

Rev. Sun Myung Moon, Times founder, dies at 92 - Led religious movement to help promote world peace

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“I am a controversial person. The mere mention of my name causes trouble in the world,” Rev. Moon wrote in his 2009 autobiography, “As a Peace-Loving Global Citizen.”

The world “has associated many different phrases with my name, rejected me, and thrown stones at me. Many are not interested in knowing what I say or what I do. They only oppose me,” he wrote.

“Today, though, not even the slightest wound remains in my heart. ... True love is a love that forgets it already gave love, and gives love again.”

Rev. Moon became widely known to Americans in the 1970s during his evangelistic rallies across the country, and major rallies at Yankee Stadium and the Washington Monument in 1976. America was in “moral decline,” Rev. Moon wrote in his autobiography, “and [I] played the role of a fireman responding to a call in an effort to reawaken its Puritan spirit.”

But accusations that his church “brainwashed” members helped make Rev. Moon the target of repeated investigations. In 1982, Rev. Moon was convicted of income-tax evasion and eventually served 13 months in federal prison.

Prolific founder

Despite such hostility, Rev. Moon established and helped fund nonprofit organizations, including the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification and the Universal Peace Federation.

He also launched business interests in industries such as shipbuilding, industrial machinery, stoneware, fishing and seafood products, computer software, ginseng tea and other health products, soft drinks, arts and cultural schools, newspapers in several countries and car factories in China and North Korea. In 1992, the church rescued the University of Bridgeport in Connecticut from bankruptcy with a loan reported at \$60 million.

A passionate fisherman, Rev. Moon inspired “Ocean Challenge” programs for youths and fishing tournaments in places such as Gloucester, Mass.; Alaska; and Hawaii. In 2011, he launched a marine company in Las Vegas to make a new kind of leisure craft.

Rev. Moon also founded numerous international, interfaith service groups, such as the International Relief Friendship Foundation, Religious Youth Service and Service for Peace, and sponsored thousands of conferences on world peace, family and interfaith issues. National leaders including former Presidents Gerald R. Ford and George H.W. Bush addressed some of these conferences.

“My peace plan starts from the level of the individual,” Rev. Moon once said. “First we must find peace with God, then peace with our fellow man, and finally we can secure world peace.”

His belief in the divine significance of marriage was the rationale behind the Unification Church’s most famous events — the mass public “blessings” for both newlyweds (including church members whom Rev. Moon matched together) and married couples of all religions renewing their vows.

“What is the blessing? It is to possess God’s love, God’s son or daughter, and then all the universe,” Rev. Moon explained at a 1975 matching ceremony.



Early years

Rev. Moon was born Jan. 6, 1920, in Sangsa Ri village in Pyongan province, now part of North Korea. His family members were poor farmers who joined the Presbyterian Church when he was 10. Rev. Moon embraced his conversion deeply and often lamented about the world of perpetual suffering he saw in Japanese-occupied Korea.

On Easter Sunday 1935, when he was 15, Rev. Moon would later say, he was praying on a Korean mountaintop when Jesus Christ appeared to him and asked him to fulfill his life’s work. Rev. Moon refused twice, but when Jesus asked him a third time to accept the mission, the teenager promised, “I will do it.”

For nine years, he studied, prayed and fasted to understand his mission. In 1943, he married his first wife, Seon-Gil Choi, and worked as an electrical engineer to support their son. But in 1946, he suddenly left his home to go to Pyongyang, North Korea, where Christianity and communism were colliding. He later said he was heeding God’s call.

There, he established himself as a spiritual leader, but was arrested after Christian clergy complained to police and accused him of being a spy from the South. During one arrest, he was tortured and left for dead outside the prison. His followers nursed him back to health.

In 1948, the same year he was expelled by the Presbyterians, Rev. Moon was arrested again by North Korean communists and imprisoned in the Heungnam labor camp.

Life expectancy in the camp was only a few months, but Rev. Moon persevered until 1950, when United Nations forces, under Gen. Douglas MacArthur, liberated the camp in October, on the eve of his scheduled execution. In the early 1980s, Rev. Moon financed the feature film “Inchon” to honor the U.S. war hero, who was played by Laurence Olivier.

In December 1950, Rev. Moon walked 500 miles south to Pusan, South Korea, where he and a small group of followers built a church from discarded U.S. military supply crates.



‘Divine Principle’

It was in Pusan where Rev. Moon committed his theology to writing, in a volume called “Wolli Wonbon,” or the “Divine Principle.” In that volume, based on years of intense biblical study, he explains that God, as the Original Parent of all mankind, has been grieving for His lost children since the Fall of Man.

The Divine Principle further explains the events of the Fall, the existence of evil, and how God has been working through human history to reclaim heaven and earth through a formula called the providence of restoration. God’s followers are called to live lives of true love, public service and work to bring peace among religions.

In 1953, Rev. Moon moved to Seoul where, the next year, he registered his church as the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity — generally known as the Unification Church. By 1957, Unification churches were established in 30 Korean cities and towns. In 1958, the church’s first missionary went to Japan; in 1959, the first Unificationist missionaries arrived in America. He later sent missionaries to every country in the world.

Rev. Moon’s marriage to Seon-Gil Choi ended in 1958 after she filed for divorce.

In 1960, Rev. Moon married Hak Ja Han. The couple eventually had 14 children, and are revered by church members as the “True Parents.”

Beginning in 1960, Rev. Moon matched and married his earliest followers with their consent. The ceremonies, which the faithful believe release them from the bondage of original sin, grew to include 2,075 couples in Madison Square Garden in 1982. Over the years, these “blessing ceremonies,” the most recent occurring in March, have involved millions of couples either in stadiums or via satellite.

Rev. Moon first traveled to the United States in 1965 for a five-month visit, during which he toured the country and spent three months in the Washington home of Bo Hi Pak, a South Korean diplomat and Unification Church member. Rev. Moon returned to the U.S. in 1969 and, in 1971, moved the missionary headquarters of his church to Westchester County, N.Y.

In 1972, Rev. Moon began a seven-city U.S. evangelical tour with a “Day of Hope Rally” at New York City’s Lincoln Center. He continued his public appearances over the next two years, speaking on the theme of “Christianity in Crisis,” including a Sept. 18, 1974, event at Madison Square Garden in New York.

In November 1973, Rev. Moon had taken out newspaper ads urging Americans to “forgive, love and unite” in the face of the crisis created by the Watergate scandal. That led to a Feb. 1, 1974, Oval Office meeting between President Richard M. Nixon and Rev. Moon.



‘Brainwashing’ charges

After Rev. Moon associated himself with Nixon, his religious movement began to be regarded as politically controversial. Critics began charging the Unification Church with “brainwashing” its members.

“Liberals in America, especially those who sympathized with international communism, felt particularly threatened by Rev. Moon’s appearance on the national scene,” Mr. Pak later wrote. “They feared that Rev. Moon could become a major threat, and so they came together to form an anti-Rev. Moon movement.”

During the 1970s, the Unification Church in America attracted many young adults. These converts often lived communally, witnessing, lecturing or raising money for the church’s projects. This attracted the attention of established religious organizations. Some parents of new members complained that the church prohibited contact between young converts and their families. In some cases, parents arranged to have young people abducted from Unification training centers and “deprogrammed.”

“I have never divided families or broken homes,” and the accusations of brainwashing are “nonsense,” Rev. Moon told theologian Frederick Sontag in a 1977 book about the church.

In 1977, a House subcommittee on international organizations began investigating the Unification Church. Rep. Donald Fraser, Minnesota Democrat, charged that the church was a lobbying organization for the South Korean government.

Although the congressional investigation failed to find any wrongdoing by Rev. Moon or the church, the Internal Revenue Service in 1981 obtained an indictment against Rev. Moon for income-tax evasion. The IRS charged that Rev. Moon failed to declare \$112,000 in interest and \$50,000 in corporate stock. Rev. Moon’s defense asserted that the assets were not Rev. Moon’s, but were held in trust for the Japanese Unification Church.

A jury found Rev. Moon guilty of not paying about \$7,500 of tax on interest income, and he was sentenced to 18 months in Danbury Federal Correctional Institution, a sentence he began serving in July 1984. With time off for good behavior, he was formally released Aug. 2, 1985, after serving 13 months. More than 2,000 clergymen welcomed Rev. Moon at a banquet in Washington that night.

‘Landslide’ predicted

Even as he faced investigations and imprisonment, Rev. Moon embarked on a new aspect of his public career. He had declared that “only the United States can protect the democratic world against the threat of communism,” and warned that President Jimmy Carter’s “naivete” about that threat would soon lead to “world communization.”

His aide, Mr. Pak, later recalled that Rev. Moon prayed for an American president who would “stop the

marching tide of communism,” and that Rev. Moon one day told him: “The next president of the United States will hold the fate of the world in his hands, and Heaven has chosen Ronald Reagan.”

Unification Church members actively supported the Reagan campaign in 1980 and, at Rev. Moon’s direction, Mr. Pak arranged a meeting with Reagan in Toledo, Ohio. Greeting the candidate as “President Reagan,” Mr. Pak recalled, he told the Republican challenger: “God has already decided on you as the next president.”

Reagan, according to Mr. Pak, was “taken aback” by the statement and asked him: “What did you say? Who on earth told you that?”

After he explained Rev. Moon’s prophecy, Mr. Pak said, Reagan responded with his characteristic humor: “I wish I had as much confidence in myself as Rev. Moon does.”

Opinion polls predicted a close election, but Rev. Moon’s confidence was reflected by the News World, a New York newspaper that he founded in 1976. On Election Day 1980, the News World rolled off the press with a giant headline predicting “Reagan Landslide.”

At a news conference that morning, Mr. Reagan held up the News World’s front page, an image carried across the country by television reports. When the votes were counted, the Republican had won 489 of 538 Electoral College votes, more than matching the bold prediction.



Going to print

The News World, renamed the New York City Tribune in 1983, was Rev. Moon’s first venture into the American press, and in 1978, he established the World Media Association dedicated to promoting freedom of the press. When The Washington Star went bankrupt in 1981, Rev. Moon thought it was important to ensure that the nation’s capital remained a two-newspaper city.

Mr. Pak, who was then publisher of the News World, recalled that on Jan. 1, 1982, Rev. Moon ordered him to establish a daily to be named The Washington Times — to begin publication by March 1.

This seemed “an impossible mission,” Mr. Pak remembered.

Recruiting veteran editor James Whelan and purchasing a warehouse on New York Avenue that is still the newspaper’s headquarters, Mr. Pak was able to get a debut issue of The Times printed by Rev. Moon’s deadline of March 1. A little more than two months later, on May 17, 1982, The Times published its second issue and began regular daily publication.

One analyst predicted that the new daily would not “last more than six months,” but according to Mr. Pak, Rev. Moon invested more than \$1 billion in The Times during its first 10 years of publication, and Unification Church members — including many with no previous newspaper experience — worked tirelessly with seasoned professional journalists to make it a success.

During its first 10 years of publication, The Times won more than 650 awards, including top honors from the Society of Newspaper Design in 1988 and 1992, and an editorial writing award from the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1989.

A favorite of Republican leaders (Reagan insisted on reading The Washington Times first thing in the morning at the White House), the newspaper scored scoops with its award-winning coverage of congressional scandals and the Whitewater scandal in the 1990s.

The Washington Times is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year.

Over the years, Rev. Moon was associated with a number of other publications, including the Segye Ilbo in Korea, Sekai Nippo in Japan, the Spanish-language weekly Tiempos del Mundo in Argentina, the Middle East Times in Cairo, Ultimas Noticias in Uruguay, and Washington Golf Monthly.

In 2000, News World Communications purchased the United Press International wire service. A weekly newsmagazine, Insight on the News, and a monthly magazine, The World and I, ceased publication in 2004, but continued as online publications.



‘Victory Over Communism’

Throughout the 1980s, Rev. Moon actively promoted opposition to communism, a struggle he saw in religious terms.

“The only way to defeat communism is to clearly prove the existence of God,” he said. He developed an anti-communist strategy he called Victory Over Communism (VOC), which critiqued the fallacies of Marxist theory while seeking to “demonstrate in detail how God guides human history.” VOC was the philosophical underpinning of CAUSA (Confederation of Associations for the Unification of the Societies of the Americas), an organization that Rev. Moon established in 1980 to combat the spread of communism in Latin America. CAUSA seminars trained anti-communist leaders through South and Central America, and even sought to convert communist sympathizers.

Rev. Moon also advocated national security policies for free nations threatened by communism. In 1986, he established the International Security Council, which convened conferences of prominent geopolitical experts and senior officials from the United States, the Soviet Union, the People’s Republic of China and other nations.

The collapse of the Soviet empire gave Rev. Moon cause to celebrate what he called “an end to the most pernicious worldwide dictatorship in history.” He described the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall and the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union as “the results of God’s providence.”

He conveyed that message, but in a spirit of reconciliation, when he met with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in April 1990 and with North Korean founder Kim Il-sung in December 1991.



Culture warrior

Even as he celebrated the end of the Cold War, Rev. Moon focused on new struggles, calling for “a revival of spiritual culture.”

“The societies of free countries today are exhibiting a phenomenon that is every bit as evil as communism ... the philosophy of materialistic humanism and ... the extreme individualism and selfishness that are the offshoots of this philosophy,” he declared in 1992.

“The young people, whom we normally expect to become the future leaders, are losing touch with their consciences in a flood of immorality, drugs and crime, to such an extent that it is difficult for us to have hope in them as the leaders of the 21st century.”

To turn back that “flood,” Rev. Moon inspired a number of organizations for youths and for adults, including the Women’s Federation for World Peace, the American Family Coalition, the World Culture and Sports Festival, the Little Angels Performing Arts Center, the Il Hwa Chonma Soccer Team in Korea and the Kirov Academy of Ballet in Washington.

In a 1997 speech, Rev. Moon called for “a true youth culture centering on true love” for the “supreme task” of combating “the social trends of moral degradation, including moral decadence and self-indulgence.” The struggle against those forces would, he said, “determine whether humanity will survive or be destroyed.”

He brought his efforts for international peace into academia and science. Beginning with the International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences in 1972, the Professors World Peace Academy in 1973 and the Summit Council for World Peace in 1987, and through the Universal Peace Federation, founded in 2005, Rev. Moon underwrote thousands of conferences and forums as a way for scholars, activists and community leaders to resolve human problems.

He announced his idea of an International Peace Highway connecting Tokyo and London in 1981. In 2005, he proposed a bridge-and-tunnel project from Alaska to Russia.

Rev. Moon received numerous honorary doctorates, including a doctorate of divinity in 1985 from Shaw University.

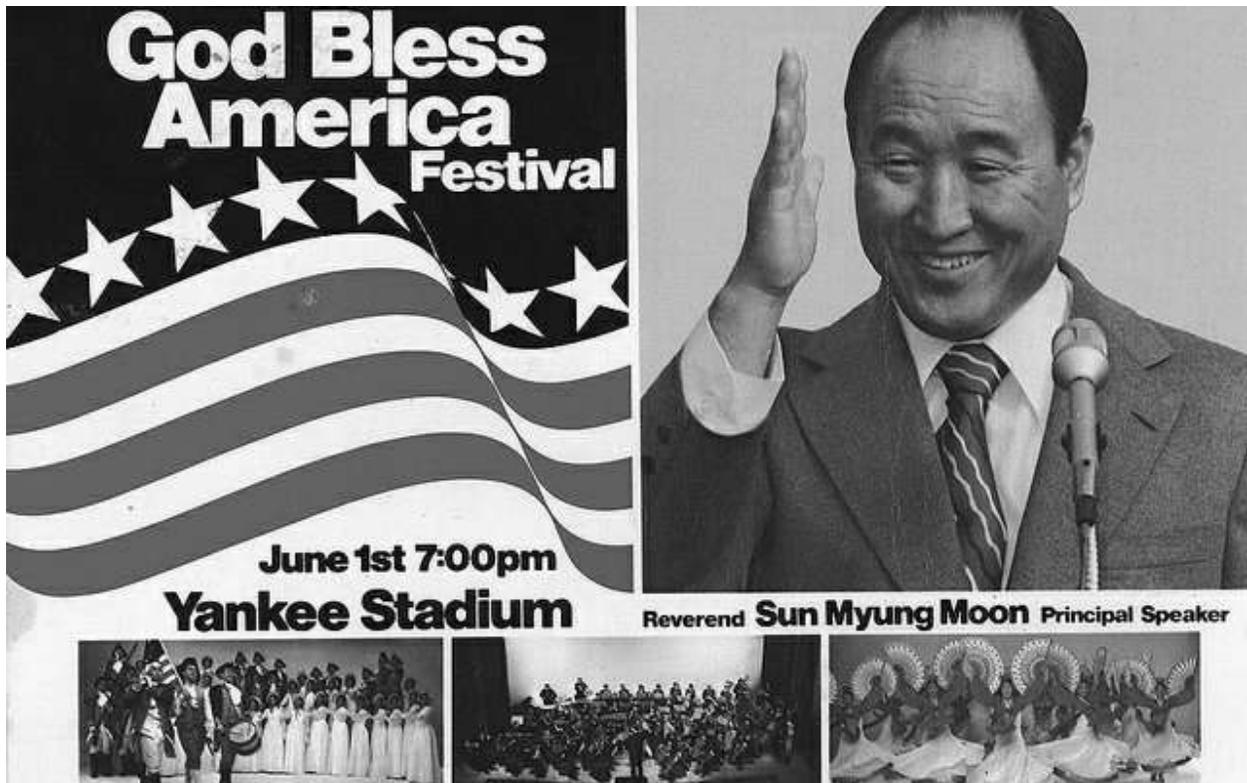
His interfaith work in America, launched in the 1970s, has grown under the American Clergy Leadership Conference. Thousands of clergy from different religions, known as “ambassadors for peace,” have visited the Middle East to pray together and create a foundation for peace.

In 2007, Rev. Moon held a conference with delegates from 194 countries to pledge to create a “peace U.N.” to emphasize “living for the sake of others,” and in 2011 underwent another international speaking tour, mostly in Europe. He also worked to promote peace between North and South Korea.

“Since [the meeting with Kim Il-sung“] and continuing to this day,” Rev. Moon said in his autobiography,

“we have maintained a special relationship with North Korea. ... That is the importance of trust.”

Rev. Moon, who was 93 by Korean age calculations, is survived by Mrs. Moon, 11 children, and numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Several children preceded him in death.



Rev. In Jin Moon, the Moons' third daughter and senior pastor of the Unification Church of North America, had been touring the country to speak about her father's illness when he died.

“Before I left my father's side, I held his hand as I normally do during the visits, and in my mind, I said, ‘Father, I'm going to take your love and your handshake back to all of the brothers and sisters who are praying for you.’ And it is really the heart of our True Mother as our mother to really thank you individually. I'm sure if she could be with you here today, that is exactly what she would do,” she told members at a Chicago service Aug. 29.

• *Former Washington Times staff member Robert Stacy McCain contributed to this report.*