

## The Providence to Engage Christianity – Part 4

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The Interdenominational Conferences for Clergy 1985–1989



*Rev. Kevin McCarthy with International Conferences for Clergy (ICC) staff members*

Father Moon chose to bring more than seven thousand members of the clergy to Japan and Korea for some obvious reasons. Korea is the home of our faith, where the foundations of our traditions were laid. Father Moon received the revelation of the Divine Principle there, and it is Father and Mother Moon's birthplace. Korea is the chosen nation of God's providence. A divided nation, Korea is emblematic of a divided world. Korea and Japan are in the position of parent nations, the Adam and Eve nations to the world.



*ICC participants visiting historic church sites in Busan*

### **Our task to be a force for unity**

In previous years, when we were less familiar with the Christian world, the general understanding among many members was that Christians, basically, were all the same. We were under the mistaken impression that all Christians were in steadfast agreement on what grounds they stood opposed to us. Yet as we grew familiar with the reality of the diversity of Christian faith, we realized that Christian doctrinal unanimity on any issue, could not have been farther from the truth.

In other words, Christians had as much of a problem with each other as they had with us, the “new kid on the block.” Each denomination believed that their particular view of scripture and the resultant doctrines thereof, were the correct view. They also, just as assertively, believed that everyone else was in the dark and had, on some level, gone astray. The more conservative, doctrinal Christians were especially this way. On the other hand, those of the more liberal theological perspective, were open to our unique views; however, frequently they were open only because of their very liberal theological perspective. In other words, they were so open to everything, they could barely ever come to the conclusion that anything was absolutely true.

Christians had been battling each other for centuries over issues such as baptism in the name of Jesus or baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, whether speaking in tongues is evidence of salvation or the simple manifestation of a gift; whether the Bible was God’s inerrant word or otherwise; whether full immersion baptism was essential or sprinkling would suffice; whether Jesus is God or Jesus is both divine and human; whether Christ’s return was imminent or would be preceded by prophesied events; on and on, the issues were endless.

Our task in bringing ministers to Korea in such numbers and in such denominational diversity, therefore, was to wade into this volatile sea and bring calmness and clarity (while trying not to get our boat swamped).

Yet how daunting was this task! Here we were, on the one hand, facing conservative, doctrinal Christians who struggled with our teachings but resonated with our worldview, our anti-communism and pro-family values. On the other hand, the more liberal Christians were intellectually intrigued with our teachings but struggled vehemently with our worldview, our anti-communism and pro-family values.

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one; I in them and you in me -- so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

*Jesus’ Prayer for all believers -- John 17:20-23*

Jesus’ prayer was for “complete unity” as “God and Christ” are united. Jesus’ expectation, his direction actually, was far beyond a mere tolerance of one another. He was not calling for mere interdenominational dialogue among Christians.



*At the Headquarters Church in Seoul*

### **Explaining the mission of Christianity**

There was another reason, more subtle but equally important, to sweep seven thousand members of the clergy out of their comfort zones and fly them to the mystical Far East on a Boeing 747. There was a most



important, hidden dimension of our journey to far away Japan and Korea. Father seemed to know that when a potentially contentious people, such as Christian ministers, are brought out of their familiar surroundings and placed in totally new and unfamiliar circumstances, it tends to magnify areas of commonality. In those circumstances, even Unificationists did not seem so far out of the mainstream as we would normally. It was an important way to create an environment in which we could come together, heart to heart, with the ministers.

Yet how could we be a catalyst for unity and do so without appearing to be merely adding to the confusion? Weren't we equally guilty of asserting our way as the true path in exclusion to all others? Should we stand in the middle only and be neutral and non-committal? Or worse, should we be chameleon-like and just patronize whomever we found ourselves with? There was a very fine line in this. It would require that we have a crystal clear sense and confidence in our message, our providential role and our objectives. We were neither Left nor Right, and we most certainly were not the middle. We stood in the vertical center with a Godism perspective, Headwing Thought. This meant our focus had to be anchored in God's purpose and hope for all believers in this era.

Like Jesus, Father defined Christian unity in much deeper terms. Christian unity would be achieved if they could unite with their mission and embrace the full meaning and implications of "the new future of Christianity."

This was the objective of our conferences, to teach ministers about what constituted their modern providential mission and responsibility. This was the true purpose for which we taught the Divine Principle. Yes, sometimes ministers protested, "Why are you teaching 'Moon's theology?'"

We would have done a great disservice to these pastors and to Father's overall objective if we were hesitant or if we became overly sensitive to whether or not we were perceived as attempting to "convert" them.

This issue of our alleged attempt to "convert" ministers to "Moon's theology" has been the enduring red herring over the many years we have been teaching the Principle to members of the clergy. Traditionally, in Christianity, conversion has been seen as a journey from darkness into light, from ignorance into the knowledge of truth. Salvation, in the conversion model, was always an act of repudiating the former tradition as one embraced the new. Ministers were thus very pre-conditioned, by their own history, to react to a passionate, compelling message evangelizing what they saw as an entirely new view of the Bible. It was hard for them to accept a "new truth." Instead they tended to overreact, concluding that we were implying that their faith was useless and their belief system invalid. We, of course, never implied such a thing. The Divine Principle is Bible based; we could not be negating all they believed.

Our model was not about invalidating their beliefs but rather about fulfilling them, about the fulfillment of all religious ideals. That fulfillment takes place in a single age, at a single point, with a single central figure for all, the Messiah. But it was never the view of the Divine Principle that all religions, up to that point, were invalid. In fact, the Divine Principle fully embraces the providential work of God within the diverse religious histories, all moving toward that one central providence to fulfill all religious ideals.

Thus, to explain, to evangelize, to call attention to the arrival of that providential consummation point and moment in history is our mission and the true reason for teaching Divine Principle.

*The current trend has these four spheres forming one global cultural sphere based on the Christian ethos. This historical development is evidence that Christianity has, as its final mission, the accomplishment of the goals of all religions which have sought the ideal of goodness.  
-- From Exposition of the Divine Principle: Eschatology and Human History, Section 2.3*

Unfortunately, this constant, unwarranted fear of conversion took root in America. It even became vogue within our own movement to warn lecturers that if we taught the Principle too persuasively and passionately, we were guilty of encroaching into the danger zone of "trying to convert them." It was thought by some, whom I think overreacted, that I was too evangelistic with the ministers, too adamant about the truth of the Divine Principle. Many counseled that we should just present "our theology" for the ministers' consideration; a report so that they could be aware of what we believed. Many times I was asked to "tone it down," but each time I stood in front of the ministers, tasked with giving the truth of the Divine Principle, something came over me, compelling me. It wasn't just "our theology" to be contained in a report of what "we" believed. It was meant for all and it was our mission to proclaim the Good News. So of course, I could never follow that advice. Can you imagine Father saying something like that?

To me, lecturing the Divine Principle to ministers was about this single, important moment of history, the moment for Christ to be revealed. I felt God had waited for this age for two thousand years since the crucifixion of Jesus. In truth, it was in Korea, during these ICC years, that the pervasive presence of this most powerful holy spirit had overtaken me. This, I'm sure, was the other key hidden dimension behind Father's decision to bring members of the clergy to Korea.



*Prayer at the Rock of Tears, where Father prayed in the 1950s*

### **The Korea effect**

As Dr. Pak would tell us in his favorite clergy joke, a telephone call to God from Korea is a local call. Never before (or since) did I feel so at one with religious life as I did in Korea. My time in Korea was the one time I earnestly followed Father's basic guidance to those who lecture the Divine Principle: "if you lecture for one hour, you must pray for three." I experienced a life of prayer in Korea that took me to places where God could come to me, speak to me and be with me in ways I had never known. The afterglow of those moments lives on to this day. It is as if an eternal conduit between God and me was forged; a passageway through which He can still find me and intervene in my life. I made an everlasting covenant with God during that time, so much so that even if I were to leave the church, I believe that God would come find me and sit with me until I decided to come back.

This all had to do with Korea and almost nothing to do with me. In fact, whenever I would leave Korea, I'm sad to say, I just could not bring that same spirit totally with me. It was a presence that had been forged in Korea by sweat, blood and many tears even before I was born. Thus, Korea was the best place for indemnity conditions of lesser amount. It is a place where a small prayer goes a long way.

Thus, fasting, cold showers, or all night prayers in the high hills around the Sheraton Walker Hill Hotel made up my constant, daily practice for almost three years. There were times when I would pray for hours on the mountainside next to the hotel and only finish ten minutes before I was to begin my lecture. I would sit on a rock and look down the mountainside into the parking lot of the Sheraton. I could see the conference center where our lectures were given. Sometimes I would see a heavenly aura emanating from around that place as I finished my prayer. I would feel as if I could stretch out my arms and fly down the mountainside, straight into the conference room.

During these prayers, God would fill me with the overwhelming clear sense of how He longed to speak to these ministers and how desperately God wanted them to discover that He had sent His Son, their providential Commander-in-Chief, into this world again. He filled me with His sense of this, of how sad He still remained that Jesus had been so denied and that so much suffering befalls the True Parents even today. He wanted these pastors to be awakened to these things; and He always made me believe that it could happen, it should happen, even in the very next presentation I was to give.

I was consumed with an overwhelming sense of the injustice, yes, the injustice that had been wrought upon God since the Fall and how unacceptable it was that this injustice could go on, even another day. I felt as if I were God's advocate, his attorney, pleading his case before the jury, pleading that these clergymen, too, could stand up to become the new advocates to liberate God from these historical chains of suffering and injustice. This is why I could never merely "present our theology for the ministers' consideration" or worry if some minister in the back had complained to the staff that he felt as though we were attempting to convert him.

I had to lecture as Father would, as God would if God had his own mouth. But sadly, God had to rely on my mouth, my heart, my hands and feet and for this I was always sorry and was always asking God to overlook my shortcomings and help me, to sustain me. Without this spiritual foundation and support, I would have been blown off the stage. The spirit to reject, to persecute, to repeat the failures of history, was that strong. The only hope was that a more powerful spirit could be generated behind the words we spoke in teaching the Divine Principle. Korea was a supercharged spiritual dynamo and it had a profound effect upon me and upon the ministers in many ways.

Generally, throughout the conference proceedings, the warm embrace of God's most loving spirit was a visceral experience for all. It was undeniable that God was in our midst and was binding us together. It was a presence that pervaded all our activities, lectures, discussions, and tour excursions. There was an undeniable presence of the Holy Spirit permeating the atmosphere.

This constant spiritual presence had a profound effect on many of the ministers. It was almost as if each minister were asking the obvious questions: How could God's spirit be so present in Moon's conference if Moon is the charlatan that I've been warned about? How could God be so present when there is no consensus of doctrine?

It would bring many of them to the gradual acceptance of the possibility that doctrinal purity in every aspect was not the essential condition that brings God into our midst. I want to strongly emphasize the implication of this. Throughout their entire life of faith, each minister's personal experience with God was always strictly defined within the doctrinal boundaries of his or her belief system. But there, in Korea, the presence of God had transcended all boundary lines. In fact, even in the process of hearing key elements of the Divine Principle that seemed to go against everything they had ever known, the presence of the Holy Spirit remained in our midst. How mystifying and thought-provoking it was! This presence of God, this transcendent sense, was creaking open the door of each minister's heart and forming a new bond that could not be defined within the framework of their existing doctrines.

Sometimes this spirit would manifest in unscheduled, unexpected ways. One of the most powerful channels of that presence of God was the clergymen's experiences with the Korean people they would encounter -- not just our Korean church members, who were wonderful, but with the Korean people in general.



*Some of the ICCs had hundreds of participants*

### **Special grandmotherly love**

One unforgettable example of this took place at a tour to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) that divides North Korea and South Korea. The highlight of the tour to the DMZ was always the trip down into the invasion tunnels that were dug by the North Koreans in preparation for a sneak invasion of the South. The first part of entering the tunnel area involved walking down a very steep descent via the interception tunnel dug by the South. The easy part was going down; the hard part was the return. In fact, we always had to double check that we didn't leave any ministers down at the bottom of the tunnel.

During one tunnel foray with a very large minister group, we were making our way slowly to the bottom, careful to cling to the handrails so as not to slip. Suddenly, we began to notice a steady stream of elderly Korean women passing our group from the rear. It started to feel as if we were going backward. One, two, ten, twenty, then forty -- what looked to be about two hundred Korean grandmothers just zoomed past us like the midnight train to Georgia on their way to the bottom. They weren't clinging to the handrails.



When we finally arrived at the bottom, they were so happy to see us and greeted the ministers with such joyful and happy smiles. After a presentation about the history of the tunnels by a South Korean military officer, we began to slowly make our way back up the tunnel. The grandmothers had gone on ahead. We figured they would be up and out by the time we arrived at the steep incline. But when we arrived there, all the grandmothers had hung back waiting for us. They wanted to help us up the final steep climb to the top. It was as if they were there to escort us and they even helped some of the larger ministers by pushing them from behind. Everyone was laughing. Everyone felt the deep love and concern of these beautiful-hearted ladies.

But the most amazing moment was as we gathered at our respective buses. The grandmothers just didn't want to see us go. They marched right into where we were gathering and began to engage the ministers as best they could with the little English that they knew. It was a remarkable moment of spiritual and heart-to-heart interaction. These ladies were so charming and dynamic. They sang, they laughed, took many pictures, they even gave the ministers back rubs. They patted the ministers' big stomachs and teased the ministers over who had the biggest. The ministers were simply overwhelmed with the robust, vibrant open-heartedness they were experiencing and it caused their hearts to open wide in return. Our ICC staff just stepped back and let it all happen and it was, truly, a marvel to behold.



*Visiting the Little Angels Performing Arts Center (now the Universal Arts Center) to see the Little Angels perform*

### **A people touched by God**

Finally, it became known to the grandmas that we had two Korean War veterans in our group. Suddenly, the festive atmosphere became so quiet, serious and deep. Now the tears began to flow. It was so astounding to see these grandmothers, with one heart, just pour out their deepest gratitude and love for these ministers and especially to the Korean war veterans.

Then something happened that I will never forget. One grandmother took off her diamond ring from her hand and placed it in the hand of one of the Korean War veteran ministers. Can you imagine such a thing? This was probably her finest and most expensive possession. Perhaps she was planning to give it to her granddaughter. Instead, she gave it to an American minister that she didn't even know and probably would never see again.

This noble gesture so deeply touched every minister there. In that tearful moment, without fully knowing it, this woman truly represented the heart of God and True Parents. Somehow the ministers knew that this was not just an expression from one very loving and selfless woman, but rather that it represented the special heart that God had placed within the Korean people. With such an experience, they could begin to understand that these humble Korean people were subject to a marvelous work of God. If indeed there was a new chosen land, it would be the home of people such as these.

It was another one of those moments that I was mentioning before. The spirit of God appeared in our midst and it was one more reminder for each minister that these manifestations, if they were to be understood, would require something more than what their doctrines could reveal. They could not avoid the thought that if Rev. Moon was not of God, how could it be that Rev. Moon brings us so many spirit-filled encounters such as these? Each and every experience made teaching the Divine Principle that much more powerful and undeniable.