

FFWPU UK: Looking Back At Rev. Moon's Encounter With President Gorbachev

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Following on from the passing of former President Mikhail Gorbachev, we look back at Rev. Sun Myung Moon's challenging meeting with the last leader of the Soviet Union.

Last week, on Tuesday 30th August 2022, Mikhail Gorbachev died, aged 91, while dealing with a long-term illness.

Mr Gorbachev is credited with introducing key political and economic reforms to the USSR and helping to end the Cold War.

In 1990, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for "for his leading role in the peace process which today characterizes important parts of the international community."

The following is an extract from As A Peace-Loving Global Citizen (page 249-251) where Rev. Sun Myung Moon recounts his meeting with the last leader of the former Soviet Union.

In April 1990, I convened the World Media Conference held in Moscow. Unexpectedly, the Soviet government gave me head-of-state - level protocol, beginning at the airport. We were transported to the centre of Moscow in a police-escorted motorcade. The car that carried me travelled on the yellow section of the road, which was used only by the president and state guests. This happened before the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Soviet government afforded this exceptional treatment to me, an anti-communist. At the conference, I gave an address praising the move toward perestroika. I said this revolution must be bloodless, and that it must be a revolution of the mind and spirit.

The purpose of my visit was to attend the World Media Conference, but my mind was focused on meeting President Gorbachev. At the time, President Gorbachev was popular within the Soviet Union, following the successes of his perestroika policies. I could have met the U.S. president ten times if I'd wanted to, but meeting President Gorbachev was much more difficult. I was concerned that even one meeting might be difficult to achieve. I had a message to give him, and it was important that I do this in person. He was reforming the Soviet Union, giving rise to the winds of freedom there, but as time passed, the swords of reform were being increasingly pointed at his back.

If the situation were left unchecked, he was about to fall into great danger. I explained, "If he does not meet me, he has no way to catch the wave of heavenly fortune, and if he cannot do that, he will not last long." Perhaps President Gorbachev heard this expression of my concern. The next day, he invited me to the Kremlin Palace. I rode in a limousine provided by the Soviet government and entered deep into the

Kremlin. On entering the presidential office, my wife and I took our seats, and Cabinet ministers of the Soviet Union took seats next to us. President Gorbachev smiled a big smile and gave us an energetic explanation of the successes of his perestroika policies.

Then he showed me into an anteroom, where we met one on one. I used this opportunity to give him the following message. "Mr. President, you have already achieved much success through perestroika, but that alone will not be sufficient for reform. You need to immediately allow freedom of religion in the Soviet Union. If you try to reform only the material world, without the involvement of God, perestroika will be doomed to fail. Communism is about to end. The only way to save this nation is to allow the freedom of religion. The time is now for you to act with the courage that you have shown in reforming the Soviet Union and become a president of the world who works to bring about world peace."



President Gorbachev's face hardened at the mention of religious freedom, as though he had not been expecting this. As one would expect from the man who had allowed the reunification of Germany, however, he quickly relaxed his expression and soberly accepted my words to him. I continued, saying, "South Korea and the Soviet Union should now open diplomatic relations. In that context, please invite South Korean President Roh Tae Woo to visit." I also explained a list of reasons why it would be good for the two countries to have diplomatic relations. After I had finished all I wanted to say, President Gorbachev made a

promise to me with a tone of certitude that I had not heard him express prior to that point.

"I am confident," he said, "that relations between South Korea and the Soviet Union will develop smoothly. I, too, believe that political stability and the relaxation of tensions on the Korean peninsula is necessary. Opening diplomatic relations with South Korea is only a matter of time; there are no obstacles. As you suggested, I will meet President Roh Tae Woo." As I was about to leave President Gorbachev that day, I took off my watch and put it on his wrist. He seemed a little bewildered that I would treat him as I might an old friend. So, I told him firmly, "Each time your reforms face difficulty, please look at this watch and remember your promise to me.

If you do that, Heaven will surely open a path for you." As he promised me, President Gorbachev met President Roh in San Francisco in June that year for a bilateral summit. Then, on September 30, 1990, South Korea and the Soviet Union signed a historic agreement to open diplomatic relations for the first time in eighty-six years. Of course, politics is the job of politicians, and diplomacy is the job of diplomats. Sometimes, though, when a door has been closed for a long time, a religious person who has no interests at stake can be more effective. Four years later, President and Mrs. Gorbachev visited Seoul, and my wife and I hosted them at our home in the Hannam Dong neighbourhood.

He had already been removed from power by a coup d'état. Following the coup by anti-reformist forces opposed to perestroika, he had resigned his position as general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party and dissolved the party. As a communist, he had eliminated the Communist Party. The former president and first lady used chopsticks to eat the bulgogi and jabchae we had carefully prepared. When he was served su-jeong-gwa as dessert, Mr. Gorbachev repeated several times, "Korea has excellent traditional foods." He and the first lady appeared quite different from the days when he was in office.

Mrs. Gorbachev, who had previously been a thoroughgoing Marxist-Leninist lecturing at Moscow State University, wore a necklace with a crucifix. "Mr. President, you did a great thing," I told him. "You gave up your post as general secretary of the Soviet Union, but now you have become the President of Peace. Because of your wisdom and courage, we now have the possibility to bring world peace. You did the most important, eternal, and beautiful thing for the world. You are a hero of peace who did God's work. The name that will be remembered forever in the history of Russia will not be 'Marx,' 'Lenin,' or 'Stalin.' It will only be 'Mikhail Gorbachev.'"

I gave high praise to the decision by Mr. Gorbachev to bring about the breakup of the Soviet Union, the mother country of communism, without shedding blood. In response, Mr. Gorbachev said, "Rev. Moon, I have been greatly comforted by your words. Hearing your words gives me energy. I will devote the remainder of my life to projects that are for the sake of world peace." And he firmly took my hand in his.
- *As A Peace-Loving Global Citizen*, Rev. Sun Myung Moon.

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