

Death of the King

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Part 1: Foundation Day and the Blessing Day in Korea.

As I write this, the ceremonies are taking place up at the World Peace Center at Chung Pyung. I am at home writing because that's what I do. As I write this, the legacy of Sun Myung Moon and the future of the movement is being decided. Much of this decision making is not taking place up at Chung Pyung but is playing out on social media. This in itself is an indication of what the future will be. Sermons and declarations made in the rural hinterlands of Pennsylvania appear on YouTube and impassioned discussions on various facebook sites are effectively changing the substance of the organization. This gives me hope.

My first observation is that the current confusion in the Unification Family was almost unavoidable. Many years ago astute observers of the Unification Church asked the all important question: What will happen to the church once the founder passes away? As young true believers the question was not even relevant to us. Are you kidding? We had the Truth and the True Parents.

Today, more than two years after the passing of Sun Myung Moon, the question has become very relevant. The very nature of both religious organizations in general and the nature of the Unification movement in particular make a struggle for the legacy of a beloved founder of great concern. The founders of major, and even minor movements, are almost by definition, men of very strong ego and they create organizations that are absolutely under their control. When they pass away or for another reason they can no longer control events, a vacuum is created.

Sun Myung Moon was a man of immense physical and spiritual power. He was always in control of himself and the movement around him. When on trial in New York city in the 1980s for tax evasion, he sat in court everyday and conducted the movement's day-to-day business during breaks in the court proceedings. Incarcerated in the Danbury correctional facility, leaders from around the world flocked to visit, report and consult with him. When he was in Alaska or the jungles of South America VIPs, leaders and members flew for many hours to be with him and these remote places became the headquarters of the Unification movement. He had absolute confidence in his God and his role as the representative of his God on earth.

As the movement grew into an international movement with members scattered around the world, the management style began to show cracks. No matter how strong he was no one man could possibly know and control all things. The model for the Kingdom of Heaven was of course a kingdom with a king at the helm. In the west, we as a culture, have moved beyond the romance of kings, queens and kingdoms. In Korea they are much closer to their last royal dynasty. It is telling that historical dramas that feature kings, queens and royal families are very popular and are still part of the popular mythology of the land. They like kings.

The governance of the church family was established as first a family with a strong father at the running the show and then a kingdom. Kingdoms have a king, a queen, a royal family and a royal court. The dynamics of royal families and courts are somewhat predictable. All the overt power is in one place, the top. Everyone else had to get things done by getting in front of the king at the right time and present their case. I recall being told that we had to wait until Father, Rev. Moon, had caught a big fish. Then he would be happy and open to endorse plans and ideas. The people surrounding the king, by necessity, had to be experts at reading the mood of the monarch. Others who wanted the royal endorsement have to go to the people in the court who were experts and enlist their aid for their projects. This of course becomes a special kind of power in the hands of the courtiers.

I saw this dynamic at work many times in San Francisco, East Garden in Irvington New York and North Garden in Kodiak Alaska. This was the reality that everyone knew and operated by. Access to the messiah, True Parent and King was through the royal court. It is what it is.

Ideology, faith and personality worked together to formulate a system that in many ways reflected the dynasties, royal families and kingdoms of the past. Sun Myung Moon lived a very long and magnificent life. Many times half jokingly he asked members if it wasn't time for him to retire and take a rest. Everyone would laugh and shout no we need you. More seriously he would say that if there was someone else who loved God and would take responsibility for God's will then he could retire. Of course no one could do that and he never retired. As the years passed he seemed to be as strong as ever. He was the messiah and True Parents. His spirit was always able to overcome the weakness of the flesh and so we thought it would be so forever.

In advanced old age, most humans suffer some degree of both physical and mental deterioration. Could such a thing occur in the life of our beloved True Father? Not only could it occur it almost surely occurred. Those who were closest to him would be the ones to see and have to deal with it both as a daily reality and for the larger effects on his ministry and legacy. Those closest to him were his wife, children and the personnel and administrative assistants that make up the royal court. In his declining years those closest to him must have recognized his decline and taken steps to protect him, his reputation and legacy. Problem is they didn't see eye to eye as to what his legacy was. This would have led them into disagreements and even in fighting.

Part Two

One of the greatest attributes of Sun Myung Moon was his spontaneous impromptu leadership style. He almost always spoke from the hip as the spirit moved him. This style inspired many people. The downside is he told different things to different people at different times. Each person, knowing that he was the messiah, took the direction that they were given personally as the will of God and dedicated themselves to carrying out the direction. Such direction from God's representative is very empowering. People who received such direction more often than not took it as their commission from God. A promise made to God is critical. If a guy is dedicated to fulfill that promise may not be able to take into account that Sun Myung Moon very well may have give a different direction to an equally ardent follower. Conflicts were sure to arise. As long as the founder was alive and holding court such conflicts could eventually be resolved by the king himself. Now that the founder has passed away such a resolution isn't in the cards.

In the mid-eighties True Parents came to Egegik Alaska as a part of their tour of fishing grounds. I drove them in a SUV down a primitive trail to the riverside for salmon fishing. As careful as I attempted to drive, everyone was bounced and thrown about inside the SUV. It was a teeth rattling ride. Later in the day True Father ordered me to get a bulldozer and improve that trail into a road. It was my very own commission from the messiah. I could have made it my life's work. I could have gotten the bulldozer and under the cover of darkness bulldozed the road. Of course the land was owned by the state of Alaska, bordered a salmon stream and would have raised hell with the neighbors and management in Kodiak. I didn't make the road. I did feel at that time how difficult it was to be close to Sun Myung Moon. I felt a certain sympathy for leaders who got impromptu orders on a regular basis.

The divisions in the church did not begin with the founder's passing. It seems that the eldest surviving son felt he had received his father's commission. Others of the inner circle including Hak Ja Han Moon considered his bold actions as detrimental to what they were told by True Father himself. Moon Hyun Jin has always claimed that the inner circle, and on occasion True Mother included, lied to True Father about his activities. It would be hard to prove what were outright lies and what were simply leaders reporting what they knew, of course based on their own understanding of True Father's legacy. True Father was very angry as evidenced by the video of Father angrily scolding members in Kodiak. The 'heretic and destroyer' video was difficult to see. Clearly a less than clear True Father was being pushed to sign the document. Does this mean that Moon Hyun Jin was right to do what he did? Depends on your point of view. Kingdoms are won by the bold who seize the day. Everyone admits that he is a talented charismatic leader. His view of his father's legacy is attractive and to many. The GPF as a vehicle of Sun Myung's life work as a peacemaker and unifier may be the most successful model. Only time will tell.

Part Three

Moon Kook Jin and Moon Hyung Jin have also laid claim to their father's legacy. It is a very different view and approach than their elder brother's. They were given a taste for power and a desire to right wrongs in the Korean church and the Tong Ill business foundation. On the business side Kook Jin had a mandate from True Father to shape up the wide spread business entities under the Tongil umbrella. His claim and pride is that he was on track to make Tongil profitable. He was seen by some elder members as being ruthless in cutting out the red ink. Of course many pet projects were surviving on stipends from the Japanese church. Major projects like Peace Cup, that were near and dear to the heart of the founder, went on the block. What was success for Kook Jin became the loss of pet projects, the closing of companies and folks losing their jobs.

Kook Jin's end came probably as the result of a huge real estate deal in central Seoul that went south. The land was considered holy ground by True Father and was worth many many millions of dollars. A lawsuit ensued and was lost. Hard to see how it was Kook Jin's fault but he had to take the fall. That and his personal dispute with his mother over events surrounding the death of the founder and an insistence that the vast sums of money, mostly Japanese, that was flowing into the Cheong Pyung training center be audited and brought under control. It was no secret that Kook Jin, like his brothers and sisters, considered the activities of charging money to liberate ancestors was akin to fraud. He was forced from the board of Tongil by a behind the scenes maneuver of the old guard allied with the palace.

After the passing of True Father and the debacle of the implosion of the Lovin Life ministry and In Jin,

Hyung Jin was sent to America to do damage control. By all reports he did a great job reaching out to, listening to and reassuring the American members. He heard that the members wanted both transparency and a say in the governance of the church. He initiated the system of local, regional and a national councils. He also promised more transparency in regards to finances. In less than six months he was summarily relieved and called back to Korea. There was no reason given by the church as to why he was relieved. The tweets by Hyung Jin indicated that there were, to say the least, hurt feelings. A great many American members who were moved and lifted up by his leadership were left to wonder why?

In the mean time brother Kook Jin was out maneuvered on the board at Tongil and was pushed out. He said he was doing the work that his father asked him to do at Tongil and refused to resign as requested. He declined to attend the stacked board meeting that removed him. The implication was that he had other fish to fry.

All was done without a thought to explain what was the brother's big mistake. Folks could only speculate that they were judged not ready for prime time.

The interesting thing is that the two brothers have remained united through all the turmoil. In fact it is their victory as Cain and Abel that is one of their main claims to being the legitimate heirs. Kook Jin's business foundation at Kahr Arms in upstate New York was where they landed. The anti gun climate in New York State and politically greener pastures in Pennsylvania led them as a unit to rural America.

For more than two years Hyung Jin was relatively quiet. He wasn't inactive. He had gone back to the earth in the classic wilderness course motif. He was also experimenting with social media. YouTube videos of his wilderness adventures began to show up. When he wasn't camping out he was holding Sunday service and bible study in his house. The evangelical pastor, Jesse Edwards, appeared as a part of his new ministry. His theology and rhetoric took a decided turn towards the born again. They next bought a church and called it The Sanctuary Church. Sunday sermons By Pastors Moon Hyung Jin, his wife and Edwards, to a large sanctuary with mostly empty seats, began to be available every week on YouTube. I suppose the palace figured it was best to ignore him and he'll come home. Boy were they mistaken.

Suddenly Hyung Jin broke his silence. He explained that he was continually receiving letters from members imploring him to just go back and unite with True Mother. Finally he got fed up with the well meaning, but in his view, unsolicited, naive and uninformed advice, decided to set the record straight.

In a series of six powerful, emotional and scathing sermons he began telling his side of the story. The main charge was that his mother, True Mother, was being, not only unduly influenced by, but being blackmailed and being held hostage by the old palace guard. He began to describe them as Archangels, which of course, in the language of the Divine Principle, is akin to calling them Satan. Every week it seemed like he was trying to top the charges of the week before. He called on the Japanese church and members to stop funding the illegitimate church headquartered at the Palace. He fired all the church leaders by name and ordered them to come to Pennsylvania and repent. He claimed that under the regime of the Archangels the precious words and traditions of True Father were being changed which amounted to desecration. In a most serious step, in the long run, he announced that the marriage Blessings given by True Mother since the passing of True Father were not valid because the vows had been changed. Later he said that True Mother alone had no authority to give the Blessing and scheduled a legitimate Blessing to be conducted by he and his wife at the Sanctuary Church. After an official letter relieving him of his position as International President, he fired True Mother back. His authority for taking these actions and making these declarations is cited as the fact that he, Hyung Jin, was crowned, in three ceremonies as the successor of True Parents. The suppressed video was located and the handwritten memo signed by True Father were displayed. Very convincing.

But you also have to take into account other parts of the whole package. The 9/11 conspiracy theory rhetoric and the prophecy of doom elements are sure to bring into question the brother's grip on reality. The hard line stance over the canonization of textbooks and the words used for ceremonies will seem unreasonable to many. The final straw will probably be the declaring of the marriage Blessings conducted by True Mother to be illegitimate. Once he conducts his own Blessings the split will be final. It will be hard for either side to back away.

Part Four: The Way Forward

In the end, the legacy of Sun Myung Moon will be inherited and carried forward by those who loved him and revered him. Will it be the orthodox church headquartered at the Palace in Korea, the GPF group under Moon Hyung Jin or the Pennsylvania group under Moon Hyung Jin? What about the internet based ministry of Moon In Jin? There are other groups waiting in the wings that also claim that their vision is the real legacy. There is also a good possibility that there is a St. Paul out there that has not yet set off down his road to Damascus. The current situation and a look at the histories of religion seem to indicate that it won't be one united organization. Today we would all feel a lot better if everyone would just get together, hold hands and sing the old standard Our Cherished Hopes are for Unity. The hard line stances

taken by the standard bearers on all sides will most likely preclude this.

The three main groups will go forward according to their own understanding and interpretation of the founder's wishes. Already new theology has been created to justify lines drawn in the sand. Before our very eyes positions are hardening into dogma. Folks are diligently searching both the Bible and their preferred books of Sun Myung Moon's speeches to support their positions and to use as weapons in battling the heretics, destroyers, archangels and the devil himself.

At this point most of the energy on the Facebook sites that I frequent are focused on persuading each other and maybe even ourselves who is right. The future belongs to those who are able to turn and apply their passionate energy not inward but outward. The real test of any claim to be the true inheritor of the life and legacy of Sun Myung Moon will be the impact, not on rival groups under the broad umbrella of Unificationism, but on the larger society, nation and world. If we take history as our guide then we should know that advancement in the human condition is gradual and incremental. The Kingdom of God on earth won't appear tomorrow, the next day or in our lifetime. Guided by religion to recognize our shortcomings and minimize them and based on the advancement of the fields of knowledge of ourselves and the natural world we will continue to move toward an ideal world. The role of religion and therefore the legacy of our great teacher and parent is to educate our original mind. It is up to each one of us to change ourselves and this world