

## Hak Ha Han's Cosmic Blessing Draws Critiques and Curiosity

Ariana Moon  
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The 2013 Cosmic Marriage Blessing in Gapyeong, Korea continues to draw a flurry of online media stories days after the ceremony on February 17, 2013 (Korea's time). Scores of news agencies pointed out the significance of this particular mass-wedding, as the first of its kind since the passing of the Unification Church's founder, the Rev. Sun Myung Moon.



As has been done countless times before, articles presented Rev. Moon as a controversial leader of a potentially "dangerous cult". In what may seem like evidence of a selective memory to a Unificationist, reporters persistently reminded readers of how Rev. Moon had been convicted of tax evasion and subsequently sent to Danbury prison in Connecticut in 1984 without citing the fact that major Christian and civil rights leaders, including the late Rev. Jerry Falwell and Rev. Joseph Lowry of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, had held a press conference to decry the injustice of his imprisonment.



Alzazeera wrote, "The founder has been a lightning rod for controversy and was once jailed in the US for tax evasion. He also declared in 1992 that he and his wife were messiahs. ... Critics have for years vilified the organisation as a heretical, weird and dangerous cult while questioning its murky finances and how it

indoctrinates followers.”



With a similar perspective, Rawstory.com, reported that “‘Moonie’ critics have pointed to [the mass weddings] as evidence of cult underpinnings,” and that despite being “revered by his followers,” Rev. Moon was “denounced by critics as a charlatan who brainwashed church members” and “was a deeply divisive figure whose shadowy business dealings saw him jailed in the United States.”

Many other agencies, such as Examiner.com, showed poor judgment by slandering Unificationists with the pejorative term, “Moonies.”

An article by MailOnline’s Tara Brady, titled “Moonie wedding: We’re going to need a bigger cake: Astonishing 3,500 couples from 200 countries gather for mass wedding ceremony in South Korea,” was a favorite among news websites, reposted on sites such as TopNewsToday.org.



“Critics have vilified the group in the past as heretical and a dangerous cult, questioning its murky finances and accusing it of indoctrinating followers which the church denies,” wrote Brady of the Unification Church, which she labeled as “one of the world’s most controversial religious organisations.”

On the other hand, other news agencies took the high road in their reportage, delving into topics such as the cultural significance of the church’s mass weddings. For example, AsiaNews.it explained that “Many of the identically-dressed couples were of mixed nationality. According to the religion’s precepts, they were dressed the same to symbolise world union through peace. They were of mixed nationalities so as to achieve peace through the union of various cultures.” This report also included less-known but nonetheless interesting details about the Unification Church, such as “Moon is also known for having celebrated the marriage of a Catholic prelate, Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo, with a Korean woman, Maria Sung, in New York City, which caused a lot of discussions and frictions within the Catholic Church.”



In what can be a response to the question of whether the Unification Church will survive the death of its founder, Catholicism.org wrote “Think again” as the first sentence of its announcement, “Did You Think Moonism Died with Rev. Moon?” suggesting a future for the movement under the leadership of Rev. Moon’s widow, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon.

The Telegraph posted a video that featured brief but heart-warming interviews with couples in various languages.

Finally, in response to BuzzFeed.com’s panorama of images from the Blessing ceremony in South Korea, a certain Tim Lee posted the following, a comment that would resonate with Unificationists worldwide: “[The mass weddings are] really not as ‘crazy’ as you think it is. One of my best friends at school is part of the Moon Church and the marriage process is incredibly intricate and beautiful! Divorce is unheard of between these couples, because as mentioned above, they feel as if they are destined for these relationships and prepare for them as if they are. This article places a bad light on a normal occurrence, not to mention the use of the term “moonie” which has its negative connotations. Rewrite the article, so people can appreciate other cultures/religions not gawk at them in disbelief.”