

Why Should You Seek the Unification Church Blessing?

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In this paper I am going to turn my attention to the service and liturgy of marriage found in the book by James White (2000) in order to shed some light on the difference and similarity between the Christian service of marriage and the tradition of the Blessing and marriage found within the Unification Church. My intention in doing so is in part due to a desire to shed some theological light on the Blessing and also to make a brief attempt to answer the question that is often posed to Unificationist: Why should someone seek the Blessing, especially if they already feel Blessed in their marriage and family. My answer will initially be geared towards an individual as well as family who is part of the Christian faith tradition and realm, but I believe it also can be applicable outside of that tradition. In response to this query I believe it would be valuable to start by considering that the early Christian church focused more on the legal implications of marriage, rather than the spiritual dimension. In fact it wasn't until the time of the reformation when marriages began to be held inside the church building (rather than at the church door or the local tavern or a home), that the early church's involvement in marriage became more pronounced with the emphasis shifting from the idea of a contract to that of a covenant and efforts were made to expand Christian spirituality into the institution of the family. At the same time, the Protestant reformation removed the status of a sacrament from institution of marriage, though it still remains as such in the Roman Catholic tradition.

The church's encroachment was unintentional. With the growth of legal systems out of chaos, it became increasingly necessary to have written records of weddings to prevent clandestine marriages and to provide for legitimacy of offspring and uncontested inheritances. Wealthy people (cf. Jan van Eyck's portrait of Givovanni Arnolfini and bride) could afford painted portraits as a record; ordinary people needed a written certificate. In most villages, the only literate person was the priest ("clergy" meant learned), and his presence became increasingly necessary at weddings simply to witness and record them legally. A nuptial mass (distinct from the wedding itself) would frequently be celebrated at the parish church after the wedding and the newly married couple blessed just before the fraction.

The legal character of the wedding ceremony is its most distinctive feature. Weddings consist essentially of a public contract freely and mutually assented to before witnesses. The traditional language, "to have and to hold," is language still used in conveyance of property. "From this day forward" dates the contract. Then follows the unconditional nature of said contract, "for better for worse." "Till death us do part" terminates the above, and "I give thee my troth" is the pledge of faithfulness to it. All this is lawyers' talk, not liturgists. Words almost identical to today's vows appear in English in fourteenth-century manuscripts, long before other liturgical documents were translated into the vernacular. The center of this most joyful occasion is a legal transaction. (White, James F. "Introduction to Christian Worship, 2000 (3rd Edition), Nashville, Abingdon Press, P. 277)

I believe that the ambiguity in the stance of the early church towards marriage alluded to in these quotes stemmed from the fact that Jesus never married and therefore did not leave much in the way of tradition related to marriage. In Matthew 19:9 and Matthew 5:32 he does speak about the indissolubility of marriage and also refers to himself as the bridegroom leaving his followers and also in eschatological terms referring to the last days (Matthew 9:15, Matthew 25:1-13). Then there are Jesus words that say marriage is not continued in the afterlife (Luke 20:27-36), but that's about the extent of Jesus's words on marriage. We find more guidance related to the family in the letters of Paul but even there we find ambiguity such as Paul's counsel that it is better not to marry (I Corinthians 7:8-16)

In contrast to the historical lack of abundant guidance and material that can be utilized to enhance and enrich the impact of Christian salvation and spirituality upon marriage, the Blessing and marriage in the Unification Tradition has been from the outset, one of its core sacraments and pivotal traditions stemming from its role as a re-birth sacrament and a key milestone on the way to spiritual maturity. This means that traditions, guidance, and insights related to the sacredness and significance of the Blessed Marriage and the way of life of a Blessed family abound throughout in the words and theology of the Rev. and Mrs. Moon. Granted that efforts to systematize and teach the full scope of those insights are still in its infancy stage, which is not unexpected since the Unification movement is young, in terms of religious traditions. I believe that over time this lack of systematization will be overcome, in fact I am personally heading up a grassroots project to develop an educational curriculum delving into the way of life for Blessed Families taken from the words of Rev. and Mrs. Moon that I hope to finish by 2025, but the task

is monumental and I believe will require concerted and careful research as we move forward into the future.

At this point I would like to address what I have determined to be key and marked differences between the rituals found in Christian worship and those that are exclusively used within the Unification tradition of Blessing. One of these is the use of water in the sacrament of Baptism, which in Christianity correlates to the death and resurrection of Jesus and is an initiation rite for the individual. In the Blessing, water is also used in the larger benediction ceremony consists of Holy water being sprinkled on the couple (as opposed to the individual) and also water is used within the fifth ceremony, the 3-day ceremony. The meaning for the use of water in those ritual is to purify the couple and by extension, the family. Another is the use of Holy wine – in Christian tradition this element is part of the Eucharist and it is utilized along with bread in remembrance of Jesus actions, supposedly carried out at the Passover feast, at least according to the synoptic Gospels, as well as purposed to bond the celebrant to Jesus body and spirit. In the Blessing, the Holy Wine is an element that is the vehicle to convey rebirth, salvation, change of blood lineage, and removal of original sin for/from the spirit and the body of the couple and by extension to the family (again as opposed to the individual). The Holy Wine is shared by the couple prior to the large wedding ceremony known as the Benediction ceremony and is also a key part of the fifth ceremony of the Blessing, the 3-day ceremony. My point here is to bring attention to the level and scope at which these sacraments are carried out. I would argue that the level and arena of the salvation and Blessedness that is found through the work of God as manifested through Jesus's advent is to save and raise up holy men and holy women. I would further argue that the level and scope of salvation and Blessedness that is found through the work of God manifested through Rev. and Mrs. Moon , initiated by the Blessing sacrament, is to raise up holy and Blessed families (which participating couples understand extends to the afterlife, that the Blessing is a forever and eternal sacrament) and by extension, greater social levels – even extending to the global level. I believe that the ministry of the Unification Church, typified by the Blessing since the family represent the smallest unit and cornerstone of any society, is its power and authority to elevate the restoration work of God to the social level, thereby giving humankind a real shot at achieve a substantial Godly society or the Kingdom of Heaven both on earth and once bound on earth, it can be bound in the afterlife. So, one answer to the question of why seek the Blessing could be that by doing so couples are able to contribute to the increasing expansion of the level of Blessedness already existing in their lives and family, and by extension, be part of the expansion of Blessedness and authorization by God that is being extended to the couple and family level. Also, by doing so, couples are given the grace filled opportunity to add to and support the expansion of God's restoration work that is being manifested in our era, eventually to reach the global and cosmic levels.

Reference

White, James F. 2000. *Introduction to Christian Worship*. Third Ed. Nashville: Abingdon Press