

## An Unexpected Encounter, A Changed Life Forever

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When I accepted the call from God to become a Roman Catholic priest, it was in my early youth. I had no idea where the pursuit of priesthood would lead me. All I knew is that I possessed a burning desire to serve God and God's people. After a circuitous course of study and preparation that led me from my small native town of New Bern, North Carolina, to the very heart of universal Catholicism in Rome, Italy, I was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in July 1974.

After serving faithfully as a priest for fifteen years, my life took a dramatic turn. As a Christian, I no longer felt that Roman Catholicism could respond to the profound spiritual, religious and cultural needs of either those whom I served or myself. Something seemed to be lacking or incomplete and, once again, I found myself in pursuit of my calling by God. It was a very painful and challenging decision but I felt, nonetheless, that there was no other recourse. It would mean a break with Roman

Catholicism but not with Christianity or the universality of Catholicism.

In July of 1989, I, along with several African-Americans who were also disenchanted with Roman Catholicism, established the Imani Temple African-American Catholic Congregation. The drastic decision was more than a notion! My whole world changed at that time, I thought, yet I found solace in feeling that I had finally reached a point where I would spend the rest of my life fully devoted to leading and developing a viable Catholic alternative to Roman Catholicism that would minister to the spiritual aspirations of its adherents. Then, in 2001, an unexpected encounter happened. Everything changed and my whole world was turned inside out and upside down! I encountered the True Parents!

No one ever could have convinced me that meeting the Rev. Sun Myung Moon and his beloved wife, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, would cause such a dramatic change in my personal life as well as in my understanding of the Bible and Christianity. True Parents made everything so clear to me, even to the point of leaving celibacy behind and realizing the importance of the Blessing of Marriage which led not only to a matching with a beautiful spouse but the producing of two incredibly gifted sons. I was immediately and completely drawn and captivated because I saw in them what I had been searching for and desiring within myself: a consecrated life in marriage in which I could find fulfillment and wholeness by "living for the sake of others" with no regard for my own personal needs or comfort. As I came to learn intensely about True Father's life course, I realized that he had accepted the call of God and the anointing of Jesus in his early youth to unite World Christianity by working assiduously to establish the kingdom of God on earth, a world of true and lasting peace with the capacity to even love one's enemies! It would eventually lead to a break with his Presbyterian roots and set him on a path to establish the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity. At last, I had found my master teachers and much more than that! I had discovered the Lord of the Second Advent!

True Father and True Mother are God's gift to humanity! They remain one! Even though True Father is one with God in the spirit world, True Mother remains one with God and her beloved husband as she continues to bring into fulfillment, as the Mother of Peace and God's only begotten daughter, the divine providential mission that was bequeathed to them by God from the very beginning of their anointed calling. They are the substantial manifestation of God's presence among us and they deserve our filial piety and devotion, our unswerving loyalty and gratitude.

I am their true student, their true son. Meeting them was not a chance encounter, it was a providential encounter that has changed my life forever! I fully embrace their providential mission and purpose. Nothing for me is the same as a result of having been exposed to their teachings and example, lives lived in consecrated service to God and all humankind. There is no one like them! Let us all become true disciples and ambassadors for peace as we unite with True Parents, especially True Mother, in ushering in Cheon Il Guk, the kingdom of God on earth! Then, and only then, will we find true peace!