

The Providential Significance of True Parents' Special Ceremony for the Liberation of Africa

Dr. Thomas Selover
President, SunHak UP Graduate University and PWPA

On January 19, 2018, at the House of Slaves on Gorée Island, Senegal, True Mother Hak Ja Han Moon, the co-founder of the Unification movement, the Universal Peace Federation and many other projects, performed a solemn ceremony of liberation and resolution for all those who have suffered because of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade over the course of five centuries.

According to UNESCO, “The Island of Gorée is an exceptional testimony to one of the greatest tragedies in the history of human societies: the slave trade. The various elements of this “memory island” – fortresses, buildings, streets, squares, etc. – recount, each in its own way, the history of Gorée which, from the 15th to the 19th century, was the largest slave-trading centre of the African coast.”¹ The ceremony which True Mother conducted there has wide-reaching implications, for the past, present and future. I would like to humbly offer some reflections on the providential significance of that event, as we seek together to comprehend and realize it more fully.

1. Liberation and Theology

My birth country, the United States, was one of the many places to which African slaves were shipped from Goree Island and other slave-trading ports. Almost everyone in the U.S. now recognizes the grave sin of slavery. When U.S. President George W. Bush visited Goree Island in 2003, he publically confessed America's sin of slavery. Speaking of Christians in particular, he said, “Christian men and women became blind to the clearest commands of their faith and added hypocrisy to injustice...A republic founded on equality for all became a prison for millions.”²

Concerted efforts to end the slave trade began in the early 1800s, but the dismantling of the slave system in the U.S. was not accomplished until the end of the U.S. Civil War. Moreover, the legacy of racial discrimination and injustice has continued to the present, leading some African-American theologians to pursue a theological agenda known as black liberation theology.³ Justin Ukpong notes that liberation theology is one of the major trends in African theology as well, reflecting the concern of African theologians for the betterment of economic and social conditions in Africa.⁴

¹ See <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/26>.

² Quoted by John Dickerson, “In Senegal, Bush Speaks Against Slavery,” *Time*, July 09, 2003.

³ See an early example, James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury, 1975).

⁴ Justin Ukpong, “Current Theology: The Emergence of African Theologies,” *Theological Studies* 45 (1984).

Liberation theology calls for liberation from disadvantaged social, economic and political conditions, and may advocate radical or violent action. It claims to address the actual situation of historical and present injustice, and to seek social change. However, because liberation theology only focuses on the horizontal, social level alone, it cannot fully recognize or resolve the issue. Liberation theology highlights historical injustice, but in the process stirs resentment on the part of all concerned.⁵ Resentment itself is destructive, not creative. To release resentment and truly bring healing, there has to be another kind of internal release from the conditions blocking resolution and advancement.

2. Resolving Resentment

The Korean title of True Parents' special ceremony⁶ includes not only the standard Korean word for liberation (해방 解放) but also a special term that means resolution of resentment (해원 解怨). In other words, the ceremony was specifically designed to recognize and release the accumulated historical and spiritual resentment associated with the African slave trade.

Resentment indicates ill will, that is unfriendly or hostile feelings towards someone else. In its French form, the concept of *ressentiment* has been widely explored in modern Western philosophy and psychology. Yet there is considerable debate as to the validity of resentment-based value perspectives, and the extent to which value systems based on resentment are maladaptive and destructive. On the contrary, the ceremony conducted by True Mother intends release and liberation from the cycle of resentment.

From the use of the term “resolution of resentment” (해원 解怨), we can recognize that the liberation ceremony which True Mother performed was deeply connected with the place where we are gathered for this symposium, the Cheongpyeong Heaven & Earth Training Center. Since 1995, ancestor liberation ceremonies under the theme of resolution of resentment have been conducted here on a weekly basis.

In the months preceding the Summit, True Mother Moon sent a high-level team from the Cheongpyeong Training Center lead by Rev. Lee Gi-seong, to do ancestor liberation and blessing ceremonies in several African countries. The Africa Summit took place on the foundation of a series of ancestor liberation ceremonies. Thus, the Summit represented not only a gathering of leaders from all over Africa but also a spiritual summit to resolve the historical grief of African peoples.

True Mother went to Gorée Island in person to officiate over the ceremony of liberation from resentment for all those involved in the slave trade. The aim of the ceremony was not

⁵ For a thorough theological critique of liberation theology, see Michael Novak, *Will It Liberate?*

⁶ 천지인삼부모님 아프리카 해방 해원식.

simply to influence the external social-political-economic conditions of Africa today, but was primarily focussed on impacting the internal, psychological-cultural-spiritual situation which affects the past, present and future. This special ceremony revealed her ritual leadership as chief officiator and mediator. It also showed her determination to resolve the historical resentment and grief of the African slave trade in order to usher in a new Heavenly Africa.

3. Recognizing True Mother

There is a place in the House of Slaves on Goree Island that symbolizes the hopeless situation of those sold into slavery. It is called the “Door of No Return,” and opens out onto the vast Atlantic Ocean, across which the slaves would be carried to generations of cruel treatment as human property.

In the process of confronting the enormity of the historical tragedy of the slave trade, True Mother experienced tremendous grief. True Mother herself is so beautiful, but through this event, we could see another side of her mission and person: her suffering heart. She said at the victory celebration the next morning that her heart had felt like bursting in pain and agony.

She understands the depth of the tragedy of turning human beings into commodities to buy and sell, because she knows and experiences the original value of human beings according to Heavenly Parent's original purpose of creation. She is the only one who has the “standing” to be able to perform this ceremony. Because she stands before God in the position of only-begotten daughter, she is able to stand before humankind as True Mother.

In recognizing True Mother in and through this ceremony, we get a glimpse of the grief of God (비통 悲痛) that True Parents have come to resolve. This is what it means for True Mother stand before God as only begotten daughter. She is the only one who could take on the task of resolving God's grief over the tragedies of the slave trade, and the resulting alienation that has infected interracial human relations, north/south political and economic relations, and the clash of religions.

True Mother experienced grief on behalf of God and also for the sake of God's children in Africa. Her first words in the prayer were to comfort the pain and suffering of Heavenly Parent: “Almighty Heavenly Parent, until now Heaven has gone through so much pain and suffering to restore fallen humankind, but you had to absolutely complete the ideal of creation.” In this way, her prayer is a mediation, to resolve the grief of Heavenly Parent, as well as of the African peoples. In the next section, I will briefly comment on the main elements of True Mother's prayer in the Special Liberation Ceremony on Gorée Island.

4. True Mother's prayer

Almighty Heavenly Parent, until now Heaven has gone through so much pain and suffering to restore fallen humankind, but you had to absolutely complete the ideal of creation.

In the first words of her prayer, she offers comfort to Heavenly Parent, with recognition of Heaven's cherished desire to complete the ideal and purpose of creation.

Heavenly Parent! How many long days have passed as you worked hard and took a sorrowful course to find your son and daughter? We know of the history that has pained Heaven many times because of humankind's ignorance.

She briefly recalls the long history of restoration, and its ultimate purpose.

Heavenly Parent! Nevertheless, you never gave up on us. Thus, you were able to find the victorious True Parents, for whom you had wished for so long. When all the people of the world are reborn through the True Parents, there will be such happiness and delight on that day.

She articulates the promise of the future world, when the human family is reconnected through true love.

Heavenly Parent! The True Parents, True Mother, the only daughter of God, has come here today.

This is the proclamation of True Mother's unique personal ministry, and her authority to conduct this ceremony.

You sent Jesus to complete Heaven's providence. ...Yet Christianity did not know your deep will or Jesus' essence and they left a sorrowful history here in Africa and on Gorée Island.

Here is Heavenly righteous judgement, parental judgement, on the history of slavery, and particularly for the complicity of Christians, both in Africa and in the West.

Where did Jesus' words of "Love your neighbor as yourself" go? The missionaries who came as Christians forgot this essence when they came to Africa. How could they treat people in this way because of differences in skin color?

The racism that allowed and justified the slave trade is rebuked in this prophetic indictment of historical injustice and unchristianity.

Then, it has to be asked--who brought about this grief? My people did it--the Europeans and the North and South Americans, the historical representatives of Christianity. True, there were also Africans who profited from the slave trade, but the engine for it came from the Euro-American merchants of the "Atlantic triangular trade".

Please remember the people of Africa who have endured and waited for more than five hundred sorrowful years.

This is True Mother's petition to Heavenly Parent on behalf of the peoples of Africa.

Beloved Heavenly Parent! Today in the name of True Parents, I liberate the sorrowful spirits of Gorée Island and through a spiritual workshop conducted by Heavenly Parent, they can be resurrected as good spirits and return to earth and be with their descendants so that Africa can become a nation that can realize the dream of one human family centered on Heavenly Parent and become the light and lamp of the world.

The Liberation and Resolution ceremony is proclaimed, along with the healing of the restless spirits of those affected by the tragedy of the slave trade. True Mother prayed for a spirit world training workshop for the healing of all those who were caught in the slave trade, connecting this ceremony to the massive foundation of Cheongpyeong works.

Let us cooperate enthusiastically to achieve a world of no more conflict, suffering, or war--one world of complete harmony and unification centered on Heavenly Parent. I liberate and proclaim this in the name of True Parents. Aju!

This is True Mother's invitation to participate together in the great work of re-creating human history and culture.

5. Toward Full Realization

The Liberation and Resolution ceremony was performed by True Mother first for Heavenly Parent, and second for those who have suffered from the African slave trade, and then third, she calls all of us to participate in realizing the intended effects of that ceremony.

Gorée Island has been re-purposed, not only as a place of remembrance, but now as a holy ground signifying the healing connection between the new Heavenly Africa and Heavenly Parent's providential representative. True Mother made a highway of connection between Africa and the land of Korea, through ritual action mixing the soil of Gorée Island with the holy earth from Cheon Jeong Gung. There is even an affinity of sound and spelling between “Korea” in French, “Corée”, and the Island “Gorée”. On the westernmost coast of Africa, True Mother has made a firm anchor, link and heavenly bond with Korea, the emerging central point of the coming Pacific Rim era.

The uplifting of Africa to its proper place, as Heavenly Africa, will bring change, first among Africans and secondly among other peoples in relationship with Africans. It is time to dissolve the remnants of resentment which have fettered our relationships. The African religious leaders who are supporting True Mother have a key role to play in the full realization of the promises contained within this ceremony. The responsibility of Europeans and Euro-Americans to avoid reverse resentment, and instead to welcome and make way for the rise of new, Heavenly Africa.

* * *

Many world leaders have come to Gorée Island to pay their respects, or even to pray. However, no one could resolve the historical grief symbolized by that place, until the direct representative of Heavenly Parent came to perform the liberation and resolution ceremony. Because only she understood that Heavenly Parent is the most grieved by the events that happened at Gorée Island.

This ceremony represents a window for our world-wide family to understand True Mother more deeply, through appreciation of her spiritual works. Through pondering this event, we can glimpse the True Mother of all humankind. On behalf of Heavenly Parent, True Mother has opened the way. In the biblical phrase (Isa. 53:4), “Surely she has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.”

Therefore, we have to humble down anew and receive True Parents, and realize once again that they have come to resolve the things which others have been unable to resolve. The legacy of slavery has been a huge barrier between “black and white.” In the rapid unfolding of providential history, this ceremonial event represents a kaironic moment of resolution. Now it is time to open wide the community of faith, to welcome all brothers and sisters with true parental heart-and-mind.

In her prayer at the ceremony, True Mother asked where Jesus' words about “loving your neighbor as yourself” went, when they were cast aside for profit in the slave trade. So, also, True Parents' words about how to care for one another in our world-wide family, and how to

treat all people as fellow brothers and sisters--these words also must be put into constant practice.

At the close of her prayer, True Mother said, “**Let us cooperate enthusiastically to achieve a world of no more conflict, suffering, or war--one world of complete harmony and unification centered on Heavenly Parent.**”

With these words, True Mother is personally leading us all in welcoming, encouraging and supporting the emergence of Heavenly Africa, so that we can participate together in the great work of re-creating the world family through the love of Heavenly Parent. Then we can freely meet and treat one another joyfully, as true brothers and sisters.

AJU!