



**CREATION IN UNIFICATION THOUGHT:
A CRITICAL INQUIRY**

by

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It is unusual for a contemporary Jewish theologian to be considering questions of origin, of creation. Indeed, the central issues of Jewish theology for the past half century have less to do with creation and much more with providence and revelation. And the Jewish future is in part being shaped by conflicting notions of the messiah, redemption.

Ever since the work of Franz Rosenzweig in the midst of World War I, the question of creation has been ceded to the scientists. Aside from fundamentalists intent on showing the literal meaning of the Genesis story, most Jewish thinkers are interested in demythologization of the creation stories, its roots in ancient Mesopotamian myths, or in the remythologization of the Genesis story as reflected in the work of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik's concepts of the two Adams, the magisterial Adam of Chapter 1 and the covenantal Adam in the second creation story. When they think of creation, they talk the language of legend and story, of aggadah, and not of metaphysics or theology. Thus aside from celebrating creation in daily prayer: God "who renews creation each day"; the sabbath whose kiddish [sanctification of the wine] begins with the recitation of the seventh day of

creation in the book of Genesis; and the Jewish New Year, the anniversary of creation; a Jewish theologian can do much of his work without addressing the issue of creation.

Much of contemporary Jewish theology avoids any discussion of creation and confines itself the metaphorical expression of humanity as a created in the divine image and thus of infinite worth, infinite value. Tradition sanctions such a position. Permit me first a word of legend, then of law, and finally of lore.

Why was the first letter of creation the Hebrew beit [ב] the Midrash asks. In order to teach that one can not know what is above and what is below nor what preceded creation. The human condition is limited to the unfolding of history in the future -- moving forward.

According to the Talmudic story, four rabbis went into PRDS, the study of Esoteric matters, the domain of the hidden. One died, one went mad, one lost his faith. Only the great master Rabbi Akiva went in whole and emerged unscathed. There are two versions of what issue

they wrestled with in PRDS: Providence: "Why do the righteous suffer." Creation: "What is there something rather than nothing? So dangerous were the consequences of such pursuit that Rabbinic law urges caution, age, experience, maturity.

For three years Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai, the two main schools of Rabbinic Judaism, debated the questions, "Was it good for God to have created the world?" The content of these debates are not recorded in the Talmud, neither the reasoning nor the depth of the inquiry. The conclusion was indecisive, we cannot know. Now that we are created our task is to fulfil the divine will.

Still, the question of creation could not be avoided. Students of Jewish mysticism know the most daring image of creation was offered by Rabbi Isaac Luria who founded a school of Kabbalah in the town of Safed shortly after the Spanish inquisition. The ARI as he was known [Ashkenazi Rabbi Isaac] offered a bold understanding of why God created the world. Primordial divinity wanted to expel some dross. Thus God contracted

and empty space remained in the void which when filled again with God's presence could not contain it. The vessels were thus broken and divine sparks were scattered throughout the world. Creation was a cosmic catastrophe according to the image of the ARI and the task of that creation is to reunite the divine sparks scattered by the catastrophe of creation. The first two attempts -- Adam and Eve in the Garden and Israel at Sinai -- failed because of sin. Both were on the brink of bringing history to an end and both in the end failed because of iniquity -- eating from the tree, the golden calf.

In the aftermath of the expulsion from Spain, Luria's exilic vision was most powerful; God's exile was mirrored by Israel's exile from the land, even Israel's exile from its exile. Divine exile was reflected in human history -- Adam and Eve's exile from the garden -- and in individual biography -- exile from the womb. The religious quest is for restoration, wholeness, reunion. Lurianic Kabbalah resulted in the Mystical Messiah Shabtai Tsevi and finds its contemporary expression in Hasidism. Its theology made its way into the meditations that precede prayers and into the psyche of seekers.

These personal reflections are a brief way of stating gratitude and incompetence; gratitude for the opportunity to wrestle with the issue of creation and incompetence as a result being so new at it. Perhaps the limits of what I can do are a careful reading and a critical inquiry.

If the Divine Principle is scripture, then Sang Hun Lee's Fundamentals of Unification Thought is commentary. Faithful to the master, Lee clarifies the Principle and relates both to Western and Eastern thought. Part science, part theology, part metaphysics, part intellectual history, the work elucidates where necessary, reflects where possible, and hones insights as required.

To the unfamiliar reader -- and surely I am one -- two elements are immediately apparent. The thinking is unitative rather than dialectic. There are no gaps, the attempt is to create a seamless whole where ontology and history, human creativity, nature, science, art and literature are dimensions of a unifying whole. Mind and body must be united. Matter and spirit are linked not

separate. Western thought and eastern thought are connected, two traditions are bridged, perhaps harmonized. Sungsang and Hyungsang are "not separated, but exist as a union since they are united." So too, Yang and Yin which are united in God. The natural world and the social world as perceived as united. There is unity beyond diversity and the diverse is united. There is a respect for the past, an attempt to build on it and to reach a higher stage. This unity reflects the Divine intent in creation. According to Lee, This harmony is reflected in nature in diversity and variety.

Secondly, Unification thought celebrates creation in ways that other religious traditions have handled more timidly, more hesitantly, perhaps even more convincingly. "God wanted to feel happiness whenever He looked at His creation," says the Divine Principle.

Sang Hun Lee comments "God created humankind as His object and the universe as the object of humankind out of the irrepressible impulse to be joyful through love." Humanity mirrors this impulse. Created in the image of God, their very individuality brings a special and unique

type of joy to God through the individuality of all creation. Thus, human individuality and diversity is acclaimed as reflective of the abundance of divinity.

Yet diversity is linked to unity in Unification thought; we learn from Lee that "there is no purpose to the individual apart from the whole nor a purpose to the whole that does not include the purpose of the individual." Human individuality is absolute.

From creation, we can see the outlines of a religious world view tolerant of diversity welcoming the secular and the sacred, accepting the variety and diversity of knowledge and learning and even the many paths to God represented by the world's religions. Every creation, is an individual truth incarnation

Lee writes:

The purpose for which God created the universe was to create human beings in resemblance to the image of God and to build through them, the everlasting Kingdom of Heaven -- a world of love, truth, goodness, and beauty."

I know of no other religious tradition which so celebrates creation -- certainly not my own whose diverse traditions celebrate creation, wonder at its intent,

bemoan its harshness, and anticipate its end in reunion with God. And yet while I am not unmoved, I am still unpersuaded. Left unclear at least for the moment to this reader is why God was motivated to create. Overflowing love led to creation, but what was God's agitation? What of the failure to achieve the kingdom through the many millennia of human existence?

Humanity is created in the divine image is a central teaching of the Genesis story. In Jewish tradition this forms the cornerstone of the infinite valuation of human life; in American national life, it is the foundation of inalienable rights endowed by our creator. In Unification thought, the human impulse mirrors the divine. Humanity also has the impulse to obtain joy through love which is the source of its creativity, generativity. Humanity is bidden to imitatio dei.

Unification thought accepts the placement of humanity in the scale of creation. "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, subdue it and have dominion." Adam was charged to fill the world, to subdue the world, to guard the world. Humanity created to be ruler of the

universe, the mediator and harmony of the universe, yet these all too often conflict.

It affirms rather than negates the body. The union of Adam and Eve in one body was the incarnation of God's world. Male and female are balanced -- we each are part male and part female. In union, there is wholeness. The second blessing is multiplication, male and female become one, produce children. Like the Kabbalists, except for sin the whole of creation would have been affirmed and perhaps could have been brought to a conclusion.

The Divine Principle speaks the attributes of God and of essence. It avoids the caution of Kabbalah's notion of the Eyn sof, that without end, the Unknowable or even of Spinoza whose philosophy distinguished between essence and attribute.

In keeping with the seamlessness of unification thought, ontology must be integrated into action, and such action is reflected in creation. "We can perceive God's deity by observing His creation," we are told, and indeed if that be the case, then we must wonder what

Unification thought sees in creation that leads to the joyous celebration of that Deity. Surely, misery and suffering, evil and iniquity should make our celebration more restrained, more hesitant.

"God is the standard for solving actual problems of individual and society." Its praxis: know the standard of creation when God first created humankind and the universe then pursue the solution in that direction. Lee suggests an analogy to the watchman, who returns the broken watch to the status quo ante and to the doctor who returns the body to stasis -- health -- is rich and suggestion yet its application eludes me. In short, I sympathize with the yearning, but find the applicability unclear especially when there is a dispute in the particularity of what standard to apply. An ecological example may pose the dilemma most poignantly. Surely, all can agree that harmony of humanity with nature is the vision of Adam and Eve in the garden. Harmony with nature is a positive ecological goal but once diversity, dominion, creativity and beauty are added to the equation there is a measure of dispute as to the applicability of the divine standard. Once economics, global competition,

use rather than abuse of natural resources are introduced as factors, the applicability of such a standard -- even its discovery -- becomes ever more problematic.

I am intrigued by the notion of Universal Prime Energy as the source of vertical power and give and take as the root of horizontal power. Give and take action is the energy that provides power for existence, allows for science and diversity. In Hasidism there is a similar notion of haloch v'shav, give and take, approach and retreat which is the core of the human response to the vertical covenant and of the response to intensity. Moving forward, backing away. Could they be rooted in the same primordial response to the divine.

And finally, Lee asserts that Unification thought believes that "God created the human being in His own likeness as His object of love." Perhaps the most ultimate question of creation is to wonder if in retrospect (though such a sense of time perspective is unGodly for Unification thought) the impulse to be joyful through love has led to disappointment or despair? Surely, it has not yet led to fulfillment.

