

Welcome to the Unification Church national parents conference

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It's more than inspiring to find that the room that we were worried would look too big, instead is probably going to turn out to be too small. I can't express deeply enough how grateful we are for your coming. In the last two and a half months, Hillie Edwards has done a tremendous job of going around the country to a number of different cities. Every Saturday we had a parents' conference. I was able to attend most of them, and I was always amazed at what a tremendous experience it was, far beyond what I expected.

I too had come to believe many of the things that I'd read in the press, that many of the parents of the members of the Church are opposed to their children's involvement; but I found, sometimes they understood it a lot better than I even did myself. So it was a wonderful and heartwarming experience, and I'm certainly grateful to see many of the same faces here tonight that I met on those trips around the country.

But I'm even happier, in a way, to see many of you that I have never met before. We really want to create a one-family feeling; we want to embrace all the people who come this weekend we want to really have an experience that will become an important memory for all of us in the future. So to us, this is, in a way, an epoch-making weekend. This is the beginning of a real national dialogue between the members of the Church, the parents of the members of the Church, and officials in the Church.

It's amazing: as we walked down the hall tonight, my father-in-law stopped and asked people "Where are you from?" The first person he stopped was from Alabama. The second person, from Vancouver, Canada. We met some people from Turkey, we met someone from Monaco, we met some who were from Louisiana and Texas, and we met a lot of other people as well. It is a tremendous environment, to see people coming together like that.

I'd like to tell you a little about what has happened in New York as part of this Bicentennial God Bless America Festival; why we're having this Yankee Stadium event, and what it is that we're trying to accomplish.

When I first joined the Church a little over nine years ago, we used to go out on the same kind of evangelical campaigns that we do now; the only difference was, there weren't very many of us throughout the country, probably about 100, or maybe even a little bit less than that. When we invited people over to tell them about our great dreams and ideas, they'd say, "Oh, it sounds wonderful! How many people are in your group?" We'd say, "Well, not very many just yet." They'd say, "Well, you must have some idea." Then I'd say, "Well, I'm a very new member; I don't really know very well." They'd say, "Is it a thousand, is it ten thousand, is it a hundred thousand?" I'd say, "Oh, no, it's not really that much."

And sometimes I wondered myself if we were going to be able to accomplish the ideals and the dreams that we had. We'd tell ourselves again and again: "Everybody had to start somewhere. Jesus Christ began as one man. If there's a dream, and you really believe it, and if you build from that dream, if it's true and if it's good, God will bless it and it will grow."

We want so much to rebuild the spirit of America. We really do. All the ideals and the dreams and the hopes of the Church that you've become very familiar with because you've heard them, or you've read about them, or you've seen some of the literature that we're putting out in recent months; we had all those dreams and ideas nine years ago, and even before that, before I joined the Church. But even the ones who've been members for just three years, or two years, we've had the tremendously gratifying experience of seeing a dream grow. We used to go out and want to do something. I remember the first clean-up campaign -- a few of us went out and we cleaned up the street where we lived. Nobody noticed. We thought "Someday, we're going to really put on a big campaign."

Especially after the founder of our group, Reverend Moon, began to work in America a little over three years ago, tremendous inspiration came and all of a sudden... we caught fire. People were just joining right and left, and the group was beginning to grow. I know that's been a source of amazement. It's historically true that new groups have difficulty in being accepted. That was certainly true for Moses. That was true for Jesus. That was true for Ignatius Loyola. Recently I heard someone tell the story of how the Society of Jesus was really formed -- the group we know as the Jesuits today. Ignatius Loyola found the standard of faith in the Catholic community was very low, compared to what he thought it needed to be. He began to think, "We ought to have 1 special group, which really dedicates themselves to rebuilding the Church and the authority of the Pope." And he did that. To his great surprise, most of the criticism didn't come from outside the Catholic community, from people who were atheist or belonged to a different religion; it came from right inside the Catholic Church. They accused him of being too fanatical. "He's taking these young men and completely breaking their ties to their family; we never see them again; they're off in monasteries somewhere; they're so dedicated, but 'What are they really doing?' "It took quite a while before the contribution of the Jesuits was really well understood.

It takes time, and we know that. But from where we're standing, inside, we've seen so many things come true. We've seen so much be accomplished that we have a great hope that in a short period of time, if we can continue with the momentum that we have now, very soon many people will know first-hand and really come to appreciate and value what it is that we're trying to do for America. That's our dream, that's our hope -- one that we want you to share with us. That's why we want you to understand very deeply.

When we began the work on the bicentennial campaign, I was thinking: you know, I was relatively patriotic when I was young; but I noticed, particularly through the period of the sixties, people stopped singing patriotic songs. People stopped saying the pledge of allegiance to the flag. People stopped doing a lot of things. "It doesn't matter, so why make a big show of it? I mean, I'm still very patriotic, but why do we have to do those things every time?" Well, that sophisticated attitude gradually killed patriotic spirit. In a lot of places throughout America today, if you come to a meeting like this and you even suggest singing something like "God Bless America," people would leave. People would say, "You're making too much of a show of patriotism." They wouldn't really understand what it was that we were trying to celebrate.

When we began this campaign, we made a decision: to set aside the goals of our Church for this year. This is our bicentennial year for Americans. America in our view has been created by God out of bits and pieces from all the other nations of the world. The pioneers came from so many different countries. Every different religion, every different race, is represented. They came here, not because it was easy; not because they were going to find people who already agreed with them; but because they had a dream.

They had a vision; they had hope that somewhere in America, things could be different. That somewhere in America, if they were willing to work hard, with God's blessing they could accomplish a better world for their children and for their children's children.

It was such a miracle when the colonies revolted that many European statesmen said, "It won't last. They can't survive on their own. They don't even have a common language. They don't have a common currency. They don't have anything in common!" The nations in Europe had been fighting for so many centuries they couldn't imagine that their descendants, on the other side of the Atlantic, would ever be able to make one country. They thought that it would just completely fall down and that in a short period of time, the way would be open for the colonial powers to come in again. Yet, somehow, those colonies came together -- not because of geography, culture, or economic policy; but because they'd really sacrificed themselves for one idea: the idea of freedom. The idea that the individual receives his rights from God; not from the state, not from his immediate leader, not from his landlord, but from God. And they were willing to work together, despite all their differences, to make a society and make a country where those rights could be guaranteed. To the amazement of the rest of the world, America -- instead of fumbling, prospered and grew. Finally, some of those statesmen, philosophers and scholars began to understand that this American experiment was unique in the history of man.

When we go back and examine the lives of the founding fathers of this country, they had a deep faith in the Almighty. They felt that they were right. Therefore they prayed to God: "Help us. Show us the way. Because we're sure we're right, and we would rather die than violate what we thought was right." On that spirit God brought down His blessing, and to everyone's amazement, this country became a free and independent nation. Even a hundred years ago, people had faith in God. The world must have been a different place then. The problems seemed to overwhelm them and they didn't have the technology that we have today. But on the other hand, people knew that if they put themselves into something, they could create something with God's blessing.

What happened when we lost that faith? World War I and World War II were crises of faith. We lost faith in our ability to solve our own problems. People began to think, "No matter what I do, no matter how I try to work to protect myself, somebody else, someplace else, may start a war." Also, the economic forces that bound the world together were controlled by people and institutions that seemed almost too big for the individual to relate to.

Gradually, people began to say, "I don't know if I can depend on myself," and they looked for someone else to do it. They began to depend on someone else to do it, whatever it was that they needed done. Whoever would promise that dream they'd put their faith in. That's why we've had some of the terrible tragedies that we've had in this century. Individuals have lost faith in their own ability to solve their problems, and they've been looking for someone else to do it. But while they've been looking for someone else, the very person who's been standing behind this country, and the individuals in it, since the beginning has slipped out of sight. Our national faith in God is at an unprecedented low.

Even 20 years ago, things were much more optimistic than they are now. That was before the Peace Corps was formed; that's before VISTA was formed. And what have we discovered? In the last 20 years, we've tried many things. But because we haven't tried God, we've lost ground steadily. Twenty years ago, the rate of suicide was high enough in this country; but at least we could say that the young people in this country, between the ages of 20 and 24, had the lowest rate of suicide. Those are the idealists, the people that are ready to charge right out and do something. Twenty years later, not only has the rate of suicide tripled but even more shocking is that the same age category, between 20 and 24, now has the highest rate of suicide in the country.

Americans say, "Well, you know, there was a generation gap 2,500 years ago; and there'll be one 2,500 years from now -- things are really the same." But you know, things aren't the same.

Last year, over a million and a half children under the age of 18 ran away from home. That's shocking. Forty percent of all of our families end in divorce. Seven hundred children were beaten to death by their parents, little babies. I'm not saying those things to depress you. True, they're depressing and I'm depressed about it. But we have to recognize that we have a giant problem on our hands. It's a spiritual problem. It's a problem of hope; it's a lack of vision; it's a time when we need some new inspiration. People are looking for it. But they won't find it among themselves.

The Bible says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." But vision comes from God. In turning our eyes to God, we believe that in this age, He has given tremendous new revelation, new inspiration. The Unification Church is founded around such an inspiration. We don't believe that God is working only through the Unification Church -- not at all. We believe that God is working in many ways. But we believe that there's a very special revelation, and we personally feel called to participate in the work of God's new plan. It's brought tremendous hope to us and new inspiration.

Mankind has been fighting for thousands of years. Particularly in this century, all the European and Asian

nations have been allies against each other, and then allies with their enemies against their former friends. And yet, through our understanding of the teachings of this Church, we've brought men and women together from all over the world. Our witnessing teams are not just composed of Americans, but they are a miniature United Nations. In the beginning, it was comical to see how we lived together; we couldn't even speak the same language. Sometimes, whenever anybody would ask a question, somebody else would just take them to the bathroom.

As human beings, we have so much more in common than we have separating us. The distinctions should be embellishments, like different ornaments on the same Christmas tree. Does "unification" mean we want one world government or that we want to obliterate all differences? Not at all! Not any more than we eliminated all the differences when we formed this country. This country was founded on a particular inspiration: one nation under God. We know that regional differences and varying cultural backgrounds are still celebrated today. They haven't been blotted out. If you ever go up to Tarrytown and you ask, "Are there any Italian-Americans in town?" the whole town will turn out. They haven't lost their identity! If you go down to Chinatown -- you know where you are. And yet they're all Americans! Because we share much more, we don't feel threatened by the differences. And the world ought to be like that. Don't you think so? We know that it can be.

We know that it will be. "One nation under God" was meant to be the blueprint for one world under God. And that should be what we celebrate on the Bicentennial. We have to unite together and recognize what it was that made this country so great to begin with. It wasn't just man, and it wasn't just God. It was man and God, working together. If we can rebuild that partnership, we believe from the bottom of our hearts, we can continue to make America an inspiration and a source of freedom, idealism and hope for all the other peoples of the world.

Therefore, this year, Reverend Moon decided we should invest ourselves in bringing a spiritual renewal to the Bicentennial celebration. "Lee's bring people together" -- first in Yankee Stadium, which seemed inconceivable when we first began, and finally, later this year, in Washington, on the Monument grounds. "Let's have the biggest and best celebrations that anyone ever had, dedicated to God." Of all the great leaders we've had, the person to whom you all owe the most is Christ. Let's have one celebration, dedicated to him. Let's have it on the international level with people from all over the world. Let's remind ourselves, in spite of all our problems, what we have to give thanks for. Second of all, let's remind ourselves how all those things came about. And thirdly, let's determine to continue to work, despite the difficulty, to achieve the original dream of this nation.

People want to be proud of their country. They want to recognize their spiritual foundation. We don't think everybody should join the Unification Church; we don't think it's the way of life for everyone. We feel that we're trying to be like a conscience, or a spark. If we all understand the same basic things, if we're committed to the same ideals, it doesn't matter what church we belong to, or what our background is. We're still one family -- one world under God. And that's the goal of our campaign.

It's very meaningful to us, since we feel that God really expresses Himself through the family unit that so many of you could be here with us tonight.

Proclamation of the parents attending the Unification Church's National Parents Conference

We the undersigned parents of members of the Unification Church, founded by Reverend Sun Myung Moon, do hereby express our support and declare the following:

We support any God-directed activity and we are especially proud of our sons' and daughters' participation in the Unification Church with its basic Judea-Christian teachings and high moral standards.

Each person has the right to worship God as he pleases, as guaranteed by the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America.

Our sons and daughters, through the teachings of the Unification Church, have developed a deep love for God and for their fellow men and we are proud that they have decided to dedicate this time in their lives to help their communities and countries. They have found a direction for their lives and new hope for the future with a possibility of peace for this nation and the world.

Participation in the Unification Church has developed the following character traits which we feel are entirely positive and desirable:

- * Increased consideration and awareness toward the value, uniqueness and feelings of others and especially of their personal families.

* A strong sense of right coupled with a high moral code of ethics.

* The self-discipline to accomplish any task set before them.

As the Bible states we must judge everything by its fruits. These fruits are young people who have dedicated their lives for the betterment of man, fulfilling God's will for world unity and peace, and accomplishing this seemingly impossible task through love and caring with the heart of God rather than with guns and violence.

In conclusion, we are in full support of our sons and daughters of the teachings of the Unification Church for its inspiration and new hope revitalizing the spirit of these precious young people. We believe that this group should be supported by all Americans if we want democracy to win over atheism, solid family unity to prevail over broken families, and strong courageous youth to prosper over corrupt and immoral youth.

The following statements were each signed by more than 200 of the parents attending the Unification Church's National Parents Conference.

NEW YORK TIMES
229 West 43rd Street
New York, New York

Dear Editor:

June 2, 1976

We, the undersigned parents of members of The Unification Church, are appalled by the blatant lies and distortions presented by the press and television concerning its teachings, practices and purpose.

Allegations against the movement include detaining by force, brainwashing, deliberate separation of families, permissive sexual behavior, drug use, exploitation of members for personal gain and satanic religious training.

More than 600 parents from all over the United States and many other countries had the opportunity to attend an open and honest three-day meeting with their sons and daughters. At this meeting we discussed the teachings and practices of this movement with its leaders. Many of these parents had previously explored this movement through work-shops, training sessions and visits to the various living centers. We found these foregoing allegations completely false.

To the contrary the young people were found to be exceptionally mature, emotionally stable and capable of intelligent decisions and responsible conduct. One of the basic teachings is the unity of personal families on which the foundation of a good society is built and members are encouraged to develop and maintain strong ties with their families. It was very evident that their deep spiritual qualities and high moral values had been retained. We found God-centered religious training with world unity and peace as its ultimate goal.

In conclusion, parents have experienced much pain and anguish as a result of the distorted facts and we as responsible citizens want the truth printed.