

Dark side of the Moon

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PROFILE: Reverend Sun Myung Moon

THE beaming reverend was resplendent in white, a proud father and husband. Last week was his 90th birthday and 50th wedding anniversary, not to mention the moment when he finally passed over the day-to-day running of his church to his 30-year-old son

This was no run of the mill church service. The Reverend Sun Myung Moon may once have been a Presbyterian, but for more than half a century his parish has been the world and his spiritual vocation has been as messiah to the millions of followers of the Unification Church, better known as the Moonies.

Nor were his immediate family – known to disciples of the sect as "the True Family" – the only witnesses to this elaborate ceremony at the Sun Moon University just outside the Korean capital of Seoul. Another 20,000 men and women were also there to say "I do" to each other. Around the world, a further 20,000 devotees beamed in from Australia, America, Brazil and Norway. Like the Korean couples crammed into the huge auditorium in Seoul, they were all there to undergo marriages arranged by the Unification Church, many of them personally sanctioned by Moon himself.

The system of arranged marriages is just one controversial aspect to the church that requires followers to surrender all material wealth to it. Whether it's Moon's assertion that as a 15-year-old he was visited by Jesus, who told him he was the Second Coming, or his belief that he can commune with long-dead political leaders such as Confucius, Buddha, Muhammad, Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky and Mao, all power rests with Reverend Moon.

The key to his beliefs is his upbringing in what is now North Korea. Educated as a traditional Confucian, he was just as affected by his older brother's deep religious convictions as by his great-uncle's decision to donate the family's wealth to fighters willing to oppose Japan's occupation of Korea.

When he was ten his family converted to Christianity, and he was sent to a Western boarding school in Seoul and then to Japan to study electrical engineering. Throughout this period he fused a hatred for Japan's occupation of Korea with intensive study of the Bible, through which he developed a profound God complex.

After the war, Moon returned to Korea to preach and proselytise, but the rash 18-year-old made an anti-Japanese speech at his graduation after which the police, egged on by other

Korean Christian churches who resented his repudiation of the tithes system, beat him almost to death before condemning him to five years in the notorious Hungnam labour camp. The sentence would have killed him had American and South Korean troops not invaded the area and freed all the prisoners three years into his incarceration.

Moon's rabid hatred for Communism and his social conservatism have been in evidence ever since his church, founded in 1954, broke out of its Korean and Japanese heartland and became a major force in America, where Moon settled in 1971. The Moonies are long-term Republican paymasters, supporting Richard Nixon at the height of Watergate and paying George Bush Snr millions of dollars to make speeches in the mid-1990s.

These contacts were invaluable recruiting aids. "When George and Barbara Bush went to Fukuoka, the people were flabbergasted at Father and Mother's power to tell a US president what to do and plan his schedule," said Moon's close aide Bo Hi Pak. "This completely changed the attitude of the Japanese government and media toward the Unification community."

But the relationship with anti-Communist hawks and socially conservative Republicans was also a meeting of minds. As well as being homophobic (Moon calls gays "dung-eating dogs") and anti-semitic (the Moonie bible Divine Principle says the Holocaust was payback time for the Jews' part in Jesus's crucifixion), the Moonies are strongly opposed to sex before marriage and vociferously pro-family, even co-sponsoring the Million Family March alongside Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam in 2000.

The Moonies are also prepared to put their not inconsiderable resources where their mouth is. In Russia they gave active help to Mikhail Gorbachev, who Moon met several times, and made huge strides in former Warsaw Pact nations after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In America, the Moonies started up the Washington Times broadsheet in 1982 as a conservative counterweight to the Washington Post, and have pumped more than \$2bn into it since then. In 1980 Moon instructed the editor of the church-owned New York tabloid News World to splash with "Reagan Landslide" on election day, before the outcome was known.

Moon has diversified into industry, making everything from M-16 machine guns to running the United Press International news agency, while also buying up vast tracts of land. He recently bought 1.5m acres of Paraguay to go with massive earlier landgrabs throughout South America. Yet he hasn't proved an able businessman; in 1982 he was given an 18-month sentence in an American jail for tax evasion.

A continual drip-feed of stories has undermined the myth of the Moons as the perfect family unit, which is a basic tenet of the church. Most reports are dismissed as anti-Moonie propaganda, but the 1996 revelations of the wife of his eldest son Hyo Jin Moon were explosive. Nansook Hong had been selected as Moon's daughter-in-law as a 15-year-old, and in her autobiography, *In the Shadow of the Moons: My Life In The Rev Sun Myung Moon's Family*, she described Moon's son's drug abuse, pornography fixation, infidelity, child abuse, violence and scrapes with the law, not to mention his

father's philandering and his illegitimate children. It disillusioned many followers, particularly in light of the suicide leap of Moon's sixth son Young Jin from the 17th floor of a Reno casino.

Not that this was the only cloud on Moon's horizon. Allegations of sex rituals, brainwashing and of a lavish lifestyle in which their New York mansion had a "dining room equipped with a waterfall and pond" while "the Moon kids were each getting \$40,000 or \$50,000 a month for allowance", continued to be thrown at the would-be messiah. Yet none of that seems to faze a man with the most audacious God complex of all time. Instead of lying low, in March 2004 he had himself officially anointed as the messiah, with US House of Representatives' Danny K Davis carrying the pillow bearing the ornate crown for Moon's spiritual coronation.

As soon as Davis had placed the crown on Moon's head, the leader of the Unification Church began a rambling speech of Castro-esque length which concluded with the assertion that "I was sent to Earth to save the world's six billion people. Emperors, kings and presidents have declared to all Heaven and Earth that Reverend Sun Myung Moon is none other than humanity's saviour, messiah, returning lord and true parent."

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