

Unification Church funeral

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A **Unification Church funeral** (or **seungwha**) is a funeral ceremony held within the Unification Church for the purpose of aiding the deceased person's transition to the spirit world and to celebrate his or her life among family and friends.^{[1][2]}

Theological basis

Unification Church scholars writing on the church's funeral customs cite the church's main theological text the *Divine Principle* which says: "Man, upon his death, after his life in the visible world, goes to the invisible world in a spiritual body, having taken off his 'clothes of flesh' (Job 10:11), and lives there forever." They also note that family and other human relationships continue after death.^{[1][2]} The Unification Church does not uphold belief in reincarnation or eternal damnation. Unification Church theologian Young Oon Kim writes:

"You and I are going to live forever. What does immortality signify? We are thinking animals and loving creatures. Those two faculties show our kinship to the eternal God. They make us part of the infinite spirit world. We will think and we will love forever. Thus, our wisdom will continually grow and our love can be enriched more and more. This is what Swedenborg taught. There will be no sharp break between life here and life hereafter. What we start here continues in quality and expands infinitely. The ever living God creates each of us to have fellowship with Him forever."^[3]

Ceremony

The seungwha ceremony was introduced by Unification Church founder Sun Myung Moon in 1984, at the time of the death of his son Heung Jin Moon. Church members who had died prior to this were given traditional Christian funerals. When the new and more distinct format was ordained, the official church newspaper reported:

"The use of the Chinese character meaning 'Seung Hwa' is new and unique to this ceremony and is not commonly used. The character for 'seung' means 'ascending, elevation'. The character 'hwa' has meanings of 'harmony and peace.' The use of 'seung hwa' was first instructed by Father at this time."^[2]

The ceremony itself consists of three parts: The Gwi Hwan Ceremony (or "returning to joy"), a farewell prayer service held by family members and close friends; the Seung Hwa Ceremony, (or "ascension and harmony"), a public ceremony celebrating the person's life featuring songs, testimonies, and an address most often by a church pastor; and the Won Jeun Ceremony (or "returning home/to the palace"), the burial service. It is emphasized that the ceremony should have a joyful atmosphere since it is a celebration of the person's life and his or her transition to the spirit world. White and light colored clothing, rather than the traditional black, is worn by participants.^{[2][1]}

Cremation is discouraged in the Unification Church, although it is sometimes practiced especially in Japan where it is required by law. Unification Church cemeteries, or sections of existing facilities, have been established in South Korea, the United Kingdom and the United States.^{[1][4]}

References

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