

How True Father witnessed to me in my cab in New York City - Part 1

Tom Conneally
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Tom and Ina Conneally

Editor's note: Tom Conneally was one of a very small number of members who met and spoke with Father personally prior to joining our movement. Some parts of this story may seem extraordinary but Mr. Conneally was not a person who ever sought to draw attention to himself. Indeed, he felt his story was more of a burden to him than a badge of honor. So much so that it was only upon being persuaded that it was for the good of our worldwide members that they read his testimony to our True Father did he consent to prepare the following content.

It was the weeks before Christmas, in the year 1959. Our third grade was to perform The Nativity, the birth of Jesus, Savior and Messiah -- a topic dear to the heart of our art teacher at Our Lady of Solace Elementary School. "And when you pray, ask God if Jesus will come again," she suggested. I might have followed her advice, for I clearly remember (even though other memories have faded away over the years) that a voice told me: "Reverend Moon is the Messiah." I was a shepherd in the play, first to be on stage, kneeling down and crying out for my lost sheep. Somehow I knew that I had to convey this message to the audience. Just these five words, "Reverend Moon is the Messiah." And then other things would follow, the voice told me -- things that, as an 8-year-old, I could not comprehend.

My parents were hard-working Irish immigrants. For them, a Catholic education for their three children was essential. On the other hand, I spent most of my afternoons on the streets of Bronx East, absorbing the multi-cultural mix of Irish and Italian families. On the afternoon before the play, I was out in the snow, sledding with my friends. Somewhere inside I felt it would be better to stay at home and get prepared, but the snow was so fresh and soft...My mother picked me up from the park.

When the curtains opened, grave anxiety came over me. I had not much confidence. The voice inside me assured me that if I just said my five words I would receive the power to heal. Right in front of me, in the first row, sat all these important, grave looking Fathers, Monsignors and Nuns that I respected and feared so much. Hanging over me was a huge stage-prop moon, and now I was to kneel down, cry out for my lost sheep and say, "Rev. Moon is the Messiah." I was confused. Was it maybe because the moon was hanging right above me that whole "moon" thing did not make much sense right now. Better to just stick to the teacher's instructions, rather than follow what that strange voice inside told me. When I left the stage I had made a decision that I would regret later on, more than anything else in my future life.

Twelve years later that little boy had turned into a long-haired, drinking, marijuana-smoking hippie with a "don't trust anyone over 30" attitude, and a lot of liking for Che Guevara and Mao Tse Tung. I was a taxi driver on the hectic streets of Manhattan.

One morning, two Oriental men flagged me down. Only one of them could speak English. He took the passenger seat, next to me in the front. "Where do you want to go?" I asked. "Drive," the well-dressed man said, "just drive." Now that was kind of unusual, but maybe these guys were tourists, wanting to be taken around...But it was not that at all. The man in the back turned out to be more interested in me personally than any other customer had ever been before. How I felt about life, its meaning...Did I believe in God's existence? What did I think about communism? I said that I liked the ideology a lot -- equal rights for everyone, the brotherhood of all humankind. He told me through his interpreter in the front that he had spent time in a communist concentration camp in North Korea. I doubted that.

We kept driving for a while, then parked near the UN building. Now this intense, soul-searching backseat person wanted to hear a song that would somehow express my life philosophy. So I sang, "I Am a Rock," one of my Simon and Garfunkel favorites. My listener wanted to sing in response, too. He chose "No Man Is an Island" and he sang it in Korean. I was told that he had never tasted even a drop of alcohol. I turned around and stared at him, incredulously. He had said he was in his early fifties, but to me he looked like a kid, big cheeks, big smile -- the picture of bursting health and innocence. There was something in me that really liked him; he was so earnest, so idealistic -- not like those other tourists or business people that I usually met, people who were already part of the "establishment."

Then, on the other hand, he angered me. I had accused him of being responsible for the Vietnam War -- he and his generation. "No," he responded, looking me straight in the eyes as I turned around, "you are responsible. God gave you a mission." Then he just talked about things that blew my mind. My mother, he said, had been praying in the spiritual world all these years. That is why today we could meet here, in the taxi. All those years, ever since I had been called by God to testify to the Messiah. Did I remember? In school, playing the role of a shepherd boy? Bits and pieces of my memory appeared dimly, reluctant to be revealed, one part of me couldn't, the other part did not want to remember.

"Master is the Messiah," the translator declared to me now, very solemnly. I felt somewhat awed, but at the same time it all sounded like a joke, and not a good one.

"If he is the Messiah, then I'm John the Baptist," I replied. I had intended to lighten things up a bit, but instead I was getting more and more tense.

"Come with me," the man in the back urged. "Come and meet my wife and children." He suggested I could become his driver, thus helping him in his mission.

"I'm not gonna be your rickshaw boy," I told him angrily. "First you tell me I have this grand mission, and now you want me to just drive you around... And," I snapped at the other man, "why is it I that you keep calling him Master? We are all the same here, with no masters and servants around!" Fury overcame me.

"You should pray," said the 'Master' now. "You have evil spirits around you a lot." I realized I had gone too far with my emotions, so I started to say the words of prayer that I had been taught, words that I sometimes used myself, without anyone knowing. "Our Father, who art in heaven..." Then the Master prayed -- and it was truly a masterpiece of a prayer, for even though I could not understand anything he said, it all sounded so deep, so much from the heart. By the time he had finished, I felt peace inside: as if I had been cleansed of all my previous anger. But no, I did not want to go with these two people whom I barely knew, even though they seemed to be very well informed about my past.

"If you don't come with us now, you will join us in the future. But you will have to pay a lot of indemnity... Your Father will die," was the prophesy of my messiah-passenger, shortly before I had to drop off both men. They told me to wait for them, as they had to run some errands. As I had my cab parked and was wondering what to do next, a very attractive woman approached me and asked whether I was free to give her a ride. As if I were awakening from a strange dream, I rubbed my eyes. Welcome back to life, I thought, with real people and real business!

As was the case when I was a child, I was again ready to give up the chance of a truly meaningful encounter for years of regret later on, still not understanding the "real" game of life, and how I was supposed to play it.

To be continued....

A note from Tom's wife Ina:

My husband and I participated in the 1275 Couples Blessing in Yongin, Korea, in January 1989. Immediately after our matching, Tom told me his testimony, so that I could choose, as he put it, whether I wanted to be blessed with someone from so difficult a past. At first I thought he was joking or trying to impress me. As the years passed, however, I came to understand that his story was true.

There is something about miracles and revelations that make everyday life special, as if God and the spirit world were the movie-makers and we the main actors. I think we all have stories to tell, some more extraordinary than others. Yet to me what really matters in the end is not what happened to us in the past but what we ourselves make happen in the present, precisely from this moment on.

-Ina Conneally