

Sun Myung Moon Blesses 1800 Couples - The Largest Wedding in Human History

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The largest wedding in human history took place on February 8 in Seoul, Korea. Rev. Sun Myung Moon, founder of the Unification Church, presided over the simultaneous marriage of 1800 couples from more than 21 nations. About 800 of the couples were Japanese, 109 were American or European, and the rest were Korean and Chinese. Among the western couples alone, more than half of the marriages were across national or racial lines.

This international wedding underscored the teaching of the Unification Church that God transcends all national and racial barriers, and that the Kingdom of Heaven on earth can be built based on God-centered family units.

Rev. Moon pronounced the newlyweds "couples forever" in Seoul's Changchung Gymnasium, the largest indoor hall in Korea, site of the church's 777-couple wedding conducted in 1970. Ten thousand spectators and well-wishers watched as the couples marched in, two couples abreast, up a set of stairs leading to a platform where Rev. and Mrs. Moon sprinkled perfumed water on them as they walked past. Lined up in orderly rows, the couples completely packed the red-carpeted gymnasium floor.

For the couples who were married in the mass ceremony, called the "Blessing" by church members, it was more than just a wedding. It was an affirmation of faith, and a commitment to a way of life and a new world culture centered on God. For the western couples, there was the added significance of visiting the homeland of their church, and receiving a first-hand glimpse of the spirit and tradition which nurtured and motivated the spread of the Unification Church to more than 50 countries around the world.

Arriving at Kimpo Airport in Seoul on the night of Feb. 2, the westerners were greeted by a crowd of Korean members holding a big banner saying "Welcome Western Couples-Congratulations on your Wedding," singing, and waving flags. They then boarded tourist buses which drove to the little village of Sootaek-Ri, the site of the Unification Church's training center, Tongil Industries' manufacturing plant, and Il-Hwa Ginseng Tea factory.

Sootaek-Ri, a small suburban village north of Seoul, has about 2,000-3,000 inhabitants, two thirds of whom are members of the Unification Church. All but a few of the hundreds of workers at the two factories are Church members. Every Sunday, the Unification Church's training center at Sootaek-Ri draws 1,000 villagers to services in the main lecture hall.

The manufacturing plant, ginseng tea factory, and training center are in a compound dominating one end of the village. Paddy fields border one end of the compound, stretching out to rugged mountains on the near horizon; and the high-walled gates of the two factories face an unpaved, narrow street which winds through the center of town, just wide enough for a bus to squeeze through.

Tongil Industries manufactures furniture, air rifles, machine tools and parts, or any kind of machined metal products. The factory has a large collection of lathes, foundries, and metalworking machines which transform the raw materials, thick bars of iron, into finely tooled metal products. Although not as automated as a comparable plant in the United States, the Tongil plant is remarkably flexible and self-sufficient.

We were told that many of the machines in use were built from scratch by Tongil engineers. The Unification Church's printing and publication plant is also there. The Il-Hwa Pharmaceutical Company, next door to the Tongil plant, makes ginseng tea products. The western members were impressed by the clean lines of the modern, four-story brick building and the complex laboratories, white-coated workers,

and gleaming vats for processing the ginseng root. The factory can produce thousands of tons of ginseng products monthly, including ginseng extract, candy, and instant tea.

Il-Hwa Company is renowned as the largest exporter of ginseng products in Korea, and its instant tea has been recognized by the Korean government as having the highest quality on the market. The training center consists of two long lecture hall-dormitory buildings, another long building for workers' living quarters, and a 500-seat dining hall. The center is normally used for Divine Principle or Victory over Communism (VOC) workshops and seminars.



The government regularly sends people to attend the VOC lectures. Normally the center can accommodate up to 500 people, but for the Blessing at one point as many as 1600 western, Japanese and Korean members were using the facilities at any one time.

The Korean Church did a truly amazing job feeding, caring for, and organizing all these people. Tongil Industries manufactured sturdy triple-tiered bunks for the new arrivals. In addition to the dormitory rooms already there, the lecture halls were turned into huge bedrooms. Bunks lined the walls of one lecture hall used as a men's room, and every available inch of floor space in both lecture halls was covered with folding foam-rubber mattresses.

Meals had to be eaten in three shifts because of the limited capacity of the dining hall. The Korean Family took special care and expense to provide only western food, so that no one suffered from stomach problems due to dietary culture shock.

Personal cleanliness was taken care of in a way which the western couples will long remember with special fondness: the public bath. After paying a small fee, you enter the men's or women's locker room. Leaving your clothes in the lockers, you enter a large washroom equipped with rows of hot and cold water spigots, and large pool-sized tubs of warm or hot water. After soaping down and rinsing off at the spigots, using a little plastic pan to splash yourself, you jump into one of the tubs for a warm, relaxing soak.

Because all 1600 people there were engaged to be married within a few days, the atmosphere was one of gaiety and happy expectation, despite the crowded conditions. However, a somber note was added when one looked at the barbed wire surrounding the compound, and the sandbagged foxholes facing the paddy fields. The workers at the factories, as factory workers everywhere in Korea, are armed and trained to defend their factory in case of an invasion from North Korea. Several fortifications and tank barriers were evident around the countryside of Sootaek-Ri. The area is located in what is called the "bowling alley," a long flat valley leading north which is the main invasion corridor from North Korea. Seeing these signs of danger, the western visitors were reminded of the very real threat from the Communists, only 60 miles away to the north.

The arrival of hundreds of westerners and Japanese, plus all the activities of the training center, was a constant show for the villagers, especially the children. Scores of children, dressed in brightly-colored knitted clothes, followed the westerners wherever they went. Once when the buses were stopped for a while in the narrow street, the westerners in the bus began to sing Korean songs. Soon a crowd of fifty or so, mainly youngsters, collected to hear the unusual performance.

Many of the westerners had the opportunity to shop at the market in Sootaek-Ri. It consisted of open stalls and little cubicles selling everything from fish to fancy brocades.

On February 6, several of the couples, representing the American, European and Japanese couples, paid a visit to Korean Prime Minister Kim Jong Pil in his office.

Included were Korean Church President Young Whi Kim; American Church President Neil Salonen;

German Church President Rev. Paul Werner; Mr. and Dr. Daniel Fefferman, representing the American couples; Mr. and Mrs. Jurgen Helms representing the European couples; and Dr. and Mrs. Akagawa representing the Japanese couples.

During the 20-minute meeting, Prime Minister Kim asked Jurgen Helms why they decided to come to Korea to get married. Dr. Helms replied that the founder of their church, Rev. Moon, came from Korea, and that it was an honor to be blessed in marriage by him. He added that, because the Unification Church originated in Korea, he loved Korea very much.

Prime Minister Kim also discussed the Korean situation and the need for ideological education to enlighten people about the dangers of Communism. After being presented with copies of "The Rising Tide," the newspaper published by the Freedom Leadership Foundation, Mr. Kim said he was aware of the work the Unification Church is doing in the United States and all over the world.



Shivering in 18-degree weather

Finally the big day arrived. Arriving at Changchung Gymnasium the 1800 couples lined up in the parking lot. The weather was clear and sunny, but windy with a temperature of 18 degrees; the couples waited a shivery hour before the wedding march began.

Inside, the hall was decorated with billowing streamers of gold and silver cloth, balloons, and flags of all the nations represented in the wedding. After the wedding march and congratulatory speeches, the names of 31 U.S. Senators and Congressmen who sent congratulatory telegrams were read. The couples answered "yea!" (Korean for yes) to the wedding vows, presented in the form of four questions by Rev. Moon. Then rings were exchanged, the couples bowed to the audience, and a shower of confetti descended from the ceiling.

After the ceremony, the couples boarded buses for a 100-bus parade around the outskirts of Seoul on the "skyway," a scenic drive which offers breathtaking views of Seoul from the ridges around the city.

That evening the gymnasium was again full, this time for an evening of entertainment by professional Korean singers and comedians and by the couples themselves. As a finale, the Little Angels performed several beautiful dance numbers and a song.

On the day before their departure on February 11, the newlyweds enjoyed a full day of sightseeing, first taking in Seoul's Changdok Palace, the imperial palace of the Yi dynasty. There they were awed by the splendor and sophistication of the ancient structures, built more than 600 years ago. After shopping for souvenirs, they stopped for a typical Korean lunch: pulgogi barbecued at the table and kimchi.

Then they took the modern Seoul-Pusan Expressway to a reconstructed Yi dynasty folk village in Suwon. Here the daily life of Korea's past has been recreated. The Korean tour guides accompanying the westerners began to express an interest in the Unification Church. Some voiced their desire to find meaning in their lives, and promised to come to lectures on the Divine Principle.

They were won over by the warm spirit of the western couples, recognizing that Rev. Moon had made these people from all over the world so unified and happy.

After the folk village, the couples visited the Little Angels' Performing Arts Center designed by Mr. Duk Moon Aum, a longtime Unification Church member who is an outstanding architect in Korea. They were greeted by Col. Bo Hi Pak, president of the Korean Cultural and Freedom Foundation which sponsors the little Angels, and a host of smiling little angels who lined up for the visitors in one of the practice halls.

The graceful building is designed to be a combined school and performing arts center. The 5000-seat auditorium was still under construction, but the arts school was completed and in full operation. Land for the building, located next to a children's park, was donated to the Little Angels by the government. Col. Pak said that in the future, foreign dignitaries visiting Korea will come to the Little Angels' Performing Arts Center to experience the beauty and hospitality of Korean culture.

Flying early the next morning to Tokyo, the couples spent three days of intense activity with Japanese members of the Unification Church preparing for the "Day of Hope Festival," a three-day crusade at Budokan Hall, the largest hall in Tokyo. Using a few hastily-learned words of Japanese, the couples handed out leaflets and tickets and urged people to come. Through this experience many felt what it really means to be a missionary in a foreign country. The joy of personally bringing people to the Festival was a reward for their efforts.

For many people, such a wedding and "honeymoon" seems strange indeed. However, for the couples, the experience was one which will live in their hearts forever as the most meaningful and significant event of their lives.