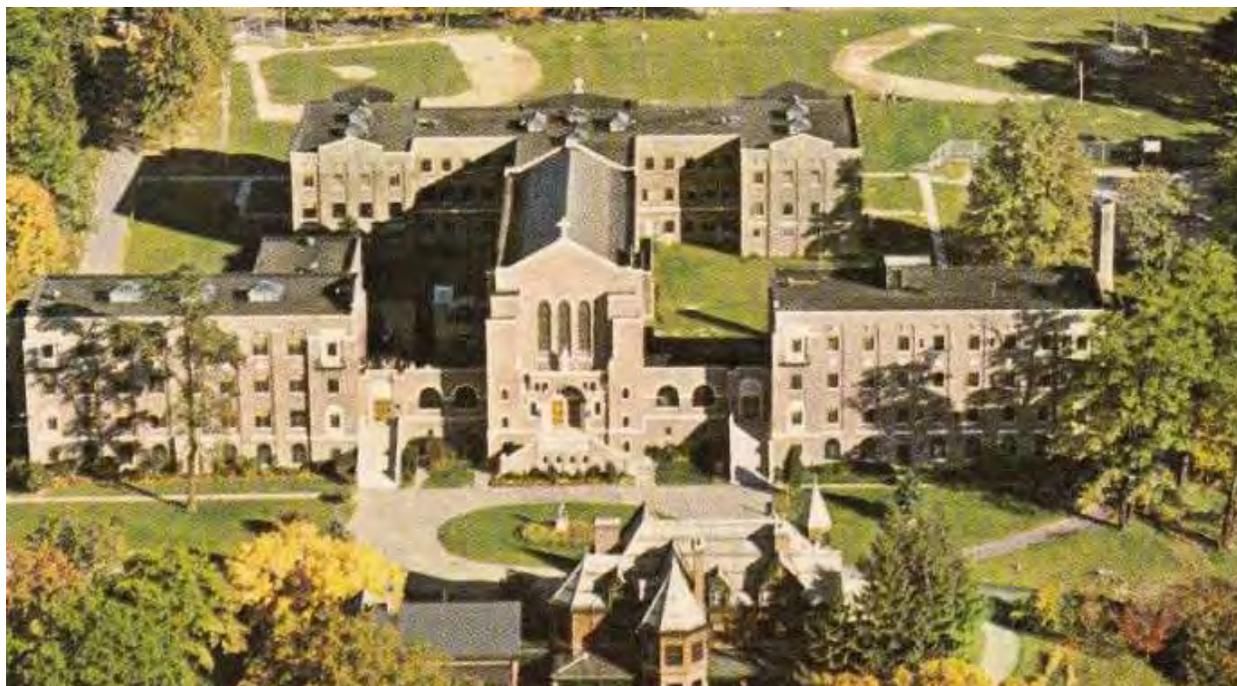


My view of the Unification Church / Movement

Erwin Franzen
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Unification Church's Barrytown training center and theological seminary – mid-1970s

[posted 20191124 -- addendum below 20191125] [more addenda 1995 and 2020 further down]

I joined the movement in Barrytown, upstate New York (on the Hudson River northeast of Kingston) in March 1975. After about 8 months I left the movement temporarily because I wanted to travel and collect my thoughts independently, without being influenced by other members. I hitch-hiked from Washington DC to California. After some unusual experiences ([Memory of California Thanksgiving 1975](#)) I ended up in Berkeley and decided to visit a local church center, as I had promised my fellow acolytes on the East Coast, but couldn't find one. Near the University of California campus in Berkeley I met two young men who said they belonged to a group of students calling itself the Creative Community Project, and they invited me to a free Thanksgiving dinner.

As I had lost almost all my possessions in a robbery earlier that day and was short of money I was happy to take them up on it. At the dinner I found out the Creative Community Project was the Unification Church by another name. I joined again, only 16 days after leaving Washington DC....

I remember the first time I saw Rev. Sun Myung Moon himself, the founder of the movement who had developed its core teaching, the Divine Principle, and whom we members regarded as the Messiah -- the Christ of the Last Days. It was in Barrytown, in the spring of 1975. He spoke to us at length. To me he seemed very arrogant and mercurial, very fond of exercising power over others. I did not feel drawn to him at all. But I told myself, as I had been taught in the church, that it was my own sinful, fallen nature that made me see him like that, similar to the way the Pharisees saw Jesus.

I liked most of the teachings of the church because they clarified a lot of things that troubled me in the world and in the Bible. They seemed very logical and plausible, and I felt the world would certainly be a much better place if all people lived according to them. Most of the fellow members and leaders I dealt with also seemed like really kind, unselfish and yet very intelligent and capable people. Today I continue to feel that way about the majority of the members I have met, although I have long ago given up my belief in the Divine Principle and even the God it describes ([Category: Thoughts](#)).

About Moon himself there were always ups and downs in my feelings, depending on what he said and how he said it in the many long speeches he gave which I attended. There were times when I felt he seemed really kind, gentle and funny but at other times he appeared like an extremely arrogant, power-hungry yet petty dictator.

My closest encounter with him came in a big hall at the Little Angels School in Seoul, South Korea on 10 October 1982. There were hundreds or even thousands of members in the hall, women on one side and men on the other. We were there to be matched for a planned mass wedding of 6,000 couples four days later. Moon walked between the rows and picked men and women from the crowd seemingly at random to match them up as couples.

At one point he asked through his interpreter, whom he always used even though he spoke English, for western men who wanted to be matched with oriental women to come forward. I stood up together with perhaps a few hundred other men and moved closer to him. He matched several of our group with oriental women on the other side. Then he came and reached over the shoulder of another member who stood in

front of me, took me gently by the chin and asked in English (to my surprise) why I volunteered to be matched to an oriental woman. I said I thought it would be more interesting and I could learn more that way. Then he asked my nationality and what my "mission" was in the church (at the time I was preparing to join other members in Cyprus where we were going to start the Middle East Times weekly newspaper), and I answered.

He nodded and took me a short distance along a row of mostly Japanese women members, then stopped in front of one of them and pointed to her. She got up, stood next to me and we were sent off to discuss our match. Later, after we agreed to accept the arrangement, we returned to the hall and bowed to him to indicate our assent.

This was my only direct contact with Moon.

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From a comment I wrote in early 2000:

"... I wonder how many members or ex-members would say, as Mike says here, that they were sort of in love with SMM (Sun Myung Moon). I, for one, didn't feel good about him the very first time I saw him (that was in Barrytown in the early spring of 1975).

This changed a bit later, and there were times when I thought he seemed like a deep-hearted, loving person one moment only to become an ogre the next, based on what he said and how he said it, and sometimes he was very amusing, too. He was always very mercurial. I/we were told the impression that he was so fickle came from my/our own fallen nature, etc. -- and I was ready to believe that. But he lost me more and more with his boundless arrogance and self-glorification in speech after speech, claiming credit for just about everything under the sun

I stayed in the church, I think, more because of the good that I saw in many loving members than because of him or anyone in his family. I have always wished I could fully return the love and support I was given by many members in different places and at different times in the church -- and that has always been a major reason for continuing to support the movement as a whole. DP [Divine Principle, the teaching] had something to do with it, too, until I started looking at it from a bit of a distance, so to speak, and found more and more holes in it.

Anyway, I really wonder how many members, especially male members -- since it's obviously harder for us -- are "in love" with SMM the way Mike says he is (SMM himself has, of course, said many times that that is the way our relationship with the "messiah" is supposed to be)...."

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From a message to a friend in June 2000:

".... I must admit that I found a lot of good ideas in the DP and in Moon's speeches and actions, apart from all the garbage, and those I want to keep and put into practice as much as I can. As far as Moon the man is concerned, however, by wanting to be everything and trying to grab all the credit and all the glory he has made himself irrelevant in my eyes. He has become almost like the antithesis of all the good he once taught. He is finished."



Partial view of one of the movement's properties at Cheong Pyeong Lake, Korea. Photo 2014

Diary Sunday 10 November 2019:

Today I want to write down some more thoughts on religion, belief and philosophy.

I have heard and read many speeches by Rev. Moon (Sun Myung) over the years I followed him, and during that period he inspired me very much at times. There were also times when something he said or did angered me because I felt it was self-serving, self-glorifying, condescending, arrogant, hypocritical and also harmful. I also detected some exaggeration and signs of ignorance on certain subjects in his talks.

The fact that he never made a serious effort to learn English properly and to speak it also put me off. He lived in the USA for so many years but insisted on speaking to us only in his native Korean, using a translator to put it into English. He always claimed to be a world citizen yet he clung to his Korean ways and expected the world to come to him.

Yes, he claimed to be "the messiah," "the True Parent," but he also said he was walking "in the shoes of a servant," and "sacrificing" himself for the world. He traveled a lot and spoke a lot at many lavish events around the world, spending huge amounts of money earned by his followers for him, and contributing a lot to world pollution in very many ways.

I also didn't like the fact that even in his speeches to members he always wore suits and ties, expensive western clothes, even though he spoke only in Korean. He also expected us male members to wear ties, which I always hated, or at least his subordinates insisted in his name that we wear them.

By the mid-1990s I came to feel Moon had totally run out of ideas and had nothing new to say. His speeches sounded like a broken record. This is also my impression of his widow Hak Ja Han Moon nowadays. She keeps harping on the theme of herself being "the only begotten daughter," born in the providential (how?) year of 1943, but she has absolutely nothing new to say. She sounds even more like a broken record than he did during the twilight of his life.

Today I find nothing at all inspiring in the talks by Hak Ja Han or any of their children, all of whom do at least speak English, unlike their parents. They are all broken records.

I find it amazing that so many people still follow and listen to them, but perhaps this is primarily a reflection of the sad, spiritually impoverished state of the world today, where appearances mean everything. People are attracted to lavish, spectacular events, which is almost all the Moon movement has to offer these days -- or at least those seem to be what inspires people the most.

To me those events are just a terrible waste of money and human and other resources contributing greatly to mental (spiritual) and physical pollution.

I must say I find a lot more inspiration in talks by Sadhguru (Jaggi Vasudev by his real name), the Indian Yogi, these days than in anything coming out of the "Mooniverse." I don't accept or agree with everything Sadhguru says and does by any means, but I find he has a lot more interesting and inspiring things to say than I have heard from Rev. and Mrs. Moon and their children at least since the 1990s.

I cannot and don't want to try to pull my family away from the Moons, though, because I have nothing to offer them to fill the void such a move would produce, and also because it would cause too much anxiety and antagonism between us, I feel. I only wish for them to be as happy as they can be, and if following the Moons mostly accomplishes that I am fine with it.

Diary Tuesday 12 November 2019:

I've reread and thought about my last entry here of 10 November, and I feel I should qualify some of what I wrote on the Moons to better reflect the truth.

My feelings about Rev. Moon were always mixed during my time as a follower but I did believe in him as the Messiah and as the True Parents with his wife Hak Ja Han. I wanted to hear what he had to say because his speeches were often quite inspirational to me even though they tended to be too long.

There were, of course, also many statements in them that I really disliked because they sounded self-aggrandizing, arrogant or hypocritical to me. Sometimes, too, I feared his angry outbursts, as if they were coming from God Him(/Her...)self.

In some ways I did regard Rev. Moon as an earthly expression of God. Through what I learned in Rev. Moon's church I also came to believe in a spiritual world hidden from our view but whose denizens, our ancestors, could strongly influence us and haunt our dreams. And I believed in the existence of evil separate from God, although I never really managed to accept the reality of angels or of a fallen angelic

being we called Satan.

I was really impressed when I first heard Rev. Moon's teaching The Divine Principle in New York City back in March 1975 and later during workshops in Barrytown upstate. Several months later, near the end of 1975, I was again impressed by the way the workshop teachers in Boonville/California explained the same ideas in a different style.

I always had unresolved and ultimately unresolvable questions about The Divine Principle and many of Rev. Moon's additional explanations given in his speeches.

Often, when I had serious doubts I would pray and repent to God, which usually made me feel good for a short while. Then I would cast my doubts and misgivings aside, telling myself the world would be a much bleaker, more terrifying place for me if I hadn't found Rev. Moon. I did express my doubts and ill feelings in writing in my diaries, though, because I believed that was a way to relieve them.

It was not until the mid-1990s when I finally started to question not only Rev. Moon and his teachings but the whole concept of God's nature itself, as taught by the monotheistic religions....

Addendum Monday 25 November 2019:

Over the last 7 years since Moon died I have followed the sayings and doings of his widow Hak Ja Han. I must say honestly she doesn't seem very bright to me at all. Her speeches are utterly tedious, and to me they sound quite superficial apart from being repetitious.

She wants to continue the work started by Moon to build the "Cheon Il Guk," the "Heavenly Kingdom" on earth. Moon died before the date he himself had chosen as the official founding day of this "Cheon Il Guk," which fell in February 2013.

Just as Moon always lived amidst a crowd of sycophants, so does Hak Ja Han. They make her feel she is the most important and the greatest human being not only on earth but in all of history and in the "cosmos." They have drafted a constitution for that "Heavenly Kingdom," and there is an academy to form and train a rudimentary police force and army, it seems. I must admit I know very little about the efforts that have been made in this direction.

The main elements of the formation of the "Heavenly Kingdom," however, seem to be what is called the "Heavenly Tribal Messiahs." This is something Rev. Moon himself began and which his widow continues to emphasize. Every Unification "blessed" family (blessed by the Moons) is supposed to bring together a "tribe" of at least 430 families, as their "Messiah." These will then also be blessed and likewise become "Heavenly Tribal Messiahs." The idea is that, ultimately, this will create one world family "under God," in practice meaning under Hak Ja Han and her prospective successors -- though she and her husband would forever stand as the one and only "True Parents of Heaven and Earth and Humankind."

Under her and her close associates' leadership the movement organizes huge gatherings in many countries around the world during which thousands of couples are "blessed" to become "Heavenly Tribal Messiahs." There are also many conferences in which scholars and religious leaders from all backgrounds discuss ways to resolve the great problems of our world and to reform the existing order aiming to bring about a hopefully more peaceful and equitable society. I am sure these efforts do have some merit, though they are nothing new or unique.

One problem I see is that there is too much emphasis on VIPs, the powerful, rich and famous. Mrs. Moon and her crowd of flatterers crave access to power and wealth, so they want to bring the powerful and the rich to their side, and to show the world they are recognized as great leaders.

Mrs. Moon talks about the evils of colonialism and exploitation from time to time but she and her entourage seem set to keep the existing capitalist and corporation-dominated system in place, perpetuating those problems. It sure looks like the "Cheon Il Guk/Heavenly Kingdom" would not be much different from the oligarchies and plutocracies we have in the world today. A kingdom? Tribes? -- Would there be serfs, too, like the common members of the movement today, many of whom are struggling to meet their financial obligations towards the church, including the large amounts of money they are supposed to cough up to pay for Hak Ja Han's lavish rallies, banquets and conferences, and for the "liberation and blessing" of their own ancestors in the putative spiritual world.

I do applaud and support Hak Ja Han's oft-proclaimed dedication to bringing peace to the world as the "mother of peace." But I don't see any sign that a better, kinder, peaceful and more equitable society is being built anywhere by the movement.

As far as the separate organizations led by some of the Moons' sons are concerned, I feel they are actually worse than their mother's, although they are smaller.