

The Providence to Engage Christianity – Part 2

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Although Father had clearly declared in his speech at Washington Monument in 1976, it wasn't until 1982 and the birth of the Common Suffering Fellowship that we came to realize that Father's plan had always been to reach the world via the worldwide Christian foundation, centering on a Christian nation, the United States of America. The Common Suffering Fellowship was the gathering of religious leaders who stood in support of Father during his trial and eventual incarceration at Danbury prison. Ministers from all over the nation united in public support of Father, even pledging to go to prison with Father as an expression of outrage over the miscarriage of justice being wrought upon him.

Renowned civil rights champion Dr. Joseph Lowery, together with In-jin nim, stood at the helm of that effort; and it was African-American ministers who most energetically responded and were the backbone of that endeavor to support Father. African-American religious leaders could clearly recognize the injustice of Rev. Moon's plight. They could easily identify the application of systematic injustice, because for many years they had been the victim of that very same injustice. They knew the system had deemed Rev. Moon and his movement "not in the club," and they were determined that the system would not prevail.

But, in Father's mind, these religious leaders were not being gathered to only help him; no, no, it was the mighty hand of God at work, bringing ministers to the point of recognizing their true, global responsibility. In Father's view, Danbury was just the prologue, perhaps even a necessary circumstance, provided by God, for Father to educate Christianity at large about its present responsibility.

The work to educate members of the clergy soon began with the videotape production of Divine Principle lectures given by Tom McDevitt, Patrick Hickey and me. Soon, the main offices of the World Mission Center were stacked to the ceiling with piles of videocassettes to be boxed, addressed and shipped. More than ten thousand sets of tapes were sent throughout the nation. Christian ministers, in virtually every state, began to receive the unexpected package from the "Korean cult leader." We heard later that ministers were even asking each other, "Did you get your box?" "Did you open it?" "What was in it?" Father had really gotten their attention.

Many ministers secretly began to watch the videotapes. One minister told me he had to make sure no one was around before he would pull out his set of videotapes from his secret hiding place. I joked with him, "Bishop, you make it sound as if you were watching porn!"

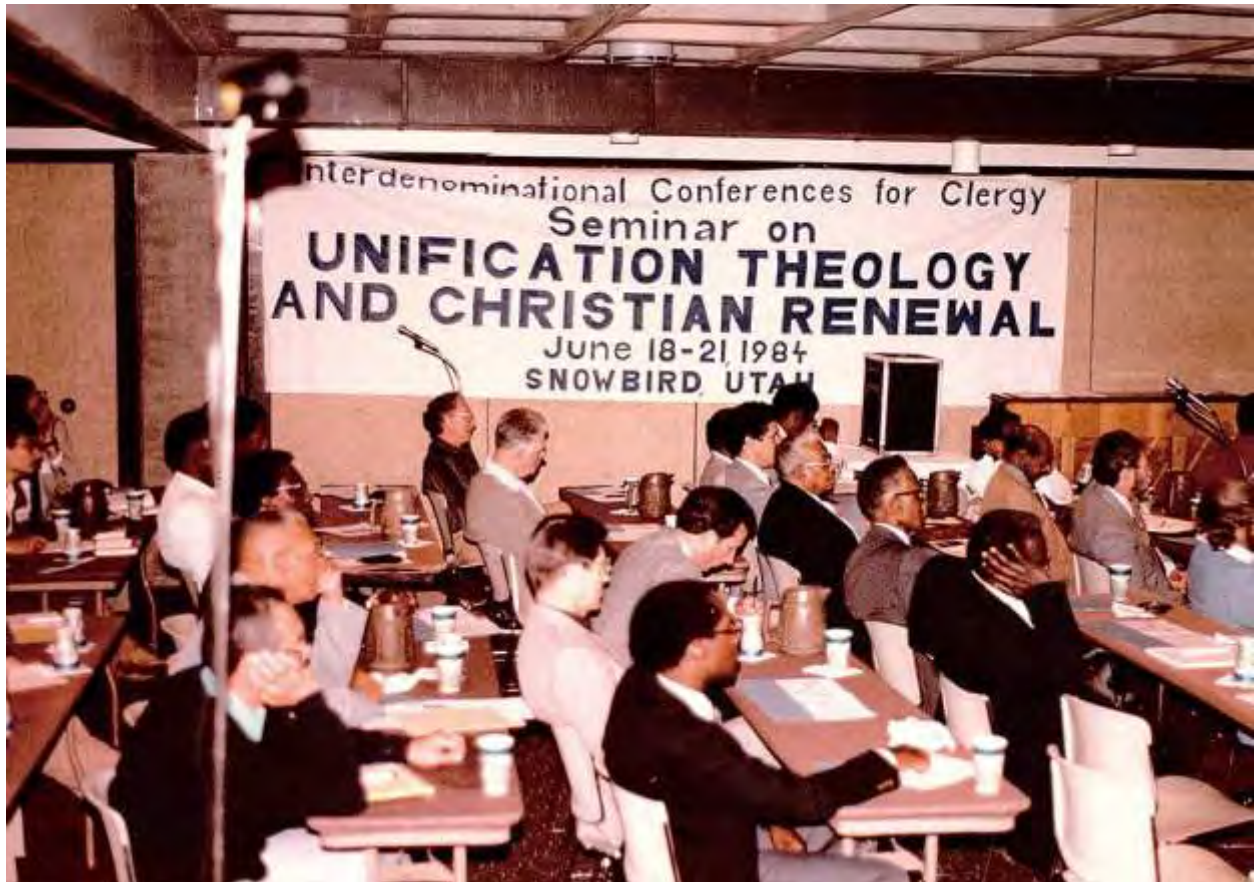
He would laugh and say, "Well, to some of my members, it was theological pornography, and if anyone ever caught me watching 'those Moonie tapes' they would have run me out of my church." A case in point: I recall one package that was shipped back to the World Mission Center. When we opened the box, there were the video cassettes, burned to a molten mass. I think the message was "Moonies, you're going to burn in hell."

Unsung heroes

During the years 1982 to 1985, members all over the nation began to visit and build relationships with ministers. This was the foundation for the birth of the Interdenominational Conferences for Clergy and for the education of more than seven thousand ministers who journeyed to Korea and Japan.

We are prone, sometimes, to give a disproportionate amount of credit to the most high-profile figures in our historical work with members of the clergy. But the real heroes of this effort were brothers and sisters, mostly unsung and uncelebrated, who spent hours, days, weeks and years, often at the extreme sacrifice of their own families, in the effort to reach out and nurture relationships with American religious leaders. This was the reality. The members brought the ministers, and this was affirmed by the testimony of the ministers themselves. The investment of love and service demonstrated by members of Rev. Moon's movement was what finally convinced ministers that all they had been hearing about Father was wrong. In the end, personal relationships moved religious leaders on to the education process, toward the ultimate discovery of the significance of this age and their own providential responsibility.

What I mean is that it took trust. Every one of the ministers who took this path did so because they had developed a relationship of trust with our members. And members knew that they would have to earn that trust by being true, by being real. At the end of the day, for the ministers, it was always a simple conclusion, How could a good fruit come from a bad tree? They knew our members were a very good fruit. Thus, Rev. Moon had to be a very good tree. "So, yes... I will come to the conference."



Forums for explaining Divine Principle and for the exchange of ideas between Christian ministers and Unificationists were a common feature of our church's work in the 1980s.

I certainly would be remiss if I didn't give a special mention to all the Japanese members who came to this foreign land and lived out the model course of the Mother nation. No one could melt the ministers' hearts like our sincere Japanese members, who are working tirelessly, even to this day, to bring a deeper understanding of True Parents to members of the clergy.

In 1983, on the foundation of the video tape distribution providence, the direct outreach to ministers was intensified. In fact, there was a nationwide mobilization. I ended up in Lowell, Massachusetts, a suburb of Boston, working on quite an unusual team with Reiko Stone, a long time member who had only recently arrived from Japan and spoke almost no English and Tomoyo Yamaguchi, Reiko's spiritual daughter, a brand new member who spoke almost perfect English and had spent time in America previously.

Our job was to meet as many religious leaders as possible in the shortest amount of time. I had to devise the best configuration of our team in order to cover the city of Lowell.

I thought, Let's see... Okay, we'll each take a section of the city.... No, wait, that won't work -- Reiko can't speak English and Tomoyo is a brand new member and might be a little "green" with the ministers.

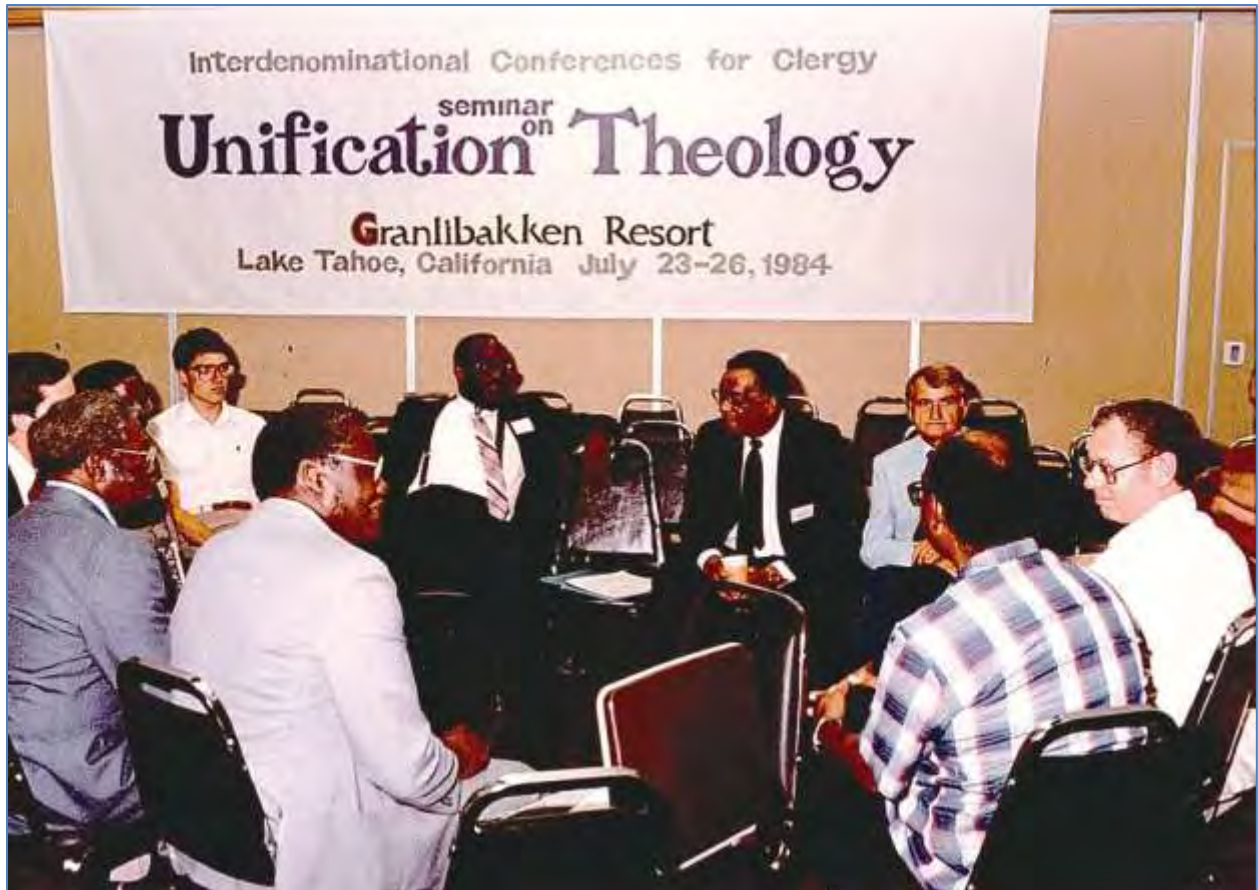
So, I decided, Okay, Reiko is "spirit" and Tomoyo is "body." They are as one person. I would work on my own, and their job was to find nice ministers. If they did, they would bring me the next day. This worked well.

Lessons in the Bible

After a couple of weeks, we began to collaborate with another Japanese sister named Asa, who was working in the neighboring community of Lawrence. Asa had made a good connection with an evangelical religious group. The young minister, Pastor Phil, and his group had invited Asa to join their Bible study every Wednesday. Asa asked us to come with her and we readily accepted.

In my experience, when any Christian Bible study group knows in advance to expect guest pagans, atheists or cultists, they have an uncanny knack for guiding the Bible study and discussion in such a way as to shed light on the error of their guests' ways and to provide an avenue for their immediate salvation. Maybe Pastor Phil's group will be different, I thought as we entered into the church's study room.

We took our places in a circle, making sure we mingled rather than nervously sitting together in a clump. After a brief round of introductions, Pastor Phil announced the scripture we'd study. "Let's turn to Galatians, chapter one, verse eight, please." This was followed by the sound of Bibles being opened and pages being turned as Pastor Phil's group, one by one, quickly found the cited scripture and returned their attention back to Pastor Phil. However, in a couple of areas of the study circle, the sound of pages turning continued, escalating to the sound of frantic flip, flip, flipping, then whisper, whisper. I looked up and beheld the state of emergency. That was the unmistakable sound of Moonies lost in the Bible, and it was now approaching a frenzy of flipping. I tried to make eye contact with my poor Japanese sisters -- Go back... No, the other way... New Testament. New... New!..



It was no use. Finally, Pastor Phil pitifully said, "Could someone help our guests find our scripture in Galatians." I caught some of Pastor Phil's members slightly rolling their eyes and giving each other a knowing wink.

We finally settled down and got everyone on the right chapter and verse. "Galatians, 1:8," I thought to myself, "that sounds familiar." Pastor Phil called on one of his regulars to read the scripture aloud. Bob stood up and read Galatians 1:8...very loud, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."

Yes, I had heard it before, in fact, many times. The fix was on. "Thank you, Bob," said Pastor Phil. "Today's topic of study is, 'What is a false christ, and how we can recognize one?'" They had known we were coming. Pastor Phil and his group suddenly took on the persona of a pride of lions scanning the Serengeti for prey. "Asa, could you tell us what 'false christ' means to you?" The lions had separated the baby gazelle from the rest of the herd and were preparing to take her down. Asa rose from her chair and thought about the question for a moment. The room stood still, all eyes on Asa -- waiting.

"Do you mean 'false christ' or 'antichrist'?" Asa asked sweetly with a big smile. Pastor Phil was startled, "Well...tell us about both. Go ahead." With total presence and not an ounce of nervousness, Asa proceeded to explain, "Well, an anti-Christ is imitation of Christ. Today, the antichrist is communism. The antichrist appears before the Returning Lord, who will come and lead God's forces to victory over communism. A false christ is different. It is someone who is spiritually open and receives a revelation that he is the Lord. This is because in the Last Days we have returned to the top of the growth stage, so this kind of thing is going to happen. So we should be careful." Asa concluded with a big smile, and said, "Thank you," and sat back down. I turned to Pastor Phil to see how he liked that answer. His eyeballs were bulging and turning like pinwheels. He was not expecting such a thorough and intriguing answer.

He quickly made a move to regain control. "Reiko, could you share with us your understanding of how we can recognize a false prophet." Tomoyo and Asa translated the question for Reiko, who didn't speak almost any English. I think Pastor Phil, still startled by Asa's knowledge, was hoping Reiko would be

clueless about false prophets and provide him the anticipated opportunity to “educate” the cultists about the true path.

A very serious look came across Reiko’s face. You could feel the group getting a little apprehensive about what she was going to say about false prophets. It was clear Reiko knew all about them and was not happy about those false prophets -- no sir, not one little bit.

Boldly, she blurted out in the best English she could muster, “False prophet is no good! False prophet is very bad. Satan dominates false prophets.” If Pastor Phil had a sermonette ready about why we should be concerned about false prophets, Reiko just rendered it unnecessary. Somehow, Pastor Phil’s grand design, which was to conclude with four Moonies turning their lives around and coming to Christ, was itself getting turned around.

As the discussion went on and touched on several more areas, it was clear that the guests from Japan were stealing the show and now some of Pastor Phil’s own members were becoming positively smitten by them. Some of his members were even chiming in with little comments like, “You know, Pastor Phil, I always thought the antichrist wasn’t just a person.”



Mainstream Christians, who saw in Father’s unjust prosecution a broader threat to the free exercise of religion in America, joined forces with our members in protests such as this.

Another weighed in, “I think Asa has made a very interesting point about communism being the antichrist.”

Still another member interjected, “Asa, does that mean, if the antichrist is here, that Christ must be coming soon?”

The look on Pastor Phil’s face was priceless. Now, I think he was even starting to get nervous that these Moonies might be getting ready to put a spell on his own sheep and march them right out of the building.

In one last attempt to turn the tide, Pastor Phil shifted the discussion toward the resurrection. Surely, he thought, the resurrection would be beyond the reach of these Bible neophytes from the Far East. “Asa, could you tell us what the resurrection means to you?”

Asa had this sudden serious look of concern creep across her face. Pastor Phil’s group was waiting, now with total interest, anticipating her next answer. All eyes were on Asa, but she appeared to be struggling to find the answer. A bit more time lapsed in silence as Pastor Phil’s confidence grew. “Asa, do you understand what we mean by ‘resurrection’?” he asked in a condescending tone. He looked knowingly around the circle as if to indicate the return of proper order. The look on his face said, “finally, she’s

stumped.”

Just at that moment, Asa looked up with a big smile, “Oh yes, I understand resurrection, but which resurrection do you mean, in the Old Testament Age, the New Testament Age, or the Completed Testament Age?” Now Pastor Phil had a new expression on his face, “no more questions for Asa,” it said.

She went on to explain to the group that there were three stages in the process of resurrection. She explained the details and meaning of each stage and whenever she finished making her point, she did so with a big smile. Honestly, I can’t remember a single thing that I said the whole night. But everything else, I’ll never forget.

But the story doesn’t quite end here. You see, there was still one thing about which Reiko, Asa and Tomoyo felt very dissatisfied -- their paltry Bible knowledge. Well, I have never seen three people learn, so quickly, the order of the books of the Bible. Every spare minute available between that Bible study and the next one on the following Wednesday night was spent by those sisters learning their Bible. They were determined never to be lost in the Bible again. I watched with amazement. They even used a stopwatch. “1 John.” “*Hai!*” “Romans chapter four.” “*Hai.*” “2 Kings, chapter twelve.” “*Hai, hai.*” They were amazing. In the dining hall, “Leviticus, chapter three.” “*Hai.*” In the car, driving to Lowell, “Matthew, chapter twenty-four.” “*Hai.*” In the sister’s room, in their sleeping bags with a flashlight, “2 John chapter four.” “*Hai.*”... “No, Tomoyo, that’s 1 John!.... Fasting, one meal.” “*Hai!*”

By the following Tuesday, I couldn’t even hear a single “flip” anymore. They were handling those Bibles as Bruce Lee handled nunchakus in the movie “Enter the Dragon.” At the next Bible study at Pastor Phil’s, he hardly got the Bible verse off his lips and there was a clap of thunder and a mighty wind, as all three sisters, smoke pouring off their fingertips, had arrived at Romans, chapter 3, verse 12 before anyone else in the room (even before Pastor Phil).

Ever since those days, whenever I teach the Resurrection lecture, of course, I think of Moses in the Old Testament Age, Jesus in the New Testament Age and True Parents in the Completed Testament Age. But after that, I am reminded of Tomoyo, Reiko and Asa. I thank them and so many other brothers and sisters who gave their all to bring Christians a step closer to the ideals of the Completed Testament Age.



Japanese members were active in outreach to ministers decades ago. Today, too, Japanese women are among those of our stalwart church members involved in the American Clergy Leadership Conference.

A word of encouragement

I would say the moral of this story is that there should be no reason for any Unificationist to feel that he cannot engage other Christians in an informative dialogue. No one should ever feel that it takes a seminary degree to do so. First of all, because you understand the basic content of the Divine Principle,

you are already well prepared to be understood by Christians.

Of course there are many new and astounding truths for Christians to learn; but you should also realize there are many truths that Christians already accept that will be even more powerfully expressed and affirmed for them by the Divine Principle view. In other words, don't think Christians will disagree with everything. Remember, too, that Christians also disagree with each other. Don't ever think that there is unanimity of belief within the body of Christ and that all Christians are against Unificationists over the exact same issues.

With this in mind, my simple advice would be to do the following: Purchase a New International Version of the Bible. This is a very reliable and easily understandable version. Also purchase a good concordance (such as Strong's Concordance of the Bible) and finally, purchase a good Bible handbook, which will give a tremendous amount of supportive information and provide texture to each book of the Bible. Many good resources are nowadays available on the Internet.

With these three tools, if you study thirty minutes a day and go through the entire Bible, you will be able, in combination with your Divine Principle knowledge, to converse deeply with any Christian or for that matter, any minister. Just remember Asa, Reiko and Tomoyo, and know that you can do it too.