

The Sanctuary Church Schismatics

Michael Mickler
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The Sanctuary Church, with branches in the U.S. and overseas, is best understood as a schismatic movement. Followers of schismatic movements are known as schismatics. A schismatic is a person who creates or incites schism in an organization or who is a member of a splinter group.

Sanctuary Church, formally the “World Peace and Unification Sanctuary,” claims that the wider Unification movement has deviated from the teachings and practice of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon and that its purpose is to preserve and propagate his teaching.

The Sanctuary Church schism was several years in the making.

In 2013, Sanctuary Church Pastor Hyung Jin Moon, then International President of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU, a.k.a. the Unification Church), refused the request of his mother, Hak Ja Han Moon, to take up duties under her in Korea. Instead, he relocated to the “wilderness” of Newfoundland, Pennsylvania, where he began an independent ministry. He was supported by his elder brother, Kook Jin Moon, who relocated Kahr Arms, which he heads, to nearby Pike County. Together, they purchased a church facility in 2014 and began the Sanctuary Church ministry.



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Initially, Sanctuary Church uplifted gifts of grace and the Holy Spirit. Later, a “wilderness” mentality took hold and sermons turned apocalyptic. Hyung Jin Moon castigated “predatory elites” and “postmodern” thinking, gave credence to “truther” claims about the Twin Tower attacks, and emphasized prophetic speculation about Shmita year cycles and Blood Moon Tetrads. Then, in a series of sermons, beginning January 18, 2015, he broke decisively with FFWPU.

His epiphany was that the “predatory system of control... in the world at large” also was occurring in FFWPU. Based on this understanding, he directed Unification Church members to resign from FFWPU organizations. In a subsequent “Declaration of Heaven,” he announced the removal of all current leaders of the Unification Movement, declaring they had “no authority.” He called on members to take over church boards and elect replacements.

In March 2015, FFWPU removed Hyung Jin Moon as International President.

This radicalized his position. Previously, he called for the “liberation” of his mother from “archangels” surrounding her. Afterwards, he attacked her directly. He declared her “authority and power” to be “stripped away and removed.” He announced her displacement as “True Mother” and conducted a ceremony transferring that position to his wife. He declared his mother was “seduced” by archangels, and in an unfortunate phrase, referred to her as the “Whore of Babylon.”

Along with these pronouncements, Hyung Jin Moon declared all “Holy Blessings” conducted since Rev. Moon’s passing to be invalid and began conducting “restorational” blessings. He declared “ancestor liberation” ceremonies under the auspices of FFWPU were corrupt and announced he would liberate member’s ancestors to the 210th generation. He denounced the governing structure of FFWPU’s “*Cheon Il Guk* Constitution,” and substituted “The Constitution of the United States of *Cheon Il Guk*” which identified him, and his male heirs, as temporal monarchs.

The Sanctuary Church has been disruptive due to its ongoing attacks and efforts to poach members from the wider movement. It gained a fervent following, established branch churches, and aggressively marketed itself on social media. The remainder of this article offers a cursory sketch of Sanctuary Church beliefs and future prospects.

Sanctuary Church Beliefs

Sanctuary Church shares many beliefs and texts with FFWPU. This section outlines core beliefs that depart from or have been defined in opposition to FFWPU.

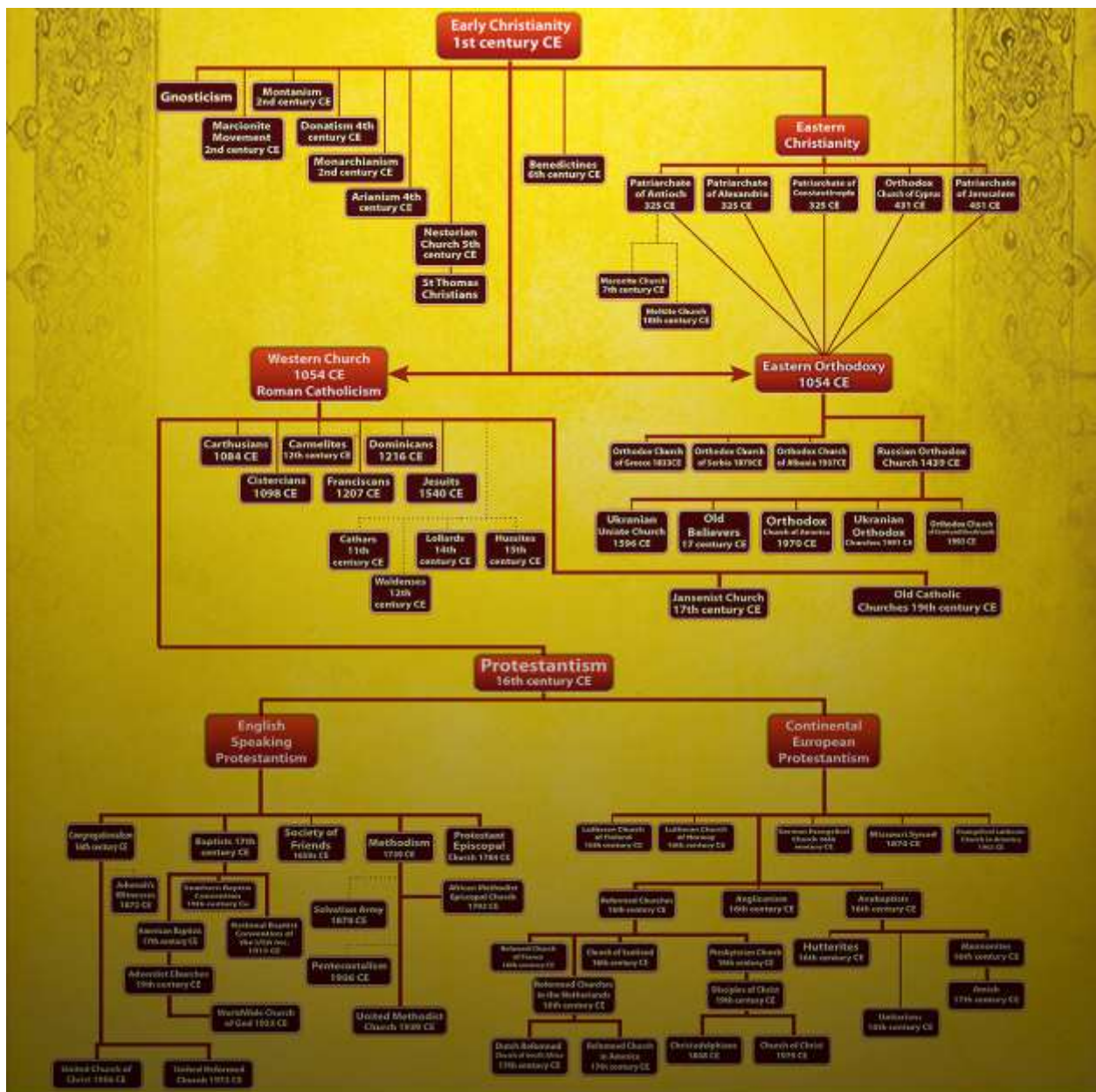
God. In opposition to Mother Moon’s admonition that members pray to their “Heavenly Parent,” implying that Unificationists image God as mother as well as father, Sanctuary Church affirms a wholly patriarchal deity. God, they insist, is in the masculine “subject” position.

True Parents. According to Hyung Jin Moon, True Parents “are equal in love and in value... but in authority that is a different matter. There is an order. There is a hierarchy in True Parents.” As he expressed it, “In True Parents, there is an absolute subject and king.” That is Rev. Moon. Mrs. Moon is in a subordinate, “object-partner” position and her authority is derivative.

Bridegroom theology. Hyung Jin Moon teaches that it would have been best if Father Moon, as Messiah and King of Kings, had taken “all the women of this world and be their spouse and to have children from every single one.” This, he said, was the “quickest way” to kill off Satan’s lineage.

Scripture. Sanctuary Church denies that Father Moon’s teachings, specifically his “last words” to humankind in the form of “Eight Great Textbooks,” can be edited or altered in any way. Sanctuary Church applies its doctrine of textual literalism primarily to the 2,500-page *Cheong Seong Gyeong*, or “Heavenly Scripture,” which includes excerpts of Father Moon’s sermons arranged thematically.

Succession. Sanctuary Church takes the position that Hyung Jin Moon has “inherited the full authority of the True Parents on earth.” As such, he has the right to proclaim himself the “second King” of *Cheon Il Guk* (the Unification equivalent of the Kingdom of God on earth), announce that his wife was now fulfilling the role of True Mother, and conduct a ceremony in which his wife bowed before one of his sons designated as the “third King,” thereby solidifying the ongoing subordination of mother to son.



Detail from a chart of Christian denominations since the first century CE (published by an Islamic organization).

Eschatology. Hyung Jin Moon views the current situation as a “time of warning” and “time of desecration.” In his view, “postmodern, humanistic, secular feminist ideology” dominates the world and FFWPU. Sanctuary Church upholds catastrophic biblical predictions as prophetic warnings to America

and is quick to cite “signs of the end” such as a MERS outbreak in South Korea which temporarily shut down a FFWPU workshop site. Sanctuary Church is suspicious of multinational corporations, central bankers, politicians, and elites in general. It embraces a vision of the ideal that attempts to link dynastic monarchism with libertarian values.

Future Prospects

Sanctuary Church’s future is indeterminate, especially at this stage. Its conflict with FFWPU is asymmetrical. Sanctuary Church possesses only a small fraction of FFWPU’s membership and resources. It has promoted itself on social media to look outsized. However, vocalness should not be confused with size or influence. So far, Sanctuary Church has limited itself to poaching members from the wider movement. As such, it tends to resemble any number of splinter groups, particularly those that have broken off from large U.S. sects, such as the Latter Day Saints or Seventh Day Adventists. Sanctuary Church, as a movement, has little meaningful contact with the “outside” world, seeing itself in a cosmic struggle against “predatory elites” and pretenders who have captured the wider society and their church.

At the same time, it would be a mistake for FFWPU to minimize or dismiss Sanctuary Church out of hand. Hyung Jin Moon was FFWPU International President. More than that, he was “crowned” on several occasions by Father and Mother Moon. He and his wife were designated as their “inheritors” and “representatives.” Kook Jin Moon headed Tongil Group, FFWPU’s corporate conglomerate in Korea and controlled the distribution of monies to the wider movement. In addition, Sanctuary Church has won several FFWPU leaders including a former national leader of Japan, the former president of Unification Theological Seminary and a former chair couple of the U.S. Blessed Family Department. To this point, Sanctuary Church’s demonization of FFWPU and adoption of countermeasures show no sign of abating.

The particulars of the Sanctuary Church/FFWPU conflict are unique but the “schismatic dynamic” it embodies is not without precedent in the history of religion. The following are five trajectories this dynamic can take or has taken:

1. **Subjugation.** The subjugation trajectory is a classic zero-sum or “win-lose” model, i.e., either the schismatic organization subjugates the founding organization or the founding organization subjugates the schismatic organization. However, there are few, if any, examples of schismatic groups subjugating founding organizations. Some have absconded with property or funds. Most have simply departed or, like Sanctuary Church, gone into a real or symbolic wilderness exile. Founding organizations, on occasion, have succeeded in persecuting schismatic groups out of existence but rarely in winning them back into the fold.
2. **Absorption/Re-absorption.** The absorption/re-absorption trajectory is a variation of the subjugation model. It posits that in the longer term the schismatic organization will absorb the founding organization or the founding organization will re-absorb the schismatic organization. Again, there are few, if any, examples of schismatic groups absorbing founding organizations. This is the case even when schismatic groups eclipse founding organizations in vigor and scope. Christianity began as a schismatic organization within Judaism and eventually outdistanced it. However, Christianity never absorbed Judaism despite continuing efforts to “convert” the Jews. Neither did Judaism succeed in re-absorbing the sect of the Nazarene.
3. **Conflagration** schismatic groups sometimes self-destruct in violent conflagrations. Sociologists of religion have identified factors leading to these apocalypses such as charismatic leadership, claims to absolute authority, us-versus-them messages, control of an encampment, sexual abuse, positive views on the use of force, and access to or stockpiling of weapons. This end-game is not common but schismatic organization adherents cannot be naïve as to this possibility, however small.
4. **Continuation.** The most likely scenario from a history of religion perspective is that schismatic groups persist as permanent schisms. If unsuccessful, schismatic groups typically either go out of existence or re-create themselves in new forms. Anabaptists became Mennonites. Millerites morphed into the Seventh Day Adventist Church. They just as commonly splinter into new schismatic groups, often for the same or similar reasons that prompted the original schismatic organization/founding organizations split. Factionalism, politely called denominationalism, characterizes Christianity not less than rival schools or guru lineages in other traditions.
5. **Reconciliation.** This is the optimal model going forward and the one most closely aligned with authentic Unificationism. Unfortunately, it is the least common. The modern ecumenical movement within Christianity, of which the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity (HSA-UWC) partakes, might be an exception but its progress has been spotty. This is ironic since confession, repentance, forgiveness, love, and restitution are at the core of most religious traditions. Yet intra-religious conflicts are among the world’s most intractable.

Religious movements are born in primal innocence and grow up in worlds of infinite possibility. As

possibilities constrict, there is a tendency to rebel and seek to create new systems of primal innocence and infinite possibility. Unfortunately, fomenting schism is like eating the forbidden fruit. The primal innocence and infinite possibilities promised are illusory and new schismatic groups spawn new schisms. This is the very dynamic that Unificationism exists to reverse.

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