

The Marriage Blessings of Catholics, His Grace Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo and the Most Reverend George Augustus Stallings, Jr.

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Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo and his bride, Maria Sung

On May 27, 2001, in the Cotillion Room of the Hilton Hotel in New York City, Heaven truly fired a "shot heard around the world." On that memorable day, Reverend Sun Myung Moon and Hak Ja Han Moon, in their capacity as True Parents officiated a simple, brief, yet dignified Blessing Ceremony of some sixty couples. But Father and Mother Moon have held Blessing Ceremonies by satellite, linking hundreds of millions, officiating from such marquis locations as Madison Square Garden in New York or Seoul's Olympic Stadium.

Why did this humble, small ceremony attract media from around the world, generate front-page news on every continent, and create a more powerful impact upon the planet than any such blessing in history? First, it was because some fifty of the couples were in fact religious leaders -- ministers, imams and clerics, Pentecostals, Baptists, Lutherans, Muslims, Sufis, and more, spiritual leaders in their own right.



Archbishop George Augustus Stallings Jr. and his bride, Sayomi Kamimoto, of Okinawa, Japan

Yet, it was the participation of one or two such men of God that shook the world and provided for many a new and profound understanding of the significance of the blessing of marriage: His Grace Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo of the Roman Catholic Church and the Most Reverend George Augustus Stallings, Jr., founder and archbishop of the Imani Temple African-American Catholic Congregation. These courageous men of God are both known for their willingness to stand up for truth even in the face of great adversity.

They were joined on this historic occasion by such pioneers as Pastor and Mrs. T. L. Barrett of the Life Center Church of God in Christ in Chicago, who were reunited after ten full years of separation, estrangement and divorce. Their "marriage miracle" occurred during the fifty-

state We Will Stand! tour and became a model for the healings and miracles that were to touch many families during that tour, the theme of which was "Rebuild the Family, Restore the Community, Renew the Nation and the World."

Rev. and Mrs. Jesse Edwards of the Pentecostals of Philadelphia, who faced severe criticism for joining hands with all faiths in the We Will Stand tour also reaffirmed their vows. Minister and Mrs. Benjamin

Muhammad, director of the Million Man March and the Million Family March, and key leaders of the American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC) joined in consecrating their marriages in the ceremony entitled, We Will Stand in Oneness!

How this blessing came to be

As the We Will Stand tour, which began in the Bronx Borough of New York City on February 25, 2001, proceeded to fifty-two cities across America, Father Moon's unswerving message of family and fidelity as essential to the building of God's kingdom and the restoration of America became clear. He challenged America's faith leaders to take up the mission of restoring the sanctity of sexuality and rebuilding their families and churches as examples. Even as Reverend Moon confronted audiences nationwide with frank discussions of God's presence and work in conjugal love, childbirth and parenting, he firmly but lovingly prodded the faith leaders to set the standard.

Father challenged Archbishop Stallings, whose church allows married priests but who had yet to embrace that path himself, encouraging him to complete himself by finding a wife. Pastor Barrett's testimony of meeting Father well past midnight after the Miami tour event is now famous. Father encouraged him to marry and be an exemplary leader of the family movement. He then learned of Rev. Barrett's desire to be reunited with his wife of twenty- four years, and after deep reflection and prayer, predicted a rapid reconciliation which even Pastor Barrett had a hard time believing until it happened ten days later!

In each city Father Moon challenged the pastors to be models of fidelity, faith and family. As the Barretts' wonderful testimony spread throughout the tour and as Archbishop Stallings felt called to complete God's love, life and lineage through marriage and family, a spirit of healing and renewal arose, touching one after another. Additional couples in Pastor Barrett's church followed his example by reconciling.

Tour participants began to seek healing for their marriages through prayer. We felt the spiritual power being released through our unity centered upon fidelity, faith and family, which could even overcome divorce and adultery.

Rev. Stallings was led to his future bride, whom he met just before the tour and was deeply moved by. Throughout the busy tour, others tried to encourage him in one way or the other, or to prevent the budding interest from being a distraction.

Meanwhile, the archbishop offered the relationship to God, confident that if Father Moon was truly anointed by the Lord to bless marriages, that he, too, would see the hand of God in this relationship. Sure enough, despite many potential brides and possibilities, both Father and Mother zeroed in on the very young woman that Rev. Stallings felt God had led him to. Through Father's serious questioning, and Mother's loving preparation, the new couple felt uplifted and embraced by True Parents' love.

As plans proceeded for Archbishop Stallings' wedding, the word spread and others emerged who sought the guidance and support of Father and Mother Moon to bless their marriage. Plans were changed to include three couples, then twelve. No, let's have twenty-one! How about thirty-six Okay, forty! But the number of couples seeking to participate in this international, interracial, and inter-religious ceremony continued to mushroom as the wedding day approached.

A providential participant

As the plans for the ceremony developed, there were some who inevitably thought of Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo, who had participated in offering prayers and blessings at previous ceremonies, but who, as a Roman Catholic, had stayed well clear of any idea that he himself would marry. Some who knew him reached out to Rome, but His Grace was nowhere to be found. Suddenly, we found that he was already in New York, and his disposition toward the blessing was dramatically different. We felt the hand of God moving deeply and silently in this situation.

Archbishop Milingo is a devout Roman Catholic, celibate all his life, who prays the rosary for the Holy Father daily and has a profound awareness of the spiritual world. Each day, when he says mass, at the sacramental moment when Christ enters the Eucharist, the seventy-one-year-old prelate experiences the Lord's presence and communes with him.

Despite the fact that his gift of healing was rejected by church authorities, that he was scandalized, exiled from his diocese, and finally prohibited from virtually any expression of his charisma, he remained faithful to the church and ecclesiastic authority. His Grace notes that his mission from God, to heal the sick, cast out devils and preach of the kingdom of God, is nothing different than Jesus commissioned his apostles to do in Luke 9: 1-2. He correctly points out that a bishop's commission is indeed inherited from the apostles. But he has been castigated, humiliated and "made a stranger and a fool in the church that I love."

The archbishop's loyalty is to Jesus and the Blessed Virgin first and foremost. After careful review of the Principle, and reflection upon God's purpose of Creation, His Grace came to see the holiness of sex, and the sanctity of marriage. Where he had once seen sexuality and spirituality in conflict, and thus embraced celibacy as the loftiest spiritual path, he now felt a higher calling to embrace God and reflect God's nature through fidelity. In a press conference after the ceremony, he explained how God's nature is completed in the union of man and woman, and how the two become "flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bone." He compared the presence of God in the union of husband and wife to the mystical presence of God the Father in the Trinity, in the union of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Despite Archbishop Milingo's humility, grace and purity of heart, in expressing his choice to marry, this unheard of act by a bishop of the church previously sworn to celibacy has turned the religious world -- the Catholic world in particular -- upside down and inside out. Many have praised his courageous stand, claiming that the church must change in response to the times.

Faithful Catholics ask how he could have forsaken his vow, why he did not seek a dispensation to leave the priesthood and then marry, and how he could have gotten mixed up with Reverend Moon. But most seem not to have taken in the deep message that Archbishop Milingo is conveying through his public act of marriage, or his own sense of stepping up to a higher calling, rather than forsaking a vow for personal fulfillment. The Italian media quotes church authorities that claim he is brainwashed, kidnapped or somehow controlled.

The archbishop calls such claims "rubbish to discredit me and to avoid the issues I am raising." Meanwhile members of the three orders founded by the archbishop write of being lost, confused, laughed at and ashamed. Some send letters placing a curse on those who led the archbishop astray. Others even prayed that either the archbishop or Reverend Moon would die before the wedding.



The Cotillion Room of the Hilton Hotel in New York City, where True Parents blessed the religious leaders

Standing in oneness

Tremendous support has come from various quarters. Archbishop Stallings, whose marriage caused a media frenzy in Washington, D.C., has joined Pastor Barrett and others in support of Archbishop Milingo and his new bride. At a gathering of clergy and a press conference in Chicago, Monsignor Milingo professed his undying Catholic faith, pointed out the significance of the unity of African and African-American religious leaders, and challenged the clergy here to fulfill America's destiny as the second Israel. "We must vindicate the blood of Jesus!" he cried. Invitations from churches all over

America are pouring in, seeking the deep teaching and powerful healing ministry of the African cleric. We often read reports of a flood of Catholic clergymen abandoning their clerical roles, primarily over the celibacy issue. Added to that are priests that have secretly married, even as sexual scandals, lawsuits and

rumors have plagued the clergymen who remain.

Archbishop Milingo has said he seeks to bring honesty and healing within the church and to restore the dignity and calling of those who have been shunned due to marriage. Many of these ex-priests have reached out to connect with the archbishop. Others have written, encouraging His Grace to ordain married priests. He has so far rebuffed such calls. He has reached out privately to the Vatican and the Holy Father, seeking to find the way to pursue God's calling and fulfill his gift as a Roman Catholic.

Media frenzy

More than forty media outlets covered the wedding ceremony and the powerful press conference that followed. The Italian press went wild, as did many others in Europe, where Archbishop Milingo has a large and faithful following. The North American press was similarly vocal.

Some headlines: the New York Times, "Maverick Archbishop Weds in Manhattan" Canada's Globe and Mail, "Wedding Highlights Celibacy Issue." With a cover photo of the "Kissing Cleric," the New York Post compared the archbishop's action to others who faced censure for challenging the church to change, such as Martin Luther and Galileo Galilei.

Front page articles ran in Brazil, Argentina, Columbia, all across Latin America. African papers followed the story closely. The Korean media was buzzing. Meanwhile, Archbishop Milingo's statement has been translated into many languages. He has been interviewed by CBS's "60 Minutes," the Fox network, NBC, ABC, [US television media] and many international media outlets as well. As the "Harvest for the Pentecost Holy Spirit Revivals," (associated with the We Will Stand tour) continue across America, ACLC has been energized by the commitment and blessing of so many distinguished religious leaders.

When Reverend Moon predicted a Pentecost would sweep the nation fifty days after the tour, no one envisioned such a cosmic and heavenly wedding after forty days, nor the explosion it would create. Just as the Pentecost two thousand years ago heralded a new age centered upon Jesus and the Holy Spirit, with True Parents, this new Pentecost portends the end of the era of churches, denominations and religions and the ushering in of the era of the kingdom of God built upon families, and centered upon the substantial embodiment of the True Parent ideal. And just as two thousand years ago, when a hundred and twenty gathered as the Pentecost began representing all nations (Acts 1:15), those sixty couples are the starting point. Now we must preach the kingdom of God to the ends of the earth!