

A Church with No Denomination



Koreans have a saying that a person insulted by others lives a long time. If I were to live in proportion to the number of insults I've received, I could live another hundred years. Also, my stomach has been filled not with food but with insults, so you could say that my stomach is the most full of anyone's. Established churches that had opposed me and thrown stones at me when I started a church in Pyongyang resumed their persecution, this time in Busan. Even before we had properly begun our church, they set out to give us trouble. Words like heretic and pseudo- were placed in front of my name so often that they seemed to become part of my name. Indeed, the phrase Sun Myung Moon came to be synonymous with heresy and pseudo-religion. It's hard to even hear my name mentioned without these words.

By 1953, the persecution reached extremes. We closed the hut in Busan and moved first to Daegu and then to Seoul. In May of the following year, we rented a house in Seoul's Bukhak Dong neighborhood, located near Jang-choong-dang Park, and hung out a sign that read "Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity." We chose this name to signify that we

belonged to no denomination, and we certainly had no plans to create a new one.

“World Christianity” refers to all of Christianity worldwide and both past and present. “Unification” reveals our purpose of oneness, and “Holy Spirit” is used to denote harmony between the spiritual and physical worlds built on the love of the father-son relationship at the center. Our name is meant to say, “The spiritual world, centering on God, is with us.”

In particular, unification represents my purpose to bring about God’s ideal world. Unification is not union. Union is when two things come together. Unification is when two become one. “Unification Church” became our commonly known name later, but it was given to us by others. In the beginning, university students referred to us as “the Seoul Church.”

I do not like using the word kyo-hoi in its common usage to mean church. But I like its meaning from the original Chinese characters. Kyo means “to teach,” and Hoi means “gathering.” The Korean word means, literally, “gathering for teaching.” The word for religion, jong-kyo, is composed of two Chinese characters meaning “central” and “teaching,” respectively. When the word church means a gathering where spiritual fundamentals are taught, it has a good meaning. But the meaning of the word kyo-hoi does not provide any reason for people to share with each other. People in general do not use the word kyo-hoi with that meaning. I did not want to place ourselves in this separatist type of category. My hope was for the rise of a church without a denomination. True religion tries to save the nation, even if it must sacrifice its own religious body to do so; it tries to save the world, even at the cost of sacrificing its nation; and it tries to save humanity, even if this means sacrificing the world. By this understanding, there can never be a time when the denomination takes precedence.

It was necessary to hang out a church sign, but in my heart I was ready to take it down at any time. As soon as a person hangs a sign that says “church,” he is making a distinction between church and not church. Taking something that is one and dividing it into two is not right. This was not my dream. It is not the path I chose to travel. If I need to take down that sign to save the nation or the world, I am ready to do so at any time.

Our sign hung near the front entrance. It would have looked better if we had hung it someplace high, but the eaves on the house came down very low, giving us no good spot to place a sign. In the end, we hung it about as high as the height of a child. In fact, some children in the neighborhood took down our sign, played with it, and broke it in two. Because of its historical significance, we could not throw it away. We attached the two pieces back together with wire and nailed it more securely to the front. Perhaps because our sign was treated with such humiliation, our church also received humiliation beyond description.

The eaves were so low that people had to duck their heads in order to pass through the entrance. The room was about eight feet square, and it was so cramped that when six of us would pray we might bump foreheads with each other. People in the neighborhood laughed at our sign. They made fun of us, asking what kind of world unification we dreamt of in that tiny little house that “you have to crawl to get into.” They didn’t try to find out why we had chosen such a name. They simply looked at us as if we were crazy.

This did not bother us, however. In Busan, we had begged for food to sustain ourselves, and now we had a room to perform services. We had nothing to fear. For a suit, I took a pair of U.S. Army fatigues and dyed them black. I wore these with black rubber shoes. Even if others sought

to belittle us, in our hearts we were more dignified than anyone.

People who attended called one another shik-ku, or family member. We were intoxicated with love. Anyone who came there could see what I was doing and hear what I was saying. We were connected by an inner cord of love that let us communicate with God. A woman would be at home preparing rice and suddenly run off to the church. Someone else would say she was going to change into a new dress and then run off to the church in her old dress with holes in it. If a woman's in-laws shaved her hair to keep her from going to the church, she would come with her bald head.

As our members increased, we began to evangelize on university campuses. In the 1950s, university students were premier among intellectuals in Korean society. We began by working near the gates of Ewha Womans University and Yonsei University. Soon a sizable number of students were spending time at our church.

Professor Yoon Young Yang, who taught music at Ewha, and Professor Choong Hwa Han, who was the dormitory master, came to our church. Many students also came, but they did not come just one or two at a time. Dozens came, and their numbers grew in geometric progression. This surprised the established churches and us as well.

Within two months after we began our campus evangelical work, our congregation exploded in size, primarily with students from Ewha and Yonsei. The rate of growth was incredible. It was as if a spring breeze had blown through and changed the hearts of the students all in a moment. Dozens of Ewha students packed up their belongings and moved out of the dormitory. This happened on a single day. If someone tried to stop them, they would say, "Why? Why are you trying to stop me? If you want to stop me, you'll have to kill me. Kill me!" They even came out by climbing the walls around the building. I tried to stop them, but

it was no use. They did not want to be in their clean school; they wanted to be in our little church that smelled of dirty feet. There was nothing anyone could do about it.

Finally Dean Hwal Ran Kim (Helen Kim) sent Professor Young Oon Kim of the Department of Religious Social Welfare to our church. Professor Kim had studied theology in Canada and was a theologian in whom Ewha held out great hope for the future. Dean Kim chose Professor Kim because her specialty was theology, and she assumed she could develop a definitive critique of our theology that could be used to finally stop this influx of students. But a week after meeting me, this special representative, Professor Kim, joined our church and became one of our most enthusiastic members. This gave us even more credibility among the other professors and students at Ewha. Our membership numbers snowballed.

The situation grew out of control, and established churches resumed their accusations that we were stealing their members. This seemed unfair to me. I never told anyone to listen to my sermons or attend our church. If I chased people out the front door, they would come in the back. If I locked the doors, they would climb over the fence. I was powerless to stop them. The people most perplexed by this were the administrators of Yonsei and Ewha, who in turn were supported by Christian foundations. They could not stand by and do nothing as their students and faculty came swarming to some other religious group.