



**DISCUSSANT RESPONSE**

by

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to Michael Berenbaum's

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

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*Comment on Michael Berenbaum,  
"Creation in Unification Thought: A Critical Inquiry"*  
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Michael Berenbaum has given us a brief but incisive paper on the idea of Creation in Unification Thought, one which raises some absolutely fundamental questions.

By way of introduction, he describes the state of Jewish reflection on the idea of Creation. He remarks that Jewish theology has been reluctant to put forth theories of Creation. Many theologians consider questions like "Why did God create?" to be unknowable. According to tradition, the rabbis of old rarely spoke about it. Most Jewish thought is centered on the theme of God's providential activity in history; its starting point is humankind in its fallen condition--exiled from his true home, longing for restoration and reunion with God.

This redemptive focus of Jewish theology even enters into what is perhaps the most sophisticated theory of Creation, put forth by the Medieval Kabbalist Isaac Luria. It speaks of the creation as tragic, a "cosmic catastrophe" which broke apart the fabric of divine unity, leaving a fallen world in need of redemption or restoration. Indeed, given the historic Jewish experience, no theology can be acceptable unless it comes to terms profoundly with the depth and extent of evil in the world. I infer that the question of theodicy is also the key criterion for Berenbaum's evaluation of the theory of Creation in Unification Thought.

In his series of very brief, almost epigrammatic, reflections on Unification Thought, Berenbaum remarks that it "celebrates creation" as the object of God's Heart and the source of God's joy. Yet he finds this understanding of the purpose of creation unconvincing, mainly because it does not accurately describe all the pain, suffering, conflict, and evil that pervades the creation. In particular, he questions why God was motivated to create the world, given the fact of the repeated failures to realize the kingdom of heaven.

What are some of the conceptual differences and confusions that color this evaluation? We can begin by noting that Berenbaum uses the term "Creation" to denote what Unification Thought is doing in the first chapter of the *Fundamentals of Unification Thought*, whereas there the chapter is titled "Original Image." Berenbaum's discussion of "Creation" takes Unification Thought to be describing the created world as it presently exists. But in my understanding, when Unification Thought treats the "Original Image" it is describing the nature of the God who creates, as distinct from the creation itself which has been corrupted by the human fall. The ideal aspects of creation, which are in accord with God's nature, are distinguished from the creation (especially human beings) as empirically observed, which includes various corruptions due to sin.

The conception of Unification Thought is described as "unitive," meaning that all aspects of existence are interconnected in a "seamless whole," including the dimensions of matter and spirit, yang and yin, eastern and western thought, ontology and history, science and art. But I become uneasy when I read in a single phrase that Unification thought joins "ontology and history" into a "seamless whole" (p. 5) We seem to be missing some of the philosophical subtlety which is packed into the idea of "unification."

After all, many philosophers, including Plato, Spinoza, and Hegel, have put forth Idealistic philosophies that bind all creation into some kind of unity, but the details and implications of that idea in each of those thinkers are very different. Spinoza's pantheism is well known; Hegel likewise has such a degree of determinism built into his thought that many interpreters have understood him to be saying that history could not but happen in the way that it did in order to express the unfolding of the Absolute Spirit ("what

is rational is actual.") But in Unification Thought, while Ontology regards creation as a reflection or manifestation of God's attributes, History is definitely *not* so regarded:

History is sinful history brought about by the human fall. Because of the fall, it was not possible for human history to start as principled, normal history; instead, it came to be filled with wars, pain, misery, and the like. Accordingly, finding fundamental solutions to the various problems in history is impossible without solving the problem of the human fall (*FUT*, p. 296).

Perhaps assuming that the creation cannot be other than the way God created it, Berenbaum questions, "why God was motivated to create" given "the failure to achieve the kingdom through the many millennia of human existence" (p. 8). He continues:

"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 (pp. 9-10).

I wish for more clarity here as to just where Berenbaum finds the picture lacking. Perhaps he means that we should question the goodness of a God who set up the world in such a way that it *could* be corrupted by human sin. In which case, we get into the question of the value of human freedom versus an alternative world in which God's paternal(istic) influence were more strongly imposed.

I think this could be a fruitful line of discussion. One of the emphases in *Divine Principle* is its insistence on human freedom and responsibility as befits our position as co-creators with God. Furthermore, in order to allow human beings the space to exercise free will and creatorship, God (voluntarily) limited His power over humans to an "indirect dominion." Only after reaching perfection would humans enter the "direct dominion" of God, where God's authority would be established by love. For the sake of the fulfillment of love, God does not order the creation by His omnipotent will; instead He gives humans free will and wants to draw humankind to return His love in freedom.

This discussion is developed, somewhat implicitly, in the discussion of God's Heart, Logos, and Creativity in *Fundamentals of Unification Thought*. There we find criticism of the Christian (and Jewish) notion that God's work in the creation can adequately be described by the concepts omniscience and omnipotence. They are clearly secondary values, if the fundamental motivation for God's creation is the impulse of God's Heart to love an object. Furthermore, in the discussion of the Logos (*FUT*, p. 39-41), it is stated that rational choice (and hence freedom) is built into the fabric of the cosmos in a dialectical relationship to law--a view, by the way, that is in sympathy with modern quantum physics. So God's omnipotence is limited according to the way He designed the creation, and is not some arbitrary decision, as some medieval Occasionalists maintained. In my opinion, the concepts of Logos and indirect dominion are crucial to Unification Thought's understanding of Creation and its doctrine of God. We could benefit from further discussion of these points in comparison with traditional doctrines of divine predestination and human freedom, of divine omnipotence and the contingency of creation.

But it is more likely that Berenbaum brings up the issue of a suffering creation to critique what appears to be a natural theology that simply draws analogies between the nature of God and the nature of creation. He brings out that old chestnut, that if "we can perceive God's deity by observing His creation," and we find creation to be full of wickedness and suffering, then what does that mean for the nature of Deity? (pp. 9-10). There may be a misunderstanding here. In fact, where Unification Thought quotes St. Paul to this effect (*FUT*, p. 24), it applies explicitly and only to the discussion of the dual characteristics of Sungsang and Hyungsang, Yang and Yin which are found as attributes both of God and of created beings. To properly understand Unification Thought, one must distinguish between those attributes of the Original

Image which are faithfully maintained in the creation despite the fall, and those attributes of the Original Image which were lost to the creation because of the fall.

I suspect this same confusion bedevils the question of how Unification Thought can be applied to actual problems. It is certainly the case that when we look at human activity in the world we find many disputes over values and standards. But Unification Thought's theory of the Original Image is not an empirically-based theory about the world; it is a theory about what is true and original and unfallen in the world. Since most human activity is a mixture of good and evil, Unification Thought's attempt to single out, *on the basis of a theory of the Original Image*, what are the true and original attributes of the creation can surely apply to the task of establishing correct standards.

Immediately germane is the discussion of Heart and Creativity in *Fundamentals of Unification Thought*, where the environmental issue is treated explicitly. In the Theory of the Original Image, God's Heart has a very specific content. Besides stating in general what Heart does, being the motive force behind creation, it describes the activity which originates from Heart as having the specific qualities "harmony, smoothness, and peace" (*FUT*, p. 44). Furthermore, Heart is the motivation behind the force to love an object, and love defined in terms of a subject giving to the object is "altruistic love" which is given "without restraint" (*FUT*, p. 35). On this criterion, Unification Thought distinguishes between the "original meaning" of creativity, which is "based on love," from the incomplete and self-centered rational creativity of fallen man. True creativity would lead to human activity for dominion founded on values. Values and true love would be the guiding lights for science and technology. But "because of the Fall, human beings have failed to manifest true creativity centered on love, having instead been cruel and destructive to nature" (*FUT*, pp. 42-43).

A complete theory of Creation based on Unification Thought should include a description the true and original attributes of the creation based upon the creation's resemblance to the Original Image, a discussion of the role of human beings in completing the creation in the realm of freedom and responsibility, and a description of the fall and those distortions to the creation which resulted therefrom. But as the starting point for a theory of Creation is the doctrine of God, the prior question remains, what is the nature of God (the Original Image)? In this regard, Berenbaum's own final question brings the discussion to its most crucial and ultimate point:

Perhaps the most ultimate question of creation is to wonder if... the impulse to be joyful through love has led to disappointment or despair? Surely, it has not led to fulfillment.

One of the most profound teachings of Unification Thought is that God's Heart, the source of love and motivation for the Creation, is also vulnerable to the response of the creation. Historically, God's Heart has manifested itself in three ways: the Heart of Hope, Heart of Sorrow, and Heart of Pain (*FUT*, pp. 204-12). God's Heart of Hope was God's joyful expectation as He created the Universe, anticipating the begetting of humankind, His beloved children, to whom He wanted to bequeath everything in love. God's Heart of Sorrow was His grief at the loss of His children at time of the fall, which has become a constant sorrow over His children who are, as it were, stricken with a fatal illness or kidnapped by a pitiless enemy and sold into slavery. God's Heart of Pain is what God has felt as He has worked tirelessly to save His lost children by any means possible over thousands of years. Every time He raised up a prophet or saint who could know something of truth and love, He had to watch that beloved messenger endure painful persecution and rejection from the crowds of ignorant people. God had to watch all His chosen ones, the ones dearest to Him, endure suffering and martyrdom. Yet in the course of restoration to save humanity, such sacrifices could not be avoided. God's pain is built upon the determination never to surrender to despair, no matter how many times the fulfillment may be delayed by human failures along the way.

If "God created the human being in His own likeness as His object of love," then the suffering and failure of His objects must ultimately find their reflection in the Heart of the Divine Lover. God is moved to tears

by the human situation and is passionately longing to revive us. But being a God who is true to His promises, we trust that He will never succumb to despair. The Bible testifies that the prophets caught glimpses of God's grief and pain, and were in turn strengthened by God's absolute will:

Is there no balm in Gilead?  
Is there no physician there?  
Why then has the health of the daughter of my people  
not been restored?  
O that my head were waters,  
and my eyes a fountain of tears,  
that I might weep day and night  
for the slain of the daughter of my people! (Jer 8:22-23)

Understanding God's Heart is the key to the entire religious outlook of Unificationism. Through a devotion to God that empathizes with this sorrowful Heart, people are able to have the fullest give-and-take relationship of love with God. Knowing the Divine Parent's pain and suffering, we can have mature adult faith. No longer depending upon God as a child, who always relies on his (supposedly omnipotent) parents for protection and constantly wants goodies from them, our relationship to God becomes more like that of the adult child who takes responsibility to care for aged parents who can no longer live without support. With this quality of love and devotion, Unificationists are motivated to work to end the suffering of the creation and to bring to God's Heart rejoicing and a well-deserved Sabbath.