

A Proposal for a New Way of Worship

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Sociological research finds that healthy marriage and family life is the key to personal happiness and societal peace and progress. Natural families -- lifelong, married, two-parent (man-woman) households -- produce individuals who are significantly happier, healthier and more successful than those created out of any other family structure. Historical research finds that societies that sustain natural family life thrive, and societies that fail to do so collapse.

This means that, from the viewpoint of creating peace and happiness in this world, the main responsibility of religion is to foster healthy marriage and family life. None have accomplished this; in fact, none have even set it as a major goal.



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A new religious movement, that of Reverend Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, has set it as a major goal. It teaches that God is our Heavenly Parent who created the universe according to the God-centered family design, and placed us in it with the responsibility to create healthy marriage and family life. Naturally, Reverend Moon defined the believers' faith commitment as a Family Pledge. For the last three decades of his life, he and Dr. Moon crisscrossed the globe teaching God's ideal of family life as the key to world peace.

The theological presupposition, based on movement teachings, is that the family is God's eternal purpose of creation and eternal dwelling place of God on earth. God is love, and the quintessential embodiment of love is in the intimate, spiritual-psychological-biological relationships that take place only in the family. This would indicate that the deepest worship of God and experience of God happens in family relationships. Based on all of this, I propose that the Unification movement design its weekly worship for the purpose of creating healthy marriage and family life.

Thus far in history, God has entered the world through gifted individuals. The Unificationist idea is that God enters the world through every family. Each member of the family is created to be a vehicle of God's love and Word to each of the others. Parents embody Heavenly Parent giving life to children. Husband and wife embody the oneness of Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother. Children are born into the bosom of Heavenly Parent, and grow to eventually embody Heavenly Parent themselves in their own family.

This, together with social science, calls us to envision worship based not on the individual paradigm (the God-centered unity of mind and body, creating an ideal individual) but on the family paradigm (the God-centered unity of husband and wife, parents and children, creating an ideal three-generation family).

Family-centered worship would be an environment in which each family realizes the "four position foundation" by fulfilling the "three object purpose." This means that God, husband, wife, and child in turn act as the subject partner to the other three. Appropriate to natural circumstances, God may take the subject partner position, or the mother might, or the father, or the child. Familial heart liberates all to exchange subject and object partner roles harmoniously.

Family worship, as I propose it, would be an environment for the celebration and practice of this in every family, every week. Its experience in community would set the foundation for it to take place at home. Unificationism teaches that heaven on earth is nothing more or less than this happening in every family throughout the world.

Let's consider a possible format for this kind of worship.

A Sacrament-Based Model for Worship

The Unificationist marriage Blessing is a sacrament. Rev. and Mrs. Moon created a deep sacramental tradition, and the marriage Blessing is its center. When they ministered the Blessing in stadiums, they were officiating sacramental worship. The liturgy I outline draws upon Unificationist formats for holy days, the marriage Blessing and the Il Shim Ceremony. The local community can decide attire and altar setup, and the degree of formality and informality.

Order of service:

Gathering and call to begin

Entry/recognition of officiator couple (and their family, if present)
Lighting candle(s)
Bow to Heavenly Parent and True Parents
Recitation of the Family Pledge (partial or entire)
Scripture reading and short reflection
Family members share with each other: Husband and wife, children and parents.

Comment: The seventh point, family sharing, is the substance of worship. The service creates an environment for heart-to-heart communication, a safe-space for sensitive disclosure. Family members share gratitude, confession, forgiveness, what they are going through right now, and displays of affection. Each family is free to make their own mini-ritual, should they so choose. I envision this would be 10-12 minutes long, but it is up to the community.

Recitation of the Blessing vows by couples
Blessing sacrament for spouses

Comment: The Blessing sacrament -- the vow, sprinkling and holy wine communion -- is an infusion of divine love into the blessed marriage, based upon a re-affirmed mutual commitment. All couples, including guests who participate fully, receive the sacrament. It is conceivable that a congregation could integrate the marriage Blessing of a new bride and groom into the service at this point, as well as ceremonial steps toward a couple's marriage Blessing. These of course could also take place separately.

Recitation of the Purity Pledge by children, youth and singles
Purity pledge sacrament for youth

Comment: I would suggest to begin as young as 12 years old. This will empower teens to maintain sexual abstinence in preparation for the marriage Blessing. They will gain strength by sharing how they are doing in this area, and making this pledge every week. In the 1990s, UTS professor Dr. Kathy Winings and alumnus Brian Sabourin created the *Il Shim* Ceremony, and the U.S. church put it into practice. In 2021, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon established a similar program on the international scale, called at present the Blessing Festival.

Closing prayer and sending forth

Comment: This altogether would establish what Catholics call the penitential system, but on the level of family. In place of priests as surrogate fathers, parents serve as counselors and mentors to their children (as well as to each other). This practice is essential to true parenthood.



Dr. and Mrs. Hendricks conducted a "form stage" family worship in the Kingston, NY church in 2016.

Additional Comments

On the Holy Wine Ceremony: Is it permissible to drink holy wine more than once? Blessed couples often drink holy wine with new couples when they minister it. I am not aware of any objections to this. Sharing holy wine means husband and wife spiritually engraft regularly. Couples make love regularly, right?

In Catholic tradition, baptism, confirmation and the eucharist are distinct sacraments. Baptism is rebirth, and it is received once. Confirmation seals one's baptism, and it is received once. The eucharist reaffirms one's membership in the body of Christ, and it is received regularly. Rev. and Mrs. Moon established ceremonies corresponding to baptism (eighth-day and 103rd-day), confirmation (*Il Shim* Ceremony) and the Eucharist (holy wine). They had blessed couples receive holy wine multiple times as the movement progressed. Rev. and Mrs. Moon created a sacrament of ascension (*Seonghwa*), and sacrament-like rituals for the sanctification of domestic life and engagement with the spirit world. Unificationists have yet to develop a sacramental theology; this is a start.

The repair shop function: In Rev. Moon's view, worship traditionally serves as a "repair shop" to free people from sin. Family worship would continue that as well as provide a trajectory beyond it. The methods by which we prepare for, receive and substantiate the Blessing are the very methods that vanquish the root of sin. So worship that multiplies the Blessing and strengthens its success is the true "repair shop." Beyond the repair shop function, family worship is essential to the growing period. In the future, it will transition from repair shop to production facility.

Family ownership: In family worship, Heavenly Parent speaks less from the pulpit and more through my children, siblings, spouse, and parents -- and listens as well. This confirms the Unificationist view that each family owns *Cheon Il Guk*.

It is guest-friendly: All of the above has just as much value to a first-time guest couple and family as it does to members. Everyone wants to find the love of their life, keep their marriage together and raise healthy children. During each worship service, every new couple in attendance is invited to affirm the Blessing vow, and on that foundation to receive the marriage Blessing. Every new single person is invited to commit to sexual purity in preparation for blessed marriage.

It is evangelical: A happy marriage and family is the world's greatest product. If Unificationists share this treasure effectively, the world will want them in their neighborhood. This worship service helps blessed families expand community networks.

It is educational: The service includes readings that illuminate the meaning of the liturgy. Each service should be followed by education for couples on sexual integrity, for singles on preparation for the Blessing, for spouses on marital and parenting skills, and for children on the Fifth Commandment.

It fulfills Divine Principle prophecy: Family worship assumes that a large demographic is prepared to receive the marriage Blessing. This fulfills *Exposition of Divine Principle's* "Introduction to Restoration" prophecy: "During the period when the providence of restoration is to be completed after the Second Coming of Christ, people are to be fully resurrected to the divine-spirit level based on the Completed Testament Word and the merit of the age." Further, family worship empowers families to "DIY." It is designed for a world prophesied in "The Messiah: His Advent and the Purpose of His Second Coming," where people "do not have the original sin. ... They do not need to pray arduously or practice a faith. ... their children are naturally born good and sinless and likewise have no need of a savior for the redemption of their sins."

It makes Unificationism applicable: All religions affirm true family values, and can update their traditions through this proposal. Governments can recast applicable policies based upon true family values.

It recasts the pastoral vocation: Spiritual leadership depends upon parental heart, not sermons and stage productions. In his January 31, 1976 "Message at the Unification Ceremony," Rev. Moon defined it in terms of advising, counseling, setting the example and establishing the tradition:

"Father and mother must be united and be examples for their children to follow. For instance, the father should demonstrate how a man should live and how he should care for a woman. We must establish this kind of tradition. ... Such a family can be the model for their neighbors and relatives, starting a unified circle. ... Then neighbors come spontaneously ... to ask for advice. And relatives will come to them for counseling when difficulties arise."

It transcends the generations: I described all of this to my children, and here's what one daughter sent back (italics mine):

"I totally agree that the church should focus on marriage and family life -- *Especially if they want to keep upcoming generations interested in the church* -- it's got to be focused on the family. My husband was talking to a Family Fed youth pastor the other day ... and he said that there are a couple of groups around America that are building more family-centered church communities. ... I think these groups will naturally be more successful in building communities *larger than just our church members* -- *which is what we want, isn't it?*"

To which I answer, yes.

Dr. Tyler Hendricks received his doctorate in religion from Vanderbilt University in 1983. He was President of the Unification Church of America (1995-2000) and of Unification Theological Seminary (2000-10). He is currently a research fellow at FFWPU International in Korea, and adjunct professor at UTS, Sun Moon University, and SunHak UP Graduate University.