



STATEMENT DM181

Moon's Ever-Changing Face-Lift

Sun Myung Moon, founder of the Unification Church and self-proclaimed messiah from Korea, continues to pout. And who can blame him? The press still portrays him as a religious buffoon. After 25 years of proselytizing in North America, only a handful of Americans have embraced his teachings. Christians refuse to welcome him into their fold despite all the money he has tossed their way. And some of his children have publicly proved to be less than perfect angels. Lest we begin to feel sorry for the “Lord of the Second Advent (a title he has given himself), we should remind ourselves that he is still a multi-millionaire who commands the devotion of hundreds of thousands of people worldwide.

Yet Moon still grumbles because of his setbacks. It is no wonder that he spends much of his time in his estate in Uruguay complaining about Americans as being stupid, lazy, evil.¹ So what is Moon doing about his tarnished image? Like any man in his late 70s who has tons of cash to throw away, who is obsessed with how people perceive him, and who still yearns to fulfill the glorious dreams of his youth, he is trying to purchase an exceedingly expensive face-lift. He wants to appear more culturally relevant and less religiously arcane by transforming the image of his movement from a church-oriented crusade into a family-affirming organization.

Moon Mania. It seems the only time the news media pay any attention to Moon and his movement is when they think he is doing something outrageous. For example, the most coverage reporters gave Moon in recent years concerned a lavish marriage ceremony, billed as “Blessing ‘97” and held at the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium in Washington, D.C. At this November 29 gathering, Moon blessed 28,000 couples, most of whom rededicated their marriage vows while about 2,500 couples were newly wed. This ceremony ended a week of artistic, academic, and sports activities, which the Unificationists called, “World Culture and Sports Festival III.”

The official sponsor of this and festival was the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, which Moon established in 1996. According to leaders within Moon's movement, the goal of this organization is to achieve “world peace through ideal families” by promoting traditional and biblical family values. Some Unificationists, such as W. Farley Jones, president of the Family Federation, say this organization is “the successor” to the Unification Church.²

This shift in focus to the Family Federation and away from the Unification Church has been effective in attracting prominent and respected political leaders and celebrities to the movement's public functions, thus drawing more attention from the news media. In fact, the Women's Federation for World Peace, a sister organization of the Family Federation, paid former president George Bush and his wife, Barbara, about \$1 million to speak about family values at several Moon events in the United States and Asia. Bush, Gerald Ford, Jack Kemp, and other notable public figures have addressed Moon-sponsored conferences under the assumption they were affirming conservative views of the family yet not endorsing the theology of Moon.

Nevertheless, the press has had a field day in subtly scoffing at Moon's marriage ceremonies and his association with high-profile conservative politicians and entertainers. For that reason, Unificationists, as well as Moon himself, often claim that the American press has been on a relentless campaign to persecute him and his movement. In fact, they believe such persecution led to his unjust 13-month imprisonment in the Danbury Federal Penitentiary for tax evasion from 1984 to 1985. Some followers of Moon also admit that Unificationists purchased the *Washington Times* newspaper in 1982 in order to provide a positive portrait of Moon and his political conservatism.

Despite the Unificationist outcry that the American press has targeted Moon for being an Asian, a strong conservative, and a Christian leader, journalists have either ignored him or continued to report on the misfortunes in his family, the setbacks of his church, or the perceived weirdness of his public events. Such irreverence for the Lord of the Second Advent further reinforces his feeling that he is truly a remarkable martyr for God.

Where Have All the “Moonies” Gone? In the ‘70s the news media portrayed the Unificationists as “Moonies,” whose numbers in North America were swelling at a geometric rate into the tens of thousands. They were evangelizing on every major college campus, selling flowers on countless street corners, and daily being interviewed in print and on the air. Most people’s perception of the Unification Church was that its American membership had become considerable.

Since both Christian and secular journalists have devoted little coverage to Moon’s movement in the ‘80s and ‘90s, the prevailing notion is that the number of Unificationists has declined significantly. In fact, Frederick Sontag, a professor of religion at Pomona College in California who has studied the Unification Church since the late ‘70s, states, “Their time ran out in the United States.”³

The truth, however, is that the Unification Church and other Moon organizations have never drawn great numbers of Americans into their fold. Although leaders in the Unification Church claim that they have 50,000 members in the United States, the actual total membership is closer to 3,000.⁴ Many Unificationists in North America are actually from Korea or Japan, the only two countries where Moon has been successful in creating a large following. At its peak his church could boast of a membership that ranged between 10 to 15 thousand in the U.S.. Nevertheless, a former church official estimated that of the members who joined during the recruiting high point of 1972-75 only 10 percent remain.⁵

In fact, many Unificationists have become disillusioned with Moon, primarily because of his personal family problems and because of the way his church has watered down the wedding ceremony — “the primary sacrament” within the Unification Church.⁶ “When I joined, you had to be in the church for seven years even to be considered for marriage,” said Ron Paquette, who was president of Manhattan Center Studios, a church-owned recording business in New York. “It was a really sacred event. It would make your children sinless. It was what you were sacrificing for, it was why you would spend 3 1/2 years fund-raising and 3 1/2 years witnessing [recruiting new members]. Now they walk up to people in the Caldor [Eastern U.S. chain store] parking lot and sign them up to be blessed.”⁷

In order to inflate the number of couples involved in Moon’s marriage ceremonies, Moon has had to compromise as Paquette describes. Each event must be more grandiose than the previous one in order to prove to his followers, and to nonbelievers as well, that he is still on course to redeem the world as the Messiah.

Nevertheless, Moon cannot but be annoyed since he has had to bend his principles to meet goals that he had set for himself. Not surprisingly, he blames neither himself nor his church for the small number of Americans who have embraced his teachings. He blames Americans. When Moon first arrived in the United States, he had great hopes for this country. He declared that God would bless the world through America. Now he scorns America as a lost nation. Focusing on the immorality he sees in their society, he says Americans are too corrupt to turn to God and welcome him as the Lord of the Second Advent.

Mainstreaming Moon’s Movement. Ever since Moon first arrived in the United States to conduct his seven-city “Day of Hope” tour from late 1971 to early 1972, he has tried to court conservative Christians in North America by identifying with the political and social causes that evangelicals have fervently embraced. Moon and his followers are undoubtedly like-minded and not merely pretending to share these concerns, but they also know that these concerns might be a crucial bridge between evangelicals and themselves.

One of their first attempts to attract the interest of conservative Christians was their anticommunist campaign. Central to Moon’s theology is that communism is the manifestation of evil and that democracy is the manifestation of good. In fact, he teaches that the thief who was crucified with Jesus and scorned the Lord was to His left while the thief who asked Jesus to remember him was to His right. Moreover, a primary requirement that the Messiah must fulfill is that he unify Korea under the banner of democracy. Hence, Moon was able to mix politics with theology and gain some support among conservative Christians. Although the threat of communism has since diminished considerably and most evangelicals are no longer concerned with this political issue, Moon’s movement still pours millions of dollars into his anticommunist campaign — especially since Korea is still politically divided. Incidentally, the Unification Church has flooded recruiters into the once-communist states in Europe, particularly the Ukraine.

Another concern of Moon is the struggle for racial reconciliation. His organizations have conducted numerous conferences targeting African-American Christians, and many times he has been successful in drawing both political and religious leaders in the black community to these events. Of course, Moon wants people of all racial and national backgrounds to recognize him as the Messiah. When he marries couples in his church, he invariably will mix people of different racial and national backgrounds. Many Christian minorities have welcomed his apparent effort to break down racial barriers. Yet when they discover what he teaches about Christ, their enthusiasm quickly dies.

Moon's movement has also been engaged in protests against abortion, drugs, and homosexuality. Unificationists often stand with evangelicals during public debate over these issues. In addition, when the government indicted Moon on tax evasion, Moon's supporters successfully assembled conservative Christians to speak in his behalf against the intrusion of the state into religious affairs. Nevertheless, these Christians were quick to add that they considered Moon's theology heretical.

Perhaps the most controversial issue is the substantial amount of money that has passed from Moon's movement to Christian institutions. For example, in 1995, when the Rev. Jerry Falwell's Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, was on the brink of bankruptcy, Moon's Women's Federation gave a \$3.5 million grant to the Christian Heritage Foundation, a separate institution that bought much of the school's debt. A year later another Moon organization, News World Communication, lent Liberty University \$400,000. The school's spokesman, Mark DeMoss, explains, "I'm not going to be pious and tell you we would have turned it down. Because it was a business transaction, we probably would have moved forward even if Dr. Falwell or somebody in the organization knew who News World Communications was."⁸ Despite all this, Falwell and other beneficiaries of Moon's organizations are not hesitant in condemning Moon's religious teachings.

Although Moon has made numerous attempts to appear attractive to conservative Christians and has spent many millions of dollars to court their favor, Christians still perceive their church as a cult and him as a false prophet. While his movement will continue to seek to enter the Christian mainstream, Moon's displeasure with American Christians is undoubtedly intense.

Family Foibles. What has certainly been the most painful thorn in Moon's side pertains to his children. Central to his claims as the Messiah is that he has created the perfect family with sinless children, through whom God blesses all other families. The fact that his children have shown themselves to be "human" is a staggering blow to that belief.

Especially troublesome to his parents has been Hyo Jin, Moon's eldest son, who is now in his 30s. Moon had groomed Hyo Jin to be his successor, but Hyo Jin's behavior has been far from pristine. Since marriage and the family are the foundation of the Unification Church and central to Moon's quest to "[unite] all Christian denominations."⁹ it was disturbing to many former members that Hyo Jin's marriage to Nansook ended scandalously.

In fact, Nansook has accused Hyo Jin of beating her and "secreting himself in the master bedroom, sometimes for hours, sometimes for days, drinking alcohol, using cocaine and watching pornographic films," according to a 1995 affidavit she filed in Massachusetts.¹⁰

Not surprisingly, Hyo Jin and Unification officials deny those accusations. Yet what cannot be denied is that Hyo Jin attended the Betty Ford Center and the Hanley Hazelden Center in Florida for addiction treatment.

Moon's family troubles are not restricted to his oldest son. Sunjin, one of Moon's daughters, not only has separated from her husband but also has changed her name. Worse still, Unjin, Moon's youngest daughter, has clashed with her father and has publicly expressed doubts about her father's faith.

Such turbulence in Moon's family is deeply worrisome to Unificationists, for none of his children have the charisma or stature within his movement to succeed him. Moon's response to that problem, however, is, "I will continue to lead the church front the spirit world."¹¹

Despite Moon's confident statement and use of his financial empire to try to create and sustain that confidence among his followers, no cosmetic makeover can disguise the blemishes in his family and theology as they continue to taint his image and undermine his quest to be the Lord of the Second Advent.

— *J. Isamu Yamamoto*

¹See Marc Fisher and Jeff Leen, "Stymied in U.S., Moon's Church Sounds a Retreat," *Washington Post*, 24 November 1997, sec. A.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Laurie Goodstein, "35,000 Couples are invited to a Blessing by Rev. Moon," *The New York Times*, 28 November 1997, sec. A.

⁷Fisher and Leen.

⁸Marc Fisher and Jeff Leen, "A Church in Flux is Flush with Cash," *Washington Post*, 23 November 1997, sec. A.

⁹Caryle Murphy, "Blessing '97: Moon's Church Adapts, Endures," *Washington Post*, 19 November 1997, sec. B.

¹⁰Fisher and Leen, “Stymied.”

¹¹Ibid.

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