

Why We Live Together in the Unification Church

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In his search throughout history to know God and to know himself, man has tried two fundamental approaches. One is that of the solitary seeker confronting his quest alone in a cave, a monastery cell, a remote "cabin in the wilderness." Thomas Merton, in his book, *Thoughts in Solitude*, comments on this path: "The Christian solitary does not seek solitude merely as an atmosphere or as a setting for a special and exalted spirituality. Nor does he seek solitude as a favorable means for obtaining something he wants -- contemplation. He seeks solitude as an expression of his total gift of himself to God."

The other is that of the believer, who recognizes that his search is not a unique one and that by sharing it with others his own experience is broadened. That is the path many young and middle-aged people are taking today -- in communes, consciousness -- raising or meditation classes, and in such groups as Scientology, Divine Light Foundation, Hare Krishna, and many others. Often, such a person will shop around, trying one for a few months or even a year or two, then moving on.

But there is one group people of all ages join, and stay with, for the rest of their lives and that is Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church, a relative newcomer but one which has been described as the fastest-growing religious movement in the world by Washington Star columnist William Willoughby.

How is this group different? What is the basic problem which rears itself in all these other groups which is not manifested in the Unification Church.

In a recent article in *Psychology Today*, "Individualism Busts the Commune Boom" (the title gives its theme away), Professor Laurence Veysey of the University of California, Santa Cruz, commented, "The drift of younger Americans, avowedly group minded or not, is toward an ever more openly flaunted individualism.... For self-absorbed Americans, the group is a vehicle to gain insight, liberation, or self-determination. It is not truly regarded as its own end."

If individualism is breaking up even small groups, consider what damage it is doing to the whole fabric of society. Professor Veysey also pointed out that "human relationships of all kinds are being redefined on a more temporary basis than ever before."

The breakdown in family life which is one outgrowth of this trend has been cited as the cause of delinquency, drug use, mental illness, and a host of other symptoms.

Nor is this factor of individualism confined to off-beat new groups. In an article on the resurgence of vitality in America's churches, *U.S. News and World Report* attributed the revival to "a renewed interest in the more personal and emotional aspects of religion and a greater emphasis on the needs of the individual person.

Rev. Moon defines the problem this way: "Among American youth, you cannot find anyone who is ready to live for the sake of other people or for the sake of the country."

The Divine Principle teaches that man does not exist for himself, but that he was created by God to live for others. This is so because we are made in God's image and He is the supreme example of unselfishness, of giving without expecting any return, of unlimited love.

If we do things for our family, we will be loved by them. If we do things for the good of our whole community, we will be loved by an even wider circle of people. If we do things for the sake of the nation or the world, then we will be loved by all people. If we do things for God's sake, then we will be loved and needed by God.

It is only as a result of man's Fall that he became centered on himself, on his own desires and purposes. That is why individualism is so rampant today. But if we continue in that way, we will never find happiness, we will never find true love, we will never be able to establish a world of God's goodness on this earth. But it is not so easy to change even ourselves, much less the whole world and its selfish ways.

We in the Unification Church are often asked why it is necessary that we live together. To the "only-on-Sunday" Christian, to the young person enjoying life and its pleasures, to the family living together, the way we live seems odd, out of place, perhaps suspiciously reminiscent of hippie communes and their reputation for free sex and drugs.

But it is not at all like that. Our goal is to change ourselves, our nation, and the world into God's ideal. We don't believe God can approve of the way we live now, and we want to create a world He can feel joy and pride from, that His will may be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

The first step we need to take is to learn to go beyond ourselves in loving others. Jesus said, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15: 12) The mystic may have a profound experience through his meditation, but unless it is translated into a new way of interacting with people outside his own room, that experience is like a rainstorm on drought-hardened earth, just sliding off the surface.

So, while our individual deep encounters with God are a very necessary part of our spiritual growth, they are not enough to effect the kinds of changes that are required in our whole way of thinking and acting if we are to be recreated in God's image. Jesus demands of us that we "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

To do this, we must learn to love all types of people, to be able to see people from God's viewpoint. Imagine an ordinary couple sitting at breakfast the morning after a party and discussing their host's guests: "Joe really is a slob, I don't see how his wife puts up with him. And that Marge, she's so arrogant, I certainly wouldn't want to see her again." And they probably won't ever see or get to know Joe or Marge again. "They're not our kind of people."

But if you are living in the same group with Joe or Marge as your spiritual brother and sister, it's not so simple to say, "Well, I just won't see that person again." Through working closely with that person, you learn to see other sides of his character: Joe always volunteers to do the dishes, Marge stays up late at night to do little favors for people. Then you can see, too, that our Heavenly Father loves each one of us, not just the kind of people we like.

"If you can love one person, God's love will be there in proportion to the depth and size of that love," Rev. Moon has said. "If you can love many people like this, God's love will come in proportion to the greatness of that love, to the depth of that love."

Learning to love is our primary mission in life. Learning to love brothers and sisters in our spiritual family prepares us for that closer bond of love that exists between husband and wife. But a true God-centered family unit is composed of two individuals who each bring to that relationship a maturity of love that is acquired in living with and for others. Unity with another person requires sacrifice of our own individuality, something that doesn't happen overnight but requires preparation, training.

So, sacrifice is another of our goals. Even scientists are coming to recognize that cooperation, not just competition, operates in nature. In *The Ascent of Man*, Henry Drummond wrote, "So advantageous are all forms of mutual service that the question may be fairly asked, whether after all cooperation and sympathy -- at first instinctive, afterwards reasoned are not the greatest facts even in organic Nature?"

In social science, too, "the new Social Darwinism has rediscovered... (the) survival value of reciprocal altruism. According to this, an ant colony could do worse than follow the precepts of Jesus. The sterile ant soldiers, who mobilize to protect the fecund queen, are really acting to perpetuate the genes of their corporation!

And so with a mother who starves herself that her child may live and reproduce her genes. Or with a hero who dies in Flanders or Vietnam so that the American stock can multiply," the economist Paul Samuelson

wrote in a recent issue of Newsweek.

It is stated very simply in the Bible (Matt. 16:25): "Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Or, as Rev. Moon puts it: "Love God and love people at the price of your life. Then you can gain your own life and gain all people also. That is what God wants from the bottom of His heart, and that is what Jesus wants us to be like." That is the example set for us by Jesus, who did give his life for us. "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13)

As we have shown above, our whole society as it is now revolves around individualism -- how will it benefit me? To change this pattern, a change that Jesus called for 2,000 years ago and which has yet to be fulfilled, requires training and self-discipline. This is the kind of thing you learn only by doing -- learning to give, to think of others. God very much needs a group which not only advocates living for others but puts it into practice. We can generally think of ourselves sacrificing for something which affects our immediate interests -- our family, even our nation.

But how many people are willing to go beyond that, to sacrifice for the sake of the world, for the sake of God? This kind of training is another reason why we live together in the Unification Church -- to train ourselves to be self-sacrificing people whom God can use.

The third explanation is the spiritual guidance and support we gain from each other. Psychologists and social scientists recognize the value of groups in helping people to change. Warren Avis, for example, founder of Avis Rent-A-Car and later of the American Behavioral Science Training Laboratories, explains what happens in groups: "One is encouraged to experiment with new ways of behaving, to take risks without fearing the consequences. Given this total freedom of expression, the individual approaches the point where total knowledge and total acceptance meet, and it is there that further spiritual and emotional growth can begin."

The Apostle Paul's letters to the early Christians are full of advice and admonitions. "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." (I Cor. 12:26) Now, as then, because we do live in a fallen world, we need to strengthen each other, to work together for common goals.

To deepen our potential for loving, to train ourselves in living for others, to sustain one another -- these then are the reasons we join together as a community seeking to live Christ's way.