

REVERSE MISSIONIZING: SUN MYUNG MOON'S UNIFICATIONIST
MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

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INTRODUCTION

. The American penchant for exporting United States culture is legendary. From democratic political forms and limitless brands of sectarian and denominational Christianity to elements of the popular culture such as rock music, Americans have approached the world with missionary zeal. Yet in the 1970's a variety of groups in the oriental tradition, such as the Hare Krishna, the Divine Light Mission, Happy-Healthy-Holy, and the Unification Church brought their own missionary goals to the United States. While gurus from the East as preachers of enlightenment are not unique to the period, Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church offers a curious twist which has stood American missionizing on its head. Moon, as a teenager, was the successful product of Presbyterian missionizing efforts. But Moon, instead of passively accepting orthodox Christian dogma, generated his own syncretic blend of fundamentalist Christianity full of millenarian expectations and oriental religious traditions. In 1959, after he established a large millenarian movement in South Korea, Moon sought to transplant his radical reformulation of Christian theology back to the United States. We use the case of Sun Myung Moon's reverse missionizing to illustrate the perennial problems of cross-cultural missionizing. We identify 3 major areas of conflict which emerge in such situations: 1) the critical divergence of theological traditions and the challenge to existing institutional arrangements; 2) the clash of organizational structures of missionizing movements with the host society; 3) the missionizing movement's insensitivity to elements of the host society's broader cultural heritage.

. Our analysis is based on continuing observation and multi-method study which includes interviews,

participant observation, and public and media records of the Unification Church of America and the larger world-wide Unificationist Movement of which it is a part, and the United States' anti-cult movement. Detailed statements of method and systematic information on the two movements' ideologies, histories and organizations are reported elsewhere (Shupe & Bromley 1979a, 1980; Bromley & Shupe 1979a, 1979b; Shupe, Spielmann & Stigall 1977a, 1977b).

MOON'S MESSAGE

. Sun Myung Moon was raised in a North Korean family which converted to a pentecostal form of Presbyterianism when he was 10. When he was 16, on Easter Sunday, 1936, Moon purportedly was visited by Jesus Christ in a revelation which informed Moon that he had been chosen to attempt the complete restoration of the Kingdom of God on Earth. The key elements of the Divine Principle, the scriptural document of the UC (Unification Church), concern the details of this first revelation and Moon's further correspondence with God and Jesus as recorded by various followers.* Moon's doctrine appears Manichaeistic in its fundamental God - Satan dichotomy operating at all levels of existence. It includes national and international affairs and anticipates a millenarian confrontation with victory over Satan. Beyond its Biblical themes, the UC beliefs are heavily grounded in Taoist notions of unity of opposites and Yin-Yang.

. According to the Divine Principle, mankind has consistently failed to live up to its responsibility to center all existence on God, beginning with Eve's seduction by the Archangel, Lucifer, in the Garden of Eden. Since then history has seen the pre-ordained but frustratingly unsuccessful series of attempts by various messianic figures, like Noah,

Abraham, Moses, and Solomon, to restore the World to God. The appearance of Christ, the potential "Second Adam" in the restoration process provided an opportunity which mankind lost, to reunite spiritually and physically with God by rejecting and crucifying Christ. A spiritual restoration of man was achieved, but because Christ died before he could establish a model God-centered family by marrying and raising children, restoration remained incomplete. After almost 2000 years, it was revealed to Moon that a new opportunity for the Messiah was imminent, this time to be the "Third Adam." But mankind may once again reject the opportunity by failing to unite behind the Messiah. It is the critical function of the Unification Church to disseminate Moon's revelations, and to work to prepare the earthly conditions necessary for complete restoration. Whether Moon is the new messianic figure, or only prepares the way, is a question which Moon evades.

THEOLOGICAL HERESY & CHALLENGE TO ESTABLISHED RELIGION

. Missionaries importing a foreign religious belief system into a culture often find that the latter clashes with the indigenous system. Christianity and the various oriental religions were based on such different world views that the missionizing had the quality of an alien invasion. But Moon's reverse missionizing with the Unification Church posed a threat of heresy. It has been the advent of the new religions, some foreign, others uncompromising or intolerant of pluralism, which has pumped fresh life in the term heresy. "In the reaction to the so-called new religions, the concept of heresy has suddenly regained a function in society. The term itself may not be used, but the attitude is clear: certain religions are illegitimate in this society (Sawat-sky 1978 21).

. Despite the lack of a formal criterion for heresy in the United States, our religious culture does

contain sacrosanct symbols and myths and sacred statuses to which ordinary persons may not aspire lest they invoke moral indignation and accusations of blasphemy. Moon struck sensitive nerves with his thinly disguised ambitions to become the new and final Messiah, and to take up Jesus' work which the latter regrettably left incomplete. Moon told his followers: "When you read the Bible, it appears as if Jesus knew everything. But he didn't. He did not know how the fall of man took place as clearly as we do. He did not comprehend the history of restoration (MS-1, Part 1, 1965).

. Moon in essence redefined Christ-hood as a status with a series of unsuccessful aspirants, and he clearly considered himself a serious candidate for it. He also questioned the integrity of biblical history as chronicled in the Old and New Testaments. Like his Gnostic counterparts 17 centuries before, Moon claimed that mere exegesis was not enough; things were not as simple as they seemed. He claimed special cryptogrammatic revelations unavailable to all others in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Hence he told followers: "Unless you truly know the meaning behind it, the Bible can reveal very little ... The Divine Principle gives the true meaning of the secret behind the verse" (MS-7 Part 2 1965). Moon's practice of comparing his own actions, many of which were unknown outside his movement, to more famous actions accented this heresy: "In 1960 I performed the holy wedding - the wedding of the Lamb that the Bible predicted. There, the first heavenly family was established on Earth. That was the equivalent in significance to the very moment of the crucifixion of Jesus .. I consummated the Heavenly plan. This was the most historical day in the history of God" (Kim 1976 28). Moon's theology denied the doctrine of the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, and fundamental assumptions of Christian dogma.

.In the view of the entrenched religious establishment, this constituted heresy. This was the more infuriating to religious traditionalists because the Unification Movement tried to pass as a bona-fide Christian evangelist group in its many public enterprises. It helps to explain the overwhelmingly hostile reception given the Unification Church by both predominant and fundamentalist Christian sects. The heretic provokes a more extreme reaction than the defector or apostate. "Whereas the latter deserts the group to go over to the enemy, the heretic presents a more insidious danger: by upholding the group's central values and goals, he threatens to split it into factions that will differ as to the means for implementing its goals. Unlike the apostate, the heretic claims to uphold the group's values and interests, only proposing different means to this end .. The heretic creates confusion and hence his actions are perceived as an attempt to break down (the group's) boundaries" (Coser 1964 70). Hence the extremes of passion in condemning him. Many critical evangelical monographs were published against the Unification Church (Yamamoto 1976 1977; Hefly 1977; Enroth 1977; Bjornstad 1976; Levitt 1976). National and regional denominations organized anti-UC demonstrations across the country. In the summer of 1976 the National Council of Churches, composed of over 1700 member groups, rejected the UC's membership application, despite the latter's intense lobbying efforts. The UC even went to court, unsuccessfully, to have the decision reversed. Various denominations through their organizational components issued preventive literature to combat the UC and its fellow travelers in other cults. The Lutheran Campus Ministry Program (1977) published brochures on how to distinguish cults from legitimate religions, who typically joins the cult, descriptions of various groups, with an exaggerated membership estimate for the UC, and how to combat these

cults.

TOLERATION AMONG ESTABLISHED CHURCHES

. In societies where there are multiple churches or religious belief systems, and no one group has hegemony over the others, some accommodation must eventually be reached. In the United States a decidedly pluralist reality has led to an ecumenical spirit of toleration and rapprochement. Moon overtly challenged this hard-won and delicately balanced detente among competing groups. From the beginning, when Moon and a handful of refugee followers began their movement against great odds in war-torn Korea of the 1950's, he made it plain that his goal was not simply entry into the community of competing religions and denominations, and that he was not seeking mere co-existence with the other groups. Instead, he sought hegemony over all the others. During his first visit to the United States in 1965 during the UC incipient growth phase, he declared: "If you regard our movement as just another denomination, you will be making a great mistake. This is not just a denominational movement; this is not a sect; it is not just one religion" (MS-1 Part 1 1965).

. Other denominations in American society, like the Roman Catholic Church and the Churches of Christ use similar rhetoric as representing the Catholic Christian faith, but none were so bold as Moon in word and deed. Moon openly sought to supercede ecumenicalism as conventionally understood, and to subsume all other religious groups and authorities in the United States and the World.

. Moon's doctrine and his personal claims stood beyond the pale of American religious pluralism. Public relations assertions of the UC to the contrary notwithstanding, Moon's aspirations were not merely ecumenical, but monolithic. For the Unification Church, all other religious groups were denigrated to an inferior and superfluous status. Moon's revision of

Christology and his biblical innovations were too narrowly sectarian in the eyes of other religious groups to permit his admittance into the fraternity of legitimate Christians.

UNIFICATION CHURCH ORGANIZATIONAL STYLE

. Not only does importing a new religious system into a society upset existing arrangements in the religious community. It also creates conflict between the religious movement and other societal institutions, as inter-institutional accommodations are undermined. In the case of the UC's reverse missionizing, Moon's plan for restoration entailed constructing a world-wide system of theocracy. This meant not only eventually possessing and managing businesses and whole economies, but also the elimination of arbitrary institutional boundaries between church and state, as well as between religion and science, and between education and economics. The UC defined the religious so broadly that it overlapped and engulfed what others saw as the non-religious and the secular. UC members felt only limited constraint to operate within conventional regulations of existing institutions. They created a number of quasi-religious and nominally secular organizations that were designed to achieve the UC's multifaceted goals. These in turn became referred to by UC critics as fronts, and were cited to expose Moon's allegedly true motives. Similar criticism was leveled at a similar pan-institutional orientation in the Scientology religion (Wallis 1975 104).

. Despite Unification Church leaders' pointed denials to the authors, there is little doubt that the UC kept a corps of members in Washington D.C. as its Capitol Hill Ministry to lobby congressmen and government officials, in the mid-1970's. Among other issues, they urged continued military support of the Park dictatorship in South Korea. Evidence comes from sworn testimony of apostates who have detailed accounts of their

participation in illegal lobbying efforts, to the point of naming Congressmen and Moonies assigned to their offices, and daily report forms on which all contacts were recorded (CEFM 1976; U.S.Govt 1978 342).

. Moon himself gained notoriety in the Watergate investigations with speeches defending Nixon on a kind of "divine right of kings" theory. Moon claimed that God appeared to him in a vision and told him to forgive Nixon, during a visit to Korea in November 1973 (Washington Post Nov 10 1977). Based on his vision, Moon claimed that "At this moment in history God has chosen Richard Nixon to be President of the United States" (Kim 1977 2 246). Nixon required forgiveness from the American people, Moon said, and should be free to perform those tasks ordained in God's plan for restoration. Because of God's will for Nixon to remain, Moon claimed, the American people lacked the authority to remove him. Moon continued to justify Nixon's continuation in office, and he called for an end to the Watergate investigation. The UC bought full page ads carrying that message in newspapers across the country (Marks 1974). The UC also staged several noisy, well-publicized pro-Nixon demonstrations involving Nixon or his staff during the Winter and Spring of 1974 (Bromley & Shupe 1979a). Such intrusions of an evangelist into United States political controversies went far beyond the usual publicity operations of politicians and religious activists. Critics noted the potential self-serving motives of Moon, for his standing in the United States, and with the Park regime in Korea, should Nixon survive in office.

UNIFYING SCIENCE & RELIGION

. Not content with unifying church and state, Moon also sought to unify science and religion. From 1972, Moon and the Unification Church, through its affiliate, the International Cultural Foundation, sponsored annual International Conferences on the

Unity of Science which sought to attract prominent scientists and scholars from all disciplines. From a mere 20 participants in 1972, the ICUS sponsored meetings which grew to 400 participants in 1977 at a cost of \$500,000 (New York Times Nov 28 1977). The 1977 conference drew Nobel Prize winners and nationally known scientists. Criticism arose on the ground that Moon was merely co-opting scholars who were naive as to his real ambition, to gain prestige by association, and that he was seeking to subvert the hard-won independence of science from theology (Horowitz 1977).

. There were elements of UC organizational style such as its communal lifestyle and public fund-raising strategies that contributed to the public reaction against it (Shupe & Bromley 1979b). The new world order which the UC pursued so vigorously included specific elements which sharply opposed existing institutions in the United States, which was perceived as a threat. Unorthodox ideas alone cannot adequately explain the hostility confronting Moon and the Unification Church.

CULTURAL INSENSITIVITY

. Leaders of belief systems being missionized into radically different cultures are unavoidably naive and inexperienced about the society into which they are expanding. The following are examples of the faux pas committed by the UC proselyting which amplified resistance and controversy.

. Missionaries are motivated by their conviction in the rectitude and superiority of their own belief systems. They expect that after hearing and fully understanding their message, others will accept the Truth. This begets misassessment of demand, and an exaggerated expectation of response. During the early struggles to gain a precarious foothold in the United States in the 1960's, the original members in San Francisco led by Moon's disciple, Young Oon Kim, believed that the Divine Principle contained in a mind-blowing

message, if truly understood, would be wholeheartedly accepted (Lofland 1977). They came to appreciate the difficulty of making the message truly understandable in a series of false starts and experiments, but their fundamental conviction never waned.

. In 1972 Moon and his staff misassessed the American receptivity, optimistically assuming that the power and logic of the Divine Principle and Moon's personal inspiration would naturally appeal to reasonable people. They also failed to realize that outsiders would be unfamiliar with their basic themes, and that insider theological references would be curious, but lacking in appeal to outsiders.

. In his first speaking tour of 7 major United States cities in early 1972, Moon set out with 75 advance team members who handled the task of attracting crowds with religious fervor. A New York Times ad (Jan 28 1972) featured Moon's kick-off rally at Lincoln Center with a large picture of Reverend & Mrs. Moon with their two children and the cryptic proclamation: "This is the day of hope, the day of the true family. Sun Myung Moon testifies to the new age revealing God's plan to establish a new world." Confident about the popularity of Moon's message, the UC charged \$18. for tickets to three successive evening lectures. They offered an unusual incentive of an international novel writing contest with the theme "Jesus Christ and the Agony of the Cross: God's Will or Man's Failure?" The first prize was \$100,000 (published authors only), and the novel was to be based on materials furnished by the Unification Church. The advertisements promised that the novel would be made into a motion picture, as well (Kim 1977 1 5). With this advance publicity, newspapers on the tour circuit generally gave Moon's engagements neutral coverage and treated the UC with polite bemusement. Attendance was sparse and unenthusiastic. Later, a more sophisticated acculturated

approach drew a larger response.

. Since Moon formulated his religious doctrines in a non-Christian oriental culture with no Jewish minority, he failed to appreciate the effects of three claims in the Divine Principle: 1) that Jesus had failed in his mission 2000 years before; 2) that when Christ would come again, he would be a Korean; 3) that the Jews were responsible for Christ's crucifixion. By early 1974, well organized vocal opposition from local clergy had emerged, coordinated by regional and national denominational organizations. Evangelical Christian ministers and associated groups began to appear at publicized stops on Moon's speaking tours to greet Moon with hostile leaflets, full-page anti-Unification Church advertisements and public demonstrations.

. Theological liberals were put off by Moon's curious Biblical literalism and Armageddon imagery. The cry of anti-Semitism was raised by Jewish groups. Religious groups began to form coalitions which denied the UC the legitimacy it so desperately sought in order to gain an initial hearing in the United States. In January 1977 representatives of the American Jewish Committee, the County Coordinator of the Office of Communication in the Catholic Archdiocese of New York, and officials of the National Council of Churches of Christ met jointly to condemn Moon's Church as "anti-democratic, anti-Jewish, and in direct conflict with basic Christian teachings" (Amsterdam News NY Jan 1 1977). Rabbi Rudin of the American Jewish Committee found 125 examples of blatant anti-Semitism in the Divine Principle (Catholic News, NY Jan 6 1977).

. Moon's public performances as speaker seemed less bizarre to the UC than to most American audiences. The audiences were first surprised, then soon bored with the format in which Moon spoke several sentences in excited Korean, whereupon his translator, Bo Hi Pak calmly translated, often for well over an hour. Those who

had paid a high admission price, or had been treated to a lavish dinner usually stayed. But as the UC sought to attract larger crowds, giving away many tickets on the streets, audiences felt less obligation to sit through Moon's Biblical harangues. This was painfully obvious to the UC at Moon's Bicentennial God Bless America rally in Yankee Stadium (June 1974). In 10 minutes after the start of Moon's speech the crowd began walking out. After 90 minutes, two thirds had left, and those who remained had to cope with youth gangs, vandals, and smoke bombs (Lofland 1977 32-3). The UC placed too much hope in its credibility. One does not rewrite the basic meaning of the Old and New Testaments, and then through lectures in baseball stadiums, easily persuade an entire culture and its well entrenched religious institutions that the new interpretation is superior. There was something incongruous to Americans in a modern-day prophet who claimed to understand the Bible better than all the Western theologians and scholars, although he could not speak coherent English.

. Finally, Moon's personal lifestyle appeared inconsistent with his proclaimed messianic status. Moon's idea of a messiah corresponded less to the post-Christian model of a humble, sacrificial ascetic Christ than to a conqueror of the World who possessed and used its resources to establish God's earthly kingdom (Sontag 1977 194). This translated into enormous personal wealth and extensive business holdings, luxurious mansions, lavish banquets, rallies, and media events. Moon's comportment was inconsistent with American expectations for a messiah.

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