

God's Hope for America Bus Tour - In My Father's Other House

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Today I was reminded that, several times in his life, my Father's house was not his home at all, but a lonely prison cell.

It was exactly 30 years ago this week, Rev. Sun Myung Moon—my True Father—reported to the Federal Correctional Institute in Danbury, Connecticut, to begin an 18-month sentence on disputed tax-related charges. Meanwhile, Father Moon's Family at East Garden and Unificationists at Belvedere made tearful prayers for his release and victory. As our #godshopeforamerica pilgrimage visited Danbury to pray today, all the drama and disappointment of that long summer three decades ago came flooding back.

Convicted by a jury exposed to a strong and persistent negative media bias, Father Moon yet emerged with his reputation and honor wholly intact, saying that he would pay any price at all if it would help speed up God's work in America. On his release, he was warmly greeted by a broad spectrum of religious and civil leaders who had stood with him throughout his time in jail.

In a speech that day, he restated his belief that America's responsibility was unchanged: to solve God's three "headaches:" the threat of communism, the breakdown of the family, and the conflict of religions.

By then he was already moving fast towards his next goal, the liberation of Moscow and the resolution of the cold war and the problem of communism. He held seminars all over North and South America, and in Europe, and when he met with Mikhail Gorbachev in 1990 and Kim Il Sung in 1991, it seemed the natural and inevitable outcome of his years of service and quiet sacrifice.

In the next two decades, he went to work methodically on the other two headaches, directing his attention to the strengthening of marriage and the family, and finding a lasting solution to interreligious conflict; the reform of the United Nations; to peace in the Middle East, and more. With such an agenda, it was easy and convenient for all of us to forget about time in an American prison, and to convince ourselves that it was all water under the bridge.

On Foundation Day this year, Mother Moon shared with us that she was not yet at peace on this matter, and that she felt it was very important for the American movement to take some action to reach closure. It was clear that the Danbury imprisonment remained as unfinished business and a stain on our national and church history.

But what to do about it, all these years later? The answer came from an unexpected source. A month ago, I wrote an opinion piece about the Holy Ground pilgrimage that was picked up by the Religion News Wire service and subsequently published in the Washington Post and many other newspapers. A couple of days later, I was reading some of the comments posted at the Post website. Most of these were supportive, some asked sarcastically whether the pilgrimage would include a visit to the Danbury Prison.

God works in mysterious ways, and this time I found myself stung into action. Why not visit Danbury, at least to pray? Going further, why not start a campaign where like-minded Americans could express their regret that such a miscarriage of justice remained unacknowledged and uncorrected?

Today marked the beginning of that campaign. 200 people from 22 states gathered in Danbury at a park overlooking the prison, for prayer and recommitment. After singing some hymns,, prayer and shared testimonies, the group became the first signatories of a “recognition of injustice,” a petition that will gather more than 12,000 signatures in all 50 states in the next 10 days and become the basis for an effort to finally gain closure on this most regrettable event in our American history.