

Hyung Jin Moon's Sanctuary Church extremist Christian mindset

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September 17, 2015



It is dismaying to see Sanctuary Church wrapped up in imagery and thought-patterns from the Book of Revelation. Concepts like the "Whore of Babylon" and seeing world-wide destruction (the so-called "Shmitta") around the corner -- or has it already passed?? -- stem from Revelation and the mindset known as apocalyptic.

The Revelation is basically a repeat of Jewish apocalyptic as found in Daniel, Ezekiel chapters 38-39, Zechariah chapter 14, etc. that sees the world facing impending judgment in order that God can unilaterally sweep away wickedness and establish His kingdom. I (following Rev. Ahn) call the Book of Revelation "Jewish apocalyptic" because even though it is in the New Testament, it breathes the spirit of the Jews of the age, whose writings are preserved in the Dead Sea Scrolls and who thought the Last Judgment was at hand. It probably was written by Jewish-Christians who were waiting for Christ to return and who had not fully realized the value of the salvation that Jesus brought through his death and resurrection. It recycles elements from the Old Testament, imagery from Zechariah and Ezekiel. It utilizes Jewish devices such as gematria -- assigning number values to letters -- in order to identify Nero Caesar by the number 666.

Apocalyptic divides the world into two categories -- the saved and the damned -- and views believers in its doctrine as the only ones to be saved when the final judgment comes. Thus it encourages black-white, "us vs. them" thinking, as well as self-righteousness about one's status as a member of the saved remnant. It is far from the spirit of Jesus of the Gospels, who spoke of unconditional grace for all, even the worst sinners. For this reason, I regard apocalyptic as one of the lower expressions of Christianity, practically in the form-spirit stage.

When I learned about apocalyptic literature in seminary, I was grateful that the theology of the Unification Church was not based on Revelation the way that of other end-times Christian groups were. References in Divine Principle to the book of Revelation are few and far between. Instead of eternal judgment, Divine Principle's discussion of the Last Days in Chapter 3 is based on God's ideal to save everyone. Every one of the traditional Christian beliefs about a fiery last judgment is decoded as symbolism for the very real spiritual process that occurs in the life of the church and of individual believers at the time of the Second Advent. It also redefines judgment in a positive way, namely as an encounter with the Word that encourages individuals to purge themselves of falsehood and rise to embody truth more fully. Believe me, if the Unification Church had the sort of apocalyptic outlook that Sanctuary spouts these days, I never would have joined.

A year or two ago, I found Hyung Jin Nim's ministry attractive. Those were the days when he was holding church out of his home in Pennsylvania. I liked his message, which was centered on grace. He was exploring Christian freedom, which is rooted in the grace of Christ and True Father (even then he

didn't have much use for True Mother in his theology, although he loved her as a mother on a humanistic level). Hyung Jin Nim was excited by the prospects of reforming the church by substituting the freedom rooted in the grace of Christ for the often legalistic and restrictive environment of obedience to elders, which he found stifling. In this, he was drawing from the best parts of Christianity, because grace is at the very center of the Gospel.

I could agree with him that the Unification Church needed more grace. I could also agree with his message that we are all sinners, because it is by admitting that we are sinners that we can approach the grace that Christ offers through his sacrifice (read, True Father's 7 deaths and resurrections -- although I disagree with him that it is the core of salvation; rather the Blessing is). It is true that any group that claims sinlessness or perfection can fall into self-righteousness, and reminding ourselves of how much we still need grace is a helpful corrective. After all, besides changing our blood lineage, there are still so many other sins we are subject to: personal sin, inherited sin and collective sin. And these sins affect our behavior in numerous ways that we cannot recognize while we are within their hold on us. It was Martin Luther who taught that all people are simultaneously saved and sinners, and that we cannot really be saved unless we recognize how sinful we really are and come before God's altar in repentance. That's a solid message.

O would that Hyung Jin Nim still preached the Gospel like that, it would be better than where he is now! He could be a voice for reforming the church in ways that it needs! Instead he is anchoring his theology in the dualistic, self-righteous theology of the Book of Revelation. Show me anywhere in the Book of Revelation that holds up the prospect of salvation for sinners! It's just not there. He has attached himself to a strain of Christianity that is of low spirit, that does not breathe in the grace of Christ but in the judgments of the Pharisees. And worse, Revelation is the book in the Bible that has given rise to the most extremist, violent and intolerant sects in the history of Christianity, from the Muenster Rebellion to David Koresh. Because once you believe that you are the only elect ones and everyone else is damned to hell, you can justify all manner of unloving actions. Hence, Christians who lift up this book are invariably sectarian, because there is no room in its black or white, light or darkness theology for any sort of compromise or even fellowship with those who are viewed as in the wrong.

It is through the prism of the Book of Revelation that Hyung Jin Nim can call Mother such awful names as the Whore of Babylon. If he would only go back to the Gospel, he would be able to see that all of us in the Unification Church, whether it is True Mother, or the elders whom he derisively calls "archangels," or even himself -- are all sinners in need of grace. That would be a more adequate theological foundation from which to advocate reform. If only we could all gather in such humility and repentance before the Throne of God, admitting that each of us has played a role in creating the current disunity, and seeking the grace and guidance of God and True Father in the spirit world, just maybe there would appear a way for healing and reconciliation.