
Statement of the Unification Church on the Guyana Tragedy

Americans look at the tragedy of Guyana and ask: what does it mean? The question is neither idle nor morbid. The issues raised by the affair go to the heart of our national life. How we come to view it will greatly decide what we do in response.

A few days following the mass suicide deaths in Jonestown, President Carter remarked: "I don't think the Jonestown cult was in any way typical of America."

Nor do we think the Jonestown "People's Temple" was typical of every new religious group in America today.

Unfair Analogy

Some people have attempted, however, to link the Jonestown tragedy to the new religious movements. They have, quite unfairly, labeled several of these groups as "cults" and lumped them together with Jones' "People's Temple." A few, including several national news outlets, have directly drawn parallels to the Unification Church and Reverend Sun Myung Moon.

To do this is as unfair as to say there is no difference between the Canaanite tribes of ancient Palestine, which practiced human sacrifice and ritual prostitution, and the Israelite tribes, which followed the Ten Commandments.

The main similarity between what the media has labeled "cults" is that they are all new, small, and not well understood by the public. However, the real distinction between a "cult" like the "People's Temple" and a legitimate religious movement is not to be found in its size, age or even current popularity, but in the quality of its moral and religious ideas.

Historical Parallels

The religions that have become the cornerstones of the world's great civilizations all

started as small groups, usually centered on divinely inspired leaders: Christianity on Jesus; Judaism on Moses; Confucianism on Confucius; Buddhism on Buddha and Islam on Mohammed.

The higher truths taught by the founders of these great religions and moral systems were not immediately recognized by their contemporaries. Many were even called "cults." Jesus himself was labeled a subverter of the law, a charlatan, and a power-hungry manipulator—in short, by his society's standards, a "cult" leader.

These groups survived persecution and prospered, however, because their teachings provided new insights into the nature of God and man. These insights became the basis of moral, cultural and intellectual progress.

Jones and his People's Temple followers were wrong because of *what they believed*—not merely because they believed in something. Practices flow from beliefs, and it is in the very core of their beliefs that the source of the Jonestown tragedy can be found. On that basis the attempt to link Jones and his People's Temple to a man like Reverend Moon and the Unification Church movement cannot be sustained. Let us examine the beliefs and organization of the Jonestown "People's Temple."

Why Guyana? Philosophy of the People's Temple

Mrs. Jim Jones told the *New York Times* in 1977 that by the time her husband was 21 years old, his philosophy was essentially Marxist. The means he used to achieve his Marxist goals was to mobilize people through religion. She said, "Jim used religion to try to get some people out of the opiate of religion." She added that he had once slammed a Bible on the table and said, "I've got to destroy this paper idol!" (*New York Times*, 11/26/78, p. 20)

Jones "was openly contemptuous of religion among his associates" (*New York Times*, 11/21/78), but he used deceptive religious techniques to

win new recruits and give his "People's Temple" an aura of legitimacy. New converts were then manipulated through sexual blackmail and other forms of physical and psychological intimidation. At Jonestown, there were no new converts or outsiders to be deceived. Jones' anti-religious Marxist program was expressed more directly; there were no religious services or discussions of religion. (*Washington Post*, 11/25/78, p. A3)

One former follower, Mrs. Wanda Johnson, told the *Chicago Tribune*, November 22, "He told us on many occasions he was the reincarnation of Lenin." A note was reportedly pinned to Jones' body, written by one of his followers, saying, "I fear without you the world may not make it to communism."

The news media played up Jones' identity as a "cultist." The emphasis should have been on Jones the Communist fanatic who misused religion. Jones blended phony faith healings with outwardly evangelical style, but his later actions reflected his violent, anti-social, Marxist values.

The Jonestown society most closely resembled those of modern day Cambodia or Communist China. Individual freedom was stifled, people were not allowed to leave the commune, fear and threats were used to enforce Jones' cult of personality. Its leaders tried in vain to establish a "people's" utopia, but without the respect for human life which stems from Judeo-Christian values. In the end, it became a society gone mad because of the paranoia and self-destructive contradictions in Marxist philosophy, which manifested in its leader's personality and actions. The Jonestown People's Temple was not religion—it was not even a religious cult. It was a Marxist commune rooted in the demonic philosophy of Communism, which has the goal of enslaving the entire world under the Marxist system, as in Jonestown.

The Unification Church

The Unification Church community is centered absolutely on God—the God of truth and love. It adheres firmly to the Judeo-Christian system of moral values. Its religious philosophy, the Divine Principle, is based on the Bible. Its members are converted by these teachings, not by the personality of Reverend Moon. Many of the members of the Unification Church have never even met Reverend Moon or seen him in person.

Moreover, the Unification Church strongly emphasizes the nuclear family unit as the basis of a moral society. Although its single members often live together in communities, they refrain from premarital sex, drugs or liquor. Their community life, in fact, is primarily a program of disciplined Christian love in preparation for a successful, God-centered marriage.

Finally, the Unification theology is decidedly anti-Communist. Unification Church lifestyle emphasizes voluntary giving, personal prayer to

the living God and study of the Bible. Unlike Marxism, Unification Theology holds that each person possesses ultimate, sacred value as God's creation. Consequently, we believe it has been God's historical principle to never use force or violence. If God could have used force to establish His Kingdom, He would have done so long ago.

Unification Church members are involved in society. They have not established an isolated enclave in a foreign jungle, but a community of believers, the vast majority of whom live and work in major cities. They are involved in the real world. They have initiated such programs as:

- *The International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences*, drawing hundreds of the world's leading minds together each year to discuss questions of science and moral values.
- *The News World*, a major, general-interest daily newspaper in New York which has already won wide praise and major awards for journalistic excellence.
- *The Unification Theological Seminary*, a two-year, graduate-level school in Barrytown, New York, staffed primarily by non-Unification Church faculty, whose students have been accepted into divinity programs at the nation's major universities such as Harvard, Yale, University of Chicago, and others.
- *The Freedom Leadership Foundation*, a nationwide educational organization dedicated to developing the standards of leadership necessary to advance the cause of freedom in the struggle against Communism.
- *Project Volunteer*, a charitable project distributing hundreds of tons of food and other items to churches and institutions throughout the nation.

The Unification Church is *not* a cult. It is a bona fide religious movement, based on Judeo-Christian values and led by the living God. Scholars who have looked into the Unification Church objectively have come to respect the Church as a new religious movement. For instance, Dr. Frederick Sontag, professor of philosophy at Pomona College, who spent 1½ years studying the Church in preparation for his book, "Sun Myung Moon and the Unification Church," stated:

- (1) The origins of the movement are genuinely humble, religious, and spiritual...and (2) the adaptability and solidarity of the movement are such that we are dealing with a movement

here to stay. We have witnessed in our own lifetime the birth, growing pains—and will see the maturity—of a new religious movement.

“By Their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them”

In the Unification Church, individual freedom is stressed as the highest gift given to man by God. The people who devote themselves to the Unification Church do so not because of phony miracles or phony faith healings, but because the truth of the Divine Principle yields the “good fruit” by which Jesus said we could distinguish the false prophets from the true.

Reverend Moon’s entire life has been dedicated to saving the world from the insanity which Jonestown epitomizes. Speaking to some 500 leading theologians, scientists, philosophers and scholars at the International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences, November 26, 1978, Reverend Moon stated:

“While we were working these last four days, the tragedy of Guyana was constantly in our minds. One reason that the Guyana tragedy frightens people is that it reminds us that we ourselves could be destroyed by a madman in power today. All mankind could perish at the push of a button, initiating a nuclear holocaust. Even your own discoveries are often used by evil forces to create instruments of destruction... We are involved in an important task for the survival of mankind. Let us work together to become a voice of sanity, reason, and creative human love. Let us continue our search for absolute and unchanging values.

Should the Government Investigate?

We recognize that stories of mind control and brainwashing have been circulated about the Unification Church. Some people have therefore urged the government to investigate the “cults” (in which category they include the Unification Church). These demands are an overreaction which could result in a wave of religious prejudice and bigotry.

However, the FBI has already thoroughly investigated charges of “brainwashing” brought by anti-“cult” and “deprogramming” adherents. On November 24, 1978, Justice Department spokesman Benjamin Civiletti released a statement that indicated that in the investigation

“...no information was developed which furnished a basis for federal criminal jurisdiction or warranted further investigation... (and) It has been our experience that members of these religious sects are apparently competent, consenting adults. In our view, evidence that sect members do not have the capacity to exercise a free will is inconclusive.”

To demand that the government should investigate people simply because their religious beliefs are unknown or unpopular is clearly against the cardinal principle of the First Amendment to the Constitution, which states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

Indeed, in a free society such as our own, it must not be the government’s job to judge the true prophets from the false ones. Two thousand years ago, a wise Jewish rabbi named Gamaliel gave advice to those politicians who wanted to put an early stop to a new religious “cult”—today known as Christianity—that had recently emerged. He stated, as recorded in the Book of Acts 5:38-39:

“Refrain from persecuting these men (the early Christians) and let them alone. For if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to naught. But if it be of God ye cannot overthrow it.”

If specific laws have been broken, then the government may prosecute those who under the law are responsible. The Unification Church has been actively cooperating with a number of federal investigations in this regard. They have all revealed that nothing has been done. Beyond this the government cannot go. We only ask that our rights as religious believers be respected so that we may carry our message to all who want to hear it.

What Can Be Done?

It is self-evident that these are times of rapid change and consequent confusion. The Guyana tragedy may be a symptom of this. Old values and institutions are challenged on every side, yet no new ones have emerged to take their place. There are two kinds of responses to this challenge. One

is to seek higher meaning in life and find new values on which to base our civilization. Another is to flee into the "jungles" of a time before religion and civilization. Jonestown was built in such an uncivilized "jungle." Marxism is an ideology of such a jungle.

How shall we respond to Guyana? The response of conscientious people should be to seek to deepen their own commitment and insight into the Judeo-Christian or other value systems and to educate others toward the goal of improving the quality of our society. The Unification Church believes it has something important to offer in this regard.

Find Out For Yourself

The best way to find out about the truth or falsity of a religious belief is, as Jesus said, to examine "their fruits." The members of the Unification Church cordially invite you to find out for yourself what the Divine Principle really is and why it has given so much hope and inspiration.

Scholars who have honestly examined the Unification Church, its organization and its teachings have concluded that the fruits of Reverend Moon's teaching are love, liberty and eternal life, the same gifts which have been spoken of by true prophets throughout history.

To quote Dr. Herbert Richardson, the distinguished professor of systematic theology at the University of Toronto:

"The Unification Church is both more orthodox and more creative in dealing with scripture than many other contemporary churches. We should rejoice in their fervor and be glad to learn from them."

We invite men and women of good conscience to join with us in seeking to create a more meaningful way of life. Our doors are open twenty-four hours a day, both to come in and to go out freely. We are more than happy to share our ideas with you.
