuting from two hours away; it was not my hometown church.) The after-service welcome program for new people progressed well, but we launched it a few weeks before summer vacation, and its director was also the director of summer camps, so the effort broke down. I learned that a blended approach requires depth of staffing and a highly nuanced vision for how to be all things to all people already in the congregation, plus attract and take care of new people. It is not an easy undertaking.

A **multiple-track model** can develop through a resourceful and empowered youth group. We read of this in the Hybels' account of the founding of Willow Creek. Unificationist young adult Harumi Kawamura developed the first steps in 2003-4 in the New York area. In the context of her seminary studies, Kawamura designed and ran three pilot retreats for college-aged American Unificationists, many of who were disaffected from the church. She applied insights that she gleaned from an independent study of several mega-churches in the New York area.

"Generation X religion," she wrote, "emphasizes the sensual and experiential, and enjoys incorporating text, image, music, dance, and the body as venues for the expression of religious beliefs." She went on to state, "It is my belief that this brief statement encapsulates

"Generation X religion emphasizes the sensual and experiential, and enjoys incorporating text, image, music, dance, and the body as venues for the expression of religious beliefs." [Kawamura]

important elements of the needs of young adults of the beginning twenty-first century in their religious experience. More specifically I refer to the experiential component in faith development and the incorporation of contemporary music and image in worship sessions. To this list I add the importance of testimonies." She formed a core group that designed and led retreats incorporating these diverse elements. They were energized because it was their natural faith expression. Kawamura's retreats led several participants to claim their parents' faith *even as they reshaped that faith*.

A multiple track model is also proposed by Hwa Young Kim, another seminarian who studied church growth. It is also a populist style. Kim proposes that young adults who are favorable toward the church begin small group meetings, solidify their identity, and gradually invite friends to their meetings. The meetings would be low-intensity, only gradually and sensitively introducing spiritual matters. She noted that gatherings of second-generation alone "have a tendency of being horizontal rather than centered on a vertical standard." Hence interaction with elders is necessary. She issues a call for "a place where anyone can share his or her own story with others [and] find a solution together." She reflects the spirituality of the "emergent church," which affirms casual community, horizontal engagement, deep spirituality and the value of elders' life testimonies for young people.

It is my view that one reason—perhaps the main reason—these retreats struck the chord among the young adult participants was because they were "for us, by us." The very fact that the events were germinated, planned, organized and executed by peers was the foundation for the Holy Spirit to work. Kawamura's ministry to re-integrate marginalized Unificationist young adults is worth the careful attention on the part of church leadership. In Kim's words, "The answer is

based on how [the second-generation] can own their faith. This cannot be substituted by the first generation or by anyone else. It has to be solved by the second-generation themselves.”

So one way to develop a multi-track model is to divest ownership to diverse leaders with their own unique styles, train them, pray for them, and allow them to minister to their own sub-community.

The **seeker model** involves intensive steps demanding that an entire congregation shift its paradigm. An effective leader with a highly motivated core congregation can achieve this. Rev. Yoshitada Sugita describes one instance in the Unification Church. His work is significant, so I am going to spend some time with his case study presented in my UTS church growth class.<sup>83</sup>

He began with the concession that no one is comfortable talking with non-believers about God, Jesus and True Parents. The sad reality is that for this reason, Unification Church congregations often do not proclaim or even explain their affiliation with the Reverend Sun Myung Moon. Rev. Sugita, as a pastor, bucked this trend with his Tokyo congregation. “One day,” he writes, “I determined to witness to people without hiding our church’s name.” Rev. Sugita inculcated a spirit of confidence in “the second Messiah, special fortune [and] all of the spirits assisting us” by calling his members to openly declare Reverend Moon. “Everyone was thinking that victory depends on witnessing to True Parents directly.” He continually reminded members of the vision at every opportunity.

The church received opposition as public awareness of their identity spread. “Though our church had to fight with local residents and opponents, it became a very big issue. This problem got on TV everyday and I had to go to the police, the TV station, and court. We brought those who opposed us into court and finally we won a

Rev. Sugita... identified our church’s “unique selling point,” and that is True Parents and their global ministry.

case. Why did I receive such persecution? It was because **I witnessed without hiding our church’s name and I did it well.**” Informed by study of Paul Cho’s Yoido Full Gospel Church, Sugita utilized proven methods for church growth and discovered that they meet with success *even in an environment in which the Unification Church suffers heavy media and official attack.*

His “basic point” is to start with true love, “not use the congregation with the motivation to raise donations. We leaders should have the fervent passion that we want to **love them as much as we love God and True Parents.**” Staff and members should “cherish each person completely.” He encouraged members to witness to their neighbors by first “giving things which they want and need. Give and give, and gain their trust.” In order to increase evangelism, he reduced the number of church meetings. “We should **stop meetings and make opportunities for members to meet many people.**”

His members witnessed at a large train station, using questionnaires and a booklet on the Unification Church. Guests coming to the church would meet him, hear a small choir sing, see a video about the movement, and hear the pastor’s introduction “**explaining what you can get in our church**, like [Rick]Warren.” Warren stresses that the church should be completely transparent to new people as to what it offers and requires of them.

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<sup>83</sup> The Kawamura, Kim and Sugita materials are presented in “UTS Students Explore Principled Directions for Church Development,” *Today’s World* (July, 2004).

The initial meeting would end with refreshments and an invitation to return to hear a lecture. This lecture was **adapted to the specific issues confronting the person's life**. It was “still not Divine Principle. We changed the content according to the people.” Thus, proclamation of Reverend Moon and the church identity was up front, but theological and doctrinal education was delayed in favor of presenting *the value of the doctrine to one's personal life*. In other words, instead of explaining how the car works, they showed the new person how advantageous it is to have the ability to travel. As a result, new people were attracted to the church. “Education was free, young people were happy to come. They ate dinner in the church; members made the meals with love. Donation started when they understood our church well enough and became a member. As we showered them with love, they donated voluntarily. Soon the church was filled with new young people. We began to have a problem because the place become too crowded and members were too few.” In order to serve all the guests, “new members helped voluntarily.”

To assimilate and disciple these new people, Rev. Sugita utilized Dr. Paul Yonggi Cho's model for small group worship and his members used that system to attract their neighbors and friends. Dr. Cho's material applies biblical principles in daily life. As Sugita put it, “His success is not only the system but also the material...” Sugita **simplified the “difficult” Unification Church doctrine**, creating a “practical textbook using Divine Principle.” He utilized the text in two “outstanding district groups” and gained three new members. This success with two experimental groups set the stage for broader application of the strategy. “[Two or three] is not such a large number, but it was an innovative event.”

Growing churches, like Sugita's, experiment with different methods, drop those that do not work, and adopt those that do.

As leaders we do not have confidence in prayer... this is a big problem. Our churches have detailed information about the spirit world, but actually we do not use this good point.

Rev. Sugita enhanced his worship service, utilizing three pillars: music, video and sermon. For music, he created a youth choir. They sang gospel and folk music before starting service, using guitar, contemporary instruments and hand clapping. They also sang the national anthem and “revival type holy songs. They played a short beautiful melody after prayer.” As a result, **“We could experience the effect of music. The atmosphere changed completely.”**

Sugita's greatest innovation, I believe, was his use of church-made documentaries in worship services. He correctly identified **our church's “unique selling point,” and that is True Parents and their global ministry**. “Our work is more wonderful than any other denomination. We can be proud of it. Actually, our activity is of a higher level than the Full Gospel Church. Our activity is beyond denomination or nation completely. Therefore, I make use of our activities videos in every service.” He would show selections from the church-made videos before the sermon. The entire congregation was inspired, including guests, and some people even shed tears. Through the carefully edited video, “they were filled with the Holy Spirit... The Japanese church makes a good providential video every month; however, most of our members never see them. I decided each week which video we should use at the next service. Honestly, *this had the most effect of the three techniques.*”

Rev. Sugita's sermon would apply Divine Principle to daily life. He spoke “in order to teach how to use our doctrine in our life. Therefore, I made a Principle sermon. I distributed a handout, which I made every week, which was a series, from the Principle of Creation to the Second Advent.” He also **included two real-life testimonies** to “give joy and hope to the people.” To

increase the impact, he utilized “a big screen with PowerPoint.” These elements are conventional in growing churches. A simple message aims at finding God and blessings in daily life. A printed handout, a consistent sermon series planned in advance and, most importantly, moving personal testimonies.

After the service, fellowship with food is very important. During that time, he, as senior pastor, “called the new people and their spiritual parents, and gave a special card on which was written a welcome, an introductory book, and our activity pamphlet. Furthermore, I prayed for them. Lastly, **the staff gave a present to the new people**. Spiritual parents and our members felt delight when we did this. As the church leader and staff loved the guest, **the congregation began to trust our church**.” Thus, Rev. Sugita’s members could rely that week in and week out, their pastor would provide a solid worship experience designed to win new members.

Prayer was another key element of the worship experience and overall church success. Sugita notes that, while Reverend Moon strongly believes in the spirit world and its relevance to his ministry, members do not learn, in general, how to mobilize spirit world. In short, they do not really believe that “prayer changes things.” He observes, “I’m afraid that our church members do not so much believe that our prayers have the power to make wishes come true, even our leaders, too. As leaders do not have confidence in prayer, they cannot lead the congregation. This is a big problem. Therefore, our churches have detailed information about the spirit world, but actually we do not use this good point.”

I’m afraid that our church members do not so much believe that our prayers have the power to make wishes come true, even our leaders, too. As leaders do not have confidence in prayer, they cannot lead the congregation. [Sugita]

To remedy this, based upon his many experiences of victorious prayer, **Rev. Sugita taught his members how to pray**, based upon his studies of Christian Science and the American New Thought movement of the late nineteenth century. He found that **group prayer during worship created miracles**. Sugita emphasized, “seeing in our imagination with three dimensional images. The secret of working with spirits is to imagine. This method is extremely powerful; I experienced it many times. Dr. Cho is using this, and many successful Americans are using it. We use this prayer power for witnessing and economic success.”

Rev. Sugita developed an effective church newsletter. He surveyed news from throughout the Japanese church, choosing the three most inspiring reports. He found a member with good computer and artistic skill, and created a full color newsletter “which was an innovation in those days.” He added a weekly message on “how to live this week.” He searched for testimonies that would “warm their hearts” and inserted two in each bulletin.

The final strategy of note is the team witnessing system. When he noticed that, even though he had an impressive worship service, the head count did not grow much, he reflected that members in his culture “were accustomed to being given a target.” So he gathered his area leaders, all of them women. He showed them the attendance book from the previous week’s service and reported who came and who did not come in each area. He asked them to take the report to those members who did not come. They were to “write some warm words on it, and visit and hand it to them. Amazingly, the next Sunday most of the people who did not come the last week came. Again we had the same meeting. I praised the leader who did well. Gradually attendance



increased. I realized that we need to assess accurately and create a good service; these two strategies are a key to success.”

As a result of these practices, he reports, his first church tripled in size, and his next church had one hundred people join within ten months. This supports the contention that even in a difficult environment, when the Unification Church effectively utilizes conventional growth principles, it grows.<sup>84</sup>

**The satellite model** Ahlen and Thomas observed that the vast majority of new worshipping communities launched in the 1990s are *not* being started by “denominational systems,” which was thought the best way in the 1950s. That is, they are not getting started by a headquarters staff assigned to build new churches. New churches are being started by “entrepreneurial individuals” working on their own or out of existing congregations.<sup>85</sup>

Unificationists planted numerous churches in the 70s and can do so again. We are good at creating organizations to accomplish specific missions and there is no reason not to identify *growing the church* as a specific mission. Following the satellite model, the Unification Church can encourage couples or small groups to plant churches with their own resources. They would be released to focus on this with all their energy and heart. They would work wherever and however they so choose. Miller observes that “the real innovative ideas for reshaping the church will come from people working in the trenches, addressing the needs of people in their churches and communities, not from denominational officials.”<sup>86</sup> The Unification Church can grow the same way all churches grow in America. It has laity gifted with a spirit of love and the ability to teach. Young people joined the Unification Church to create the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, not for secular careers. Blessed families on their own or in small groups can be trained, ordained and released.

Following the satellite model, the Unification Church can encourage couples or small groups to plant churches with their own resources. They would be released to focus on this with all their energy and heart.

Here I want to mention the American church experience with door-to-door outreach during the run up to the RFK Stadium Blessing in 1997. One recalls the surge of energy that year, when blessed families were called to do home blessings locally. People were given a mission: share holy wine with new people. They had a goal: 160 families. The church provided the materials: holy wine, cups and simple guidelines: a liturgy and prayer for a home holy wine ceremony. Thus we gave ownership to the Blessed couples. A congregation in Kentucky broke through. The conventional thinking had been that new people had to come to our setting to receive the Blessing. The Kentucky group decided to take the Blessing to the people, door-to-door and even in parking lots. Suddenly the number of Blessings began multiplying exponentially and the

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<sup>84</sup> Hwa Un Kim holds bachelors degrees in fine art from Sungshin Women’s University and philosophy in Seogang University, Seoul, Korea. Harumi Kawamura is a graduate of the University of Bridgeport, Bridgeport, CT, and is pursuing master degrees at Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, MA, and Unification Theological Seminary. At the time the original of this chapter was written, Yoshitada Sugita, an MRE student at UTS, had served 20 years as a church leader in Tokyo. At present he is overseeing the Unification Churches in the southern quadrant of Tokyo.

<sup>85</sup> Ahlen and Thomas, p. 12.

<sup>86</sup> Miller, p. 188. Miller continues, “I believe that denominations would be well served by radically decentralizing their organizational structures—abandoning central offices and locating themselves in local churches.” This resonates with Father Moon’s mid-1990s call to close down his American church headquarters and disperse his leaders throughout the local churches.

national headquarters took notice, received reports and shared nationwide the Kentucky method. *Within a few days*, Blessed couples across the country had adopted it. Simultaneously, the members in Nigeria pioneered another segment of the Blessing process, calling it the “holy honeymoon.” Innovation was taking place everywhere, including the production of holy candy and helicopter blessings. This brings to mind the value of standards, clear training and careful theological thinking, of which we could have used more at the time.

We can use the same ingenuity and creativity to build satellite churches. Our 1997 ministry moved toward a national stadium event, but instead of that, the satellite model would focus on building local family groups and eventually congregations. Ministry to build the newly blessed families into interfaith (yes, interfaith) communities could have followed the sacramental activity.

The satellite congregation initiative would serve to liberate the members who are called to do so to act on the anointing our True Parents have given. The leadership would validate, respect and spiritually protect the home church, hometown mission of the blessed central family, make it a providential priority, allow people to do it when, where and how they are guided by God to do, and educate, train, ordain and equip those who are called so that they can find success. Local church leaders need to examine these transitional models, develop indigenous worship and community life, and relentlessly seek God’s guidance in order to grow the Unification Church in America.

## VIII: Peace Through Shared Worship

This aspiration to create deep oneness among the religious populations, one family of humankind, is perhaps the most challenging of all that Reverend Moon has assumed. Where do religions divide? Not in ideals, not in values, not in shared hopes for peace. They divide when they worship. Worship is where religion brings people before God, and each religion does this with different scriptures, methods, music, words, rituals and so forth. To articulate shared ideals and values is a good first step. But we then return to our separated houses of worship to meet the divine and form our communities and families. Does this make a lot of sense? We ultimately must harmonize worship.

How can we possibly generate shared worship? There is of course one major obstacle: worship is led by dedicated professionals supported by members to speak and minister from the deepest core of their being. The leaders' job is to keep the people doing what they are doing in worship and to bless them through it. They are very unlikely to change; they are among the least likely candidates for conversion to a new way. People set in their separate ways before God will not accomplish the ultimate peacebuilding. But the populist church style offers hope. Why? Because the populist church style is *built for change*. It is designed for people who are growing out of the old formats and dealing with new cultural realities.

The populist style is not wedded to tradition, formality, symbols and doctrines. The populist style allows youth to step up as the resource for spiritual vitality. I suggest that the way to merge worship is by turning ownership of it over to youth whose affection and trust for each other surpasses their commitment to the traditional forms of their own religions. The hope for merging worship lies with *turning it over to young people in an empowered local community and letting the God-experience come first*.

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Miller's comments are helpful here. He states, "mainline churches need to begin to experiment with worship styles and music and communicate to a new generation of young people."<sup>87</sup> His research leads to the conclusion that the key is giving leadership over to the youth: "The services need to be led by young men and women whose lives have been transformed by their experience of the sacred." The youth represent the future, "...new churches led by a new generation of young people, and these youth (even as adults) may choose to meet in entirely different types of worship spaces and may organize their churches in radically different ways from those of their parents and grandparents."<sup>88</sup>

Extending Miller's insight beyond Christianity, why not let the Buddhist, Christian, Unificationist, Muslim, Jewish etc. *youth* work out shared worship, a "radical restructuring of liturgy"? *This is possible in a flattened organizational structure that allows local ownership*. This is the only way it can work, because it will break traditions, drive down new avenues, and turn out differently everywhere as local participants feel their way forward.

The goal is to move from a spirituality smorgasbord to meltdown worship. The key is inspired preaching and teaching that connects people of all faiths to God and to each other. From these

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<sup>87</sup> Miller, *Reinventing*, p. 187.

<sup>88</sup> Miller, *op. cit.*, pp. 188-190.

connections will emerge new forms of ritual. While a very challenging task, I believe that in the long run it will succeed. It also is consistent with Reverend Moon's explicit hopes, stated in 1991: "I will... hold worship services transcending all denominations. After this, I will go to spirit world. I will go there after completing that trans-denominational worship."<sup>89</sup> Unification communities can drive this process once they open out into populist space and time. After all, Unification Church members tend to be very affirmative of other traditions, and to be flexible about their own. While our tradition is in its formative stage, it can do this. From such worshipping communities will come young adults who will marry across religious boundaries, which, Reverend Moon believes, is "even more difficult than international marriage."<sup>90</sup>

### **Tuna Melt, Not Salad Bar**

The Unification Church tradition already is an amalgamation, emerging from a heterogeneous culture that wedded Buddhism, Confucianism, Shamanism and Christianity. It is no surprise that UTS welcomed members of Jewish backgrounds leading Shabbat services at Passover, nor that the new temple in Seoul features the founders of four great world faiths in the sanctuary with the church's own founders. The course of Hyung Jin Moon, youngest son of the Founder and president of the worldwide church, is emblematic. His path of faith included several years of devotion to Buddhist meditation. The important point is that he never abjured Unification faith; Moon found Buddhist spiritual disciplines to be a path to express his Unification identity. He brings this experience into his Unificationist worship in Korea. Prior to that, he led well-received "Chun Hwa Dang" workshops in spiritual practice on the Unification Seminary campus. As a participant, I found his Buddhist-informed expression of the Divine Principle to be highly effective, in particular in addressing the call for mind-body unity.

Hyung Jin Moon's path to faith included several years of devotion to Buddhist meditation. His focus on the internal mind-body dynamic is refreshing.

Similarly, two young leaders in America, Jaga Gavin and Dave Hunter, spent years worshipping in independent Bible churches. Hunter was active for four years in what he calls a "dynamic youth ministry and Sunday worship service" at the Mt. Oak United Methodist Church in Maryland. That church's web site identifies itself as solidly contemporary in style: "a Biblically based, multi-racial fellowship, located at the corners of Mt. Oak & Church Roads in Mitchellville, MD. We love Jesus. We strive to equip folks to live as His disciples." It emphasizes the simple points: loving Jesus, Bible-based, open-minded, warm and inclusive, equipping people for discipleship. And, oh yes, it's local—"on the corners of Mt. Oak & Church Roads."

To illustrate, here is what Dave Hunter informed me about his years at Mt. Oak. It is all "healthy church 101." His first point was about ministry for and by the youth, "the necessity for vibrant youth ministry led by young adults ['not older adults'] that emphasizes fun over theology, practical rather than theoretical / theological content and meets the needs of the youth, not the church." Second was about worship and cracking the culture code: "the importance of worship

<sup>89</sup> Sun Myung Moon (*Cheon Seong Gyeong*) pp. 291-2. In this speech Father Moon referred to the realm of Christian denominations. Assuming that the same would apply to the realm of all religions, I posed this question to Dr. Peter Kim, Reverend Moon's chief assistant: "My question is: here Father is referring to Christian denominations (Lutheran, Methodist, Catholic, etc.). Can we say that Father now is committed to holding worship services transcending all religions (i.e. Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, etc.)? My feeling is that the answer is YES, but I want to check with you." I received in response, "Dear Dr. Hendricks, My answer to your question is "YES" too. Peter Kim."

<sup>90</sup> *Global Citizen*, pp. 223-4.

and that as long as the message is ‘holy,’ any style is acceptable.” Third was about building community: “people need a connecting point with others. The church I went to did it through small groups, study groups, and retreats based on age demographic.” Fourth was about flat organizational structure and gifts-based ministry. Dave wrote that the Mt. Oak leader was “well-spoken and charismatic” but not “a pastor who tries to do it all. ... In this church, the senior pastor was not as good of a public speaker as the assistant pastor. The senior pastor recognized this and therefore allowed the assistant pastor to give most of the sermons. The senior pastor guided the pastoral team internally, and allowed the pastoral team to do their jobs with very little oversight. As long as the pastoral team was internally aligned, they were free to do their ministry in whatever way God led them externally.”<sup>91</sup>

Jaga and Tami Gavin were members of the Rock Church in Asheville, NC, and worked with the young adult ministry leadership for several years before the call to Lovin’ Life. A glance at the Rock web site shows us that their mission is: “Love God. Lift people. Change the world.” “That’s what we’re all about,” they say. “We love God and His Son Jesus - we love walking with Him daily and coming together weekly to worship Him and grow together in Him - we love serving and building His beautiful church. We want to connect with each other, encouraging and lifting each other to new levels as we share life together. And we want to change the world through our relationships - feeding the homeless, seeing people come to know God, building orphanages in other countries, comforting the broken hearted, and simply loving our neighbors.” Unlike the Mt. Oak UMC, the Rock is an independent Bible church, more typical of the contemporary approach. Jaga and Tami made a seamless transition into the Unificationist context from the Rock, showing the inclusive nature of the UC spirituality. Jaga runs the New York City young adult ministries and Tami is the volunteer coordinator.

As long as the pastoral team was internally aligned, they were free to do their ministry in whatever way God led them externally. (Hunter)

Dave and Jaga participated with numerous Unification Church youth and veterans in a series of “witnessing summits” led by Sheri Rueter. These led to the founding of an experimental young adult ministry in (where else?) Los Angeles, in the summer of 2008. That ministry came to be called the Hub. Jatoma and Camia Gavin, co-founders of the Hub, sought “to pilot the fresh and creative ideas from the Witnessing Summits to effectively outreach to American young adults ... and start a revolution.” Soon, young adults from the L.A. community stepped up to join them on the pilot team. As would be predicted from the record of all populist efforts, numerous programs were floated, including such things as “TrueQuest—monthly outdoor adventures, Community Concert Series—a monthly concert for LA’s up and coming musical talents, Artists Showcase—a night of local art and music, The REAL Relationship Seminar—a Divine Principle based seminar on relationships, The Lasting Imprint—a Divine Principle retreat focusing on the gifts we each have and our responsibility to share them with the world, and Project Connect—a young adult worship service, [and] financial IQ workshops.”

But most importantly, the Hub, Camia writes, is “a community outreach center where young adults can share their faith.” It has “given hundreds of guests and hundreds of young adult Unificationists a place to call home. ... It is the local volunteers who make the HUB a place to call home and make L.A. a community of support, creativity, self-expression, and tremendous adventure.” The Hub experience led Jatoma to declare that what leads to success is “trust and

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<sup>91</sup> Dave Hunter e-mail to the author, February 11, 2010.

giving creative space.”<sup>92</sup>

For the youth in the modern world, forms are not set in stone and personal relationships trump institutional commitments. So the idea is that a real interfaith worshiping community can come through a young, locally-empowered pastoral team internally aligned with the ideal of True Parents, partnering with peers from diverse traditions to build a worship experience. Young adults can readily integrate what the adult sees as incompatible faiths into something other young adults see as cool. I want to think this way: meltdown worship inclusive of diverse tradition strands is not a stopgap measure in response to the crisis our world is facing. No—far from it! It is what makes life exciting. It’s what we want! It can expand ministry into something hugely powerful, once we wrap our minds around it—and gain a little education about each other.

Unification youth are not wedded to traditional religious styles but are very open to spirituality and religion in general. They can link with young people of all faiths and, in the right context, build new forms of worship, locality by locality. I think this will take place naturally as the Unification Church evolves as an authentically open populist community, because our core value is, after all, one family under God. It is where God wants to work!

The Hub experience led Jatoma Gavin to declare that what leads to success is “trust and giving creative space.”

### **Take a Time, Peace, and Do**

We Unificationists are always in a hurry. Perhaps it is Reverend Moon’s Presbyterian background. Everything is scheduled to be completed very quickly. It is good to know that the eschatological clock is ticking. But at the same time, we need historical perspective.

We can learn something from the role of Reverend Moon and his movement in the fall of the Berlin Wall. The fall of communism was a sudden and unexpected historical shift, but research such as Thomas Ward’s shows that behind it was a sustained, systematic educational and activist strategy carried out over decades. The movement published books and pamphlets offering careful analyses of the flaws of communism in terms of ideology and social practice. It sponsored seminars and conferences on the subject for decades, in Korea, Japan, the US, South America and Europe. It held countless rallies with a very clear message on college campuses, confronting Marxist student groups to the point of violence. It gathered 1.2 million people in Seoul in a rally against communism. It created the CAUSA movement, educating tens of thousands of American ministers and political leaders from all parties in the early to mid-eighties. It sent journalists on all-expenses paid fact-finding tours to Russia, where they developed relations with the Russian media, some of whom were hungry to get onto the world stage. The teaching was well informed and the presentation was technically advanced and persuasive. In other words, Reverend Moon conducted a focused, ideologically grounded, strategically intelligent campaign to overcome communism, spanning decades.

The lesson naturally would be that in order to grow the Unification Church, the membership needs to conduct a focused, ideologically grounded, strategically-intelligent campaign spanning decades, with objectives as clear and simple as that wrapped up in the phrase “the end of communism.” That objective was easy to measure: the collapse of the communist empire centered in Moscow. The objective of church growth has to be equally simple: grow the church.

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<sup>92</sup> Hub literature, Spring, 2010.

Rodney Stark's research reveals that early Christianity did not grow by leaps and bounds. It came to dominate the Mediterranean world by sustaining a growth rate of 3.42% per year, year in and year out. That means that a church of 100 would grow to 103 or 104 in that year, and to 107-108 the next. Stark's conclusion is that Christianity did not grow due to miracles, state legislation, or the impressive acts of martyrs. Rather, "the primary means of its growth was through the united and motivated efforts of the growing numbers of Christian believers, who invited their friends, relatives and neighbors to share the 'good news.'"<sup>93</sup>

In reality, religious do not grow by miraculous intervention unless it leads to sustained open networks, compassionate care, human love and acceptance, healthy values and a spiritual

message of God over generations. So too, Reverend Moon does not rely on miracles, but on human interaction. Regarding miracles, he states that they "tend to confuse people ... A faith that relies on unexplained or miraculous occurrences is not a healthy faith. All sin must be restored through redemption. It cannot be done by relying on spiritual powers. As our church began to mature, I

Reverend Moon's new members  
"...kept coming to me. The reason was that I opened a way for them to resolve their frustrations. ... They wanted to come to our church and join me on my spiritual journey."

stopped talking to members about the things that I was seeing with my heart's eyes." In his words, his new members "...believed what I taught and kept coming to me. The reason was that I opened a way for them to resolve their frustrations. Before I knew the truth, I, too, was frustrated. I was frustrated when I looked up to heaven and when I looked at the people around me. This is why I could understand the frustrations of the people who came to our church. ... Young people who sought me out found answers in the words that I spoke. They wanted to come to our church and join me on my spiritual journey."<sup>94</sup>

Long-term growth can happen with reference to a messianic social impact of Reverend and Mrs. Moon and the Unification theological vision. To learn from history, this requires sustained strategic investment focused over decades with clear and simple objectives. The Divine Principle, finally, is clear about this. The Messiah, it states, "will emerge from among a group of reborn believers to become the leader of Christians." In fact, the Principle text prophesies that he will be persecuted as the movement he generates "sprouts and grows amidst the final phases of the old age and comes into conflict with that age."

"At Christ's Second Advent, because he will be born on the earth, the Kingdom of Heaven will be realized first in the hearts of those who believe in him and follow him. When these individuals increase in number to form societies and nations, the Kingdom of Heaven within will gradually be manifested in the world as an outward, visible reality."<sup>95</sup>

May God grant us individuals the power and grace to realize the Kingdom of Heaven in our hearts, believe in and follow the Messiah, increase in number and form societies and nations embodying God as an outward, visible reality.

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<sup>93</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 208.

<sup>94</sup> *Global Citizen*, pp. 135, 139.

<sup>95</sup> EDP, pp. 394, 107, 388.