



RNS photo
by John Lei

We all have a stake in being fair
to the far-out

The Moonie Family

Leo Sandon, Jr.

Why are so many able and informed young people joining the Moonies? One of the Moonies I met in the Barrytown, New York, seminary of the Unification Church is a young man I will call Tom Kellogg, now in his mid-twenties. We became friends, and it was when I was talking with Tom that the seriousness of this question struck me with great force. Tom comes from one of New York's prominent families; he graduated, first in his class, from one of New England's most prestigious preparatory schools; and he has a baccalaureate degree in biochemistry. Obviously he is a young man who, by all standards of American culture, has a "future"; one would also think Tom would know that he has a past. In short, he "belongs." For several minutes I ceased being an investigative researcher and became a father, the father of two sons. If Tom Kellogg could become a Moonie, so could my own twelve-year-old preppie! My twenty-year-old son, who is somewhat lonely, living without a systematic ideology and concerned about his vocation, probably is in the ninety-seventh percentile of those who could be persuaded to join one of the religious cults. "Some of my best friends" are Moonies...but I don't want my sons to marry into the Family!

LEO SANDON, JR., is Associate Professor of Religion and Director of the American Studies Program at Florida State University, Tallahassee.

If one of my own sons joined the Reverend Moon's cult, I would be profoundly disappointed, and I would engage in my own attempt at deprogramming, short of physical coercion or abrasive brainwashing. But above all I would do everything I could to maintain a relationship. Nothing—nothing seen, nothing unseen, no Korean holy man—is going to induce me to renounce the awesome reality of my vocation as father; I have no adolescent need for distance between my children and me, and that is a game I won't be seduced or aggravated into playing. The door to my home will never be closed to either of my sons, whether or not they've sold their quota, kept the faith, remained pure, or jumped through my hoop or anyone else's. That's my definition of true father! I would hope that preventive inoculations against cults might have occurred through their learning something about the sociohistorical character of all religious belief, about the nature of religious language, about the resources of their own religious heritage, and about the relative character and claims of *all* ideologies and movements.

If my sons became followers of the Reverend Moon, I would try to bear in mind that ultimate religious commitment inevitably implies penultimate rejection of one's natural family as *the* center of loyalty.

And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking around on those who sat about

him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother" [Mark 3:33-35].

For many years now people who became Christians in Korea or in other missionary countries were confronted with conflict between the newly accepted religion and the oriental family system.

Finally, as one who was pastor of a congregation for six years and who served as a university chaplain for five years, I know there are worse conditions that could befall my sons than membership in the Unification Church. When a parent can say, "I'd rather he were back on drugs," or "Sooner she were dead," it reveals as much about the nature of their values as it does about their children's commitments. But it is about the commitment of the Moonies that I intend to write. What is its basis? What does it tell us about our own commitments?

Given the cult's still comparatively small membership, perhaps more has been written about the Unification Church's belief and piety than is warranted. Recently Abingdon Press published a highly touted book, *Sun Myung Moon and the Unification Church*, by philosophy teacher Frederick Sontag, a study that is disappointing at best, compromised at worst. The best book on the faith and ethics of the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity (the official name of the Unification Church) is John Lofland's *Doomsday Cult*, which in its enlarged edition records the Moonist cult's stages of development from 1959 to 1975. Nevertheless Lofland's work suffers from a lack of theological appreciation. Harvey Cox has written in *Christianity and Crisis* a more theologically oriented article, which does raise some questions about certain of the movement's theological challenges.

I write yet another piece on the Moonist cult because I am concerned to analyze and reflect upon the Unification Church's experience of religious community, which I understand to be the central theme of Moonist theology—a theme expressed in the Unification emphasis on the family: the God-oriented family as the fundamental locus of salvation. Salvation for the Moonist does not consist in the receiving of forgiveness but, rather, in becoming a member of the "True Family." To demonstrate this judgment it is necessary to lay out in a cursory way the essential structure of Unification thought.

Unification theology is (1) eclectic, (2) syncretistic, and (3) esoteric. The theology is based on the receiving of "new, ultimate, and final truth" by the God-chosen messenger, Sun Myung Moon. The movement's official doctrinal statement, and a part of the revelation, is the *Divine Principle*. A summary of that statement would include the following: *Divine Principle*, which is both an oral tradition and a written one, published in several versions, is the Completed Testament. The Reverend Moon has come not to destroy or abrogate the Old and New Testaments but to fulfill them—to complete them. The Reverend Moon is primarily "true father," probably the Messiah, only secondarily a theologian. In an effort to systematize

Moon's teachings, several members of the Unification Church in Korea have put together a developing theological system in the *Divine Principle* that is impressive in its imaginativeness, coherence, and consistency, if not in its Christian orthodoxy. As the most complete expression of Moonist teachings to date, *Divine Principle* is the basic text of the Unification Church. The two major divisions of the system are the doctrines of Creation and Restoration. There are many subsets to these major divisions, but Creation and Restoration are the foci for the Moonist theological system.

Moon's theological system understands God's nature to have "dual essentialities"—containing both subject and object—and every creation is a "substantial object" of the invisible deity of God, the Creator. God's creation must reflect God's dual essentialities. The purpose of the creation of the universe was God's joy in the reflection of his own nature: "God wanted to feel happiness whenever he looked at His creation." The purpose of the creation of man, after the image of God's own nature, was that man should enjoy his position as an object of God and thus increase God's happiness. God therefore gave to Adam and Eve three great blessings: to be fruitful, to multiply and fill the earth, and to subdue it and have dominion. These three great blessings should have been fulfilled on the basis and with the completion of the four-position foundation: "the four-position foundation is manifested as God, husband and wife, and their offspring." Man was created as both spiritual and physical being, each dimension having its own structure and function and each in reciprocal relationship with the other: "...unless a man leads a good life, the living spirit element cannot provide anything for the betterment of physical man....Likewise, our spirit man can be perfected only through our physical life on earth."

The primal act that was the occasion for the fall of man was fornication: an improper act of love. Lucifer seduced Eve and she responded by committing illicit sexual intercourse, and then, thinking that she might reverse the process that had been set in motion, Eve seduced Adam and he in turn responded by having sexual relations prematurely. The point is that Adam and Eve were in a growth period, during which they were to relate as brother and sister. The original sin, then, was unprincipled love. According to *Divine Principle*, the Fall is both spiritual and physical in its nature.

Since God created man in spirit and flesh, the fall also took place in spirit and flesh. The fall through the blood relationship between the angel and Eve was the spiritual fall, while that through the blood relationship between Eve and Adam was the physical fall.

The result of the Fall was that the world of creation was now based on the four-position foundation, centered on Satan (Lucifer) rather than on God. Formally, Moon's understanding of original sin is that of unprincipled love; materially it is "unrighteous intercourse."

According to Moon, God has been working to restore creation ever since the original fall. Human history is the history of attempted restoration. This history is divided into three dispensations: the Old Testament Age, the New Testament Age, and the age of the

Second Advent—the Completed Testament. According to the *Divine Principle*, the entire period of human history is six thousand years: two thousand years from Adam to Abraham, two thousand years from Abraham to Jesus, and two thousand years from Jesus to the Second Advent. The end of World War I marks the beginning of the Age of the Completed Testament.

The New Testament Age was not the age of restoration because of the cross. To fulfill God's mandate, Jesus, with the divine blessing, should have been united with a woman who, in the position of Eve, reared children; thus he would have reestablished a God-centered four-position foundation. All men could have been restored to the original perfection by being grafted both spiritually and physically into Jesus. The death of Jesus on the cross, due to the disloyalty of his followers, meant that he could accomplish only the spiritual restoration of creation. He failed to accomplish the physical restoration. This is why the Moonist reveres Jesus, yet cannot believe in the full sufficiency of his work. Jesus is a tragic figure, betrayed and lost; and God's hopes are crushed, a state of affairs that causes God to suffer. A stanza from the Unification hymn, "Suffering Jesus," conveys the understanding:

See Lord Jesus on the cross
 nails are hammered through His hands.
 What kind of sin did He commit,
 this, the only Son of God?
 Like a pure innocent sheep,
 He is dying, dying for you.
 Father above He cannot watch;
 When He turns His face from His Son.
 "My God, my God!" Jesus cries,
 "Why do you forsake me?"
 Twelve disciples shared His ways,
 Still were deaf and blind to His heart
 All gone to waste, all gone to waste,
 Providence of God is broken.
 No use to cry and repent,
 all repentance comes too late.
 To prepare His coming again,
 sacrifices must be found.
 All the faithful shedding their blood,
 spilling for two thousand years,
 All this bloodshed, salvation's price,
 for three billion people today.

To meet the conditions for full restoration there must be a Second Coming of the Messiah—the Third Adam. In the age of the Second Advent the Kingdom of God on Earth will be established. The *Divine Principle* described the conditions to be met if the Second Advent is to occur. The first condition is the arrival of the Lord of the New Age. This was preceded by the Satanic counteraction of Wilhelm I, who initiated World War I. The second condition was the start of the Lord of the Second Advent's mission, which was Satanically counteracted by Hitler with the initiation of World War II. The third condition was met by an event that initiated the Cosmic restoration in 1960, again preceded by the counteraction of the Communist regime in the Soviet Union. These formal conditions for the time of the Second Advent

were fulfilled as follows: (1) the birth of Sun Myung Moon on January 6, 1920; (2) the vision of Jesus that Moon experienced Easter Sunday, 1936, at which time Jesus revealed that Moon was to accomplish the complete restoration of the world; (3) the marriage of Moon to Hak-Ja Han, April 11, 1960, which began her twenty-one-year course of preparation to become "True Mother" to "True Father," the new Eve to the Third Adam.

The climax of the revelation contained in the *Divine Principle* is the announcement that "the nation of the East where Christ will come again would be none other than Korea." As Moon is the Third Adam, Korea is the Third Israel. In order to demonstrate that Korea is the birthplace of the Second Messiah, the *Divine Principle* cites the following considerations: (1) the "fact" that Korea has suffered forty years of Japanese colonial

The central focus: "communal solidarity in the unified and True Family under the True Parents."

domination; (2) the "fact" that Korea is a nation that is both God's front line (South Korea) and Satan's (i.e., North Korean communism's) front line for the final confrontation; (3) the "fact" that Korea is a nation that always has valued "loyalty, filial piety, and virtue" qualifies it as a nation close to God's heart; (4) the persistent Korean folk belief in the prophecy that the "King of Righteousness" would appear in Korea.

The above summary does not do justice to the *Divine Principle*, for it fails to review many theological and philosophical aspects of the system. However I believe it does not do violence to the system, since it delineates the central focus of the movement: communal solidarity in the unified and True Family under the True Parents.

Moonist theology is *eclectic* in that it is composed of motifs selected from many sources. One can easily discern elements from primitive Korean Shamanism; Confucianism, Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism, Roman Catholicism, and Presbyterian Calvinism. Another way of saying this is to note

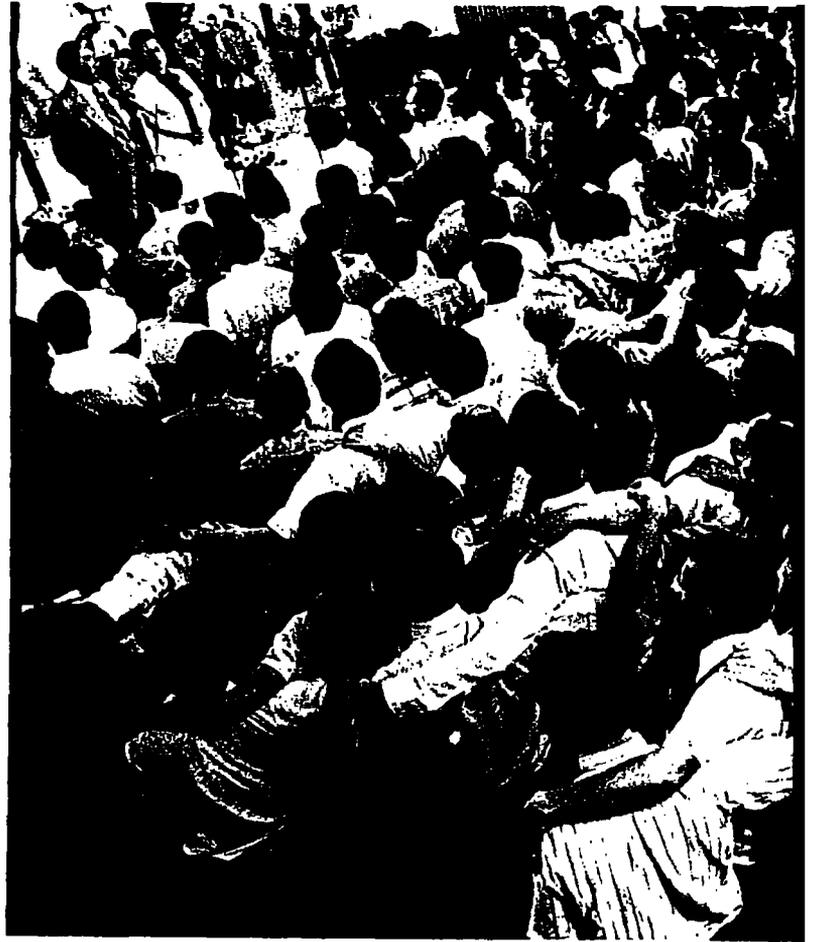
that Moon's theology is typically Korean. Korean culture reflects the fact that, in its documented history of more than two thousand years, it has experienced a series of invasions and depredations by stronger nations. Korean culture is eclectic.

Moonist theology also is *syncretistic* in that it attempts to reconcile or unify these apparently different motifs into a coherent system. The Korean people have always experienced a strong need for religious, cultural, and political unification. Koreans have demonstrated a continuing ability to assimilate what is alien into their own sense of reality and tradition. It is instructive to note that the Reverend Sun Myung Moon's movement is not the first religious movement that has sought the unification of Korean culture. Ch'odogyo, the "Religion of the Heavenly Way," played a significant role in the development of Korean nationalism and in Korea's struggle for independence. It began in 1860 as a religious movement, but Ch'odogyo early acquired a strong political emphasis. The movement was founded by Ch'oe Che-u, who, as is the case with the Reverend Moon, received a supernatural revelation. Ch'odogyo bore a resemblance to Christianity, but it was essentially a syncretistic religion that proclaimed a new age, which was to be established through human effort.

Moonist theology also is *esoteric*, not only because it is difficult to understand, but also because there are levels of its teaching expressions that are thought to be understood only by the specially initiated. Certain teachings are to be reserved for those who are established in the faith. Several members of the Barrytown seminary community were a bit uneasy to discover that I had been reading the lectures of Mr. Ken Sudo, a Japanese Moonist who instructs members in such matters as proselytizing, witnessing, and fund raising. There was some question as to the appropriateness of my having access to teachings meant for members of the inner family circle.

To observe that the Moonist theology is eclectic, syncretistic, and at least quasi-esoteric is not to assert that it doesn't have integrity. I would argue that the unifying concept of Moonist teaching is that of the family and that this concept is deeply rooted in Korean culture. The essential basis of oriental society rests on blood relationship. The ethical basis for Korean society was ancestor worship and friendship among family members, the deep Confucian substratum of Korean social philosophy. Therefore the meaning of marriage is found only in relationship with the "Family," and marriages are to be performed by families, not by individuals. Traditionally the three greatest expressions of morality for the Korean people have been loyalty to the king, filial piety to parents, and chastity and obedience toward one's husband. True marriage, then, was possible only in accordance with obedience to the family/nation and to the parent. It is in this context that we understand the Reverend Moon's answer to a fractured and pluralistic world, an answer that is poignantly Korean:

So far in the universe, no central parents have existed. We have only had false parents, who brought the elements of distrust and betrayal day in and day out.



Therefore there have been no true brothers and sisters and no true husband and wife. True parents were not there, and true sinless children were not there. In other words, the heavenly family was lost....Mankind, throughout history, has been blind, not knowing why they lived, where they came from, or where they were going....why? because they did not have one central point—true parents as their true ancestors. You know the central point of this universe, the true parents; from this central point as an axis or starting point, you cannot only understand, but you are given the power to win that past, present, and future....

The one sacrament in the Unification Church is the blessing of marriages arranged by the True Parent after the member has demonstrated the ability to live a disciplined life of principled love with other brothers and sisters for at least three years.

This review of Moonist theology leads me to the following proposition: *Unification thought and community must be understood in large measure as a synthesis resulting from almost two hundred years of Christian missionary teaching as it has interacted with indigenous Korean culture.*

Shifting now to a more theological mode of reflection, I want to return to the central question that the Moonist movement puts to contemporary American culture and religion. "Why are many able and well-trained young adults joining the family?"



Religious News Service photo by John Lei

The central theme of Unification theology and practice is the concept and experience of “true family”—religious community. *I think that most of the members with whom I talked are in the Family because they have found a radically communitarian life-style that is more fulfilling than anything they have experienced in mainline American culture.* The essential power of the movement’s cohesiveness is not to be found in the logic of the *Divine Principle* but, rather, in the experience of warm, chaste, unselfish, morally principled, and ordered fraternity. The robust prayer life and liturgy (some of it unbelievably bad liturgy) provide an attractive spirituality that is not characteristic of conventional American religious life. The Moonist hymns/folk songs, many of which originally were meant to inspire the unification of the Korean peninsula, have been adapted to inspire the unity of the True Family. And they do play a significant role in Moonist community experience.

The Unification Church’s appeal is to be found in its answer to that pervasive tendency in American culture that is radically individualistic in its understanding of human existence. For one of two reasons these young adults have not felt at home in contemporary American culture. Those members who were lonely and not making it on the outside have found in the Family a warmth and acceptance they needed for support and succor. Those members who undoubtedly are equipped to “make it” in a world of individual achievement have freely chosen to take a radical communal route because they believe it the way to personal fulfillment as well as to world restoration. Religious communitarians have

been doing this in America since the early nineteenth century.

I believe young adults I have met in the Moonist family are going to experience the severe cognitive dissonance that millenarian sectarians have always experienced. They are going to be very upset. Such dissonance, which reflects the difference between expectation and fulfillment, is very painful and often devastating. Perhaps young Moonists will find, as did many of the nineteenth-century Millerites, that it is easier to tolerate the dissonance than it is to abandon their beliefs and admit they have been wrong. Sociohistorical contingencies will not be gentle with the Unification timetable for the providential eschatological events the members of the Family eagerly anticipate. History is not all that malleable to our ideologies, and our most adequate belief systems have a way of providing answers to questions people have ceased asking. For instance, Moon’s cosmic anticommunism is hardly the wave of the future. A hard core cadre of three thousand to six thousand Moonists (the present real strength of the movement) is not going to transform America and the world in accordance with the teachings of *Divine Principle*.

Our personal questions have a way of changing too, and Moonies will discover not only that they are in dispensational time but that time is in them! One able and articulate Moonie told me that the one thing that might induce him to leave the Family was his thirtieth birthday. Undoubtedly some of the ardent Moonies I got to know will be dropping out of the Family, particularly some of the stronger ones who manage to maintain a sense of self and a critical dimension to their understanding of the movement.

These judgments, if they prove correct, should not leave us with a sanguine attitude. I suspect that the intense Moonist revolutionaries are telling us something we should take to heart if we want to restore our fragmented culture and heal our fractured communities in the years ahead. They have rejected permissiveness for morality; they have rejected ease for discipline; they have rejected consumption for austerity; and they have rejected privatism for active participation in the changing of social systems. What these young adults are arguing, perhaps more intuitively and less consciously than even they themselves fully appreciate and understand, is that life understood simply in terms of individual self-fulfillment is what Philip Slater has called “the pursuit of loneliness” and the path to continued social disintegration. They are convinced that in a global community with finite resources, both physical and spiritual reality must be integrated in theology and practice if human life is to become truly human. They believe that people should be about the task of the development of authentic spirituality; that we need to be about the cultivation of meaningful tradition and ritual; that we must be willing to substitute for the pursuit of individual material achievement roles that are communally designated. These particular insights, which are not necessarily heretical or esoteric, may be the aspect of the Moonie message we need to hear, and—in that respect—these intense young adults may indeed be harbingers of the coming age.