

# Unification Church

## *History, Beliefs, and Practices*

**Identity:** The Unification Church (whose members are commonly known as “Moonies”) is the name used for a large series of organizations whose influence and assets far exceed its actual membership. Despite internal problems, it has remained a somewhat popular movement even at the start of the twenty-first century.

**Founder:** Sun Myung Moon (b. 1920)

**Statistics:** An exact number is extremely difficult to obtain. The UC does not publish official statistics for outsiders, explaining that the media may use these statistics against the organization. Membership is estimated at 1-2 million worldwide, with the largest number in Korea and U.S. membership of approximately 10 to 30 thousand.

**History:** Sun Myung Moon was born on January 6, 1920 in the village of Kwangju Sangsa Ri in North Korea. At age 16 Moon (a Presbyterian) claimed to have had a spiritual revelation in which he was called to complete Jesus’ unfinished work. This revelation included having the “perfect marriage,” and in 1944 Moon married the first of several wives. In 1946, the year that he began to organize what would later become the Unification Church, he was arrested. Moon claimed that he was arrested because he was teaching against communism, but evidence suggests charges of bigamy. He was arrested a second time in 1948 and sentenced to five years of hard labor. When the Korean War broke out, Moon escaped and fled to South Korea. He was also excommunicated from the Presbyterian Church and in 1954 founded the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity in Seoul. Moon’s first wife officially divorced him that same year. In 1960 he married Hak Ja Han, who bore him 13 children.

In 1957 Moon published his first edition of *Divine Principle*. Fifteen years later, Moon announced that America was his new mission. He purchased an \$850,000 home in upstate New York and gained a footing in America by engaging in numerous capitalist ventures (many of which failed). Moon’s anti-communist teachings also brought him fame and fortune. He was charged with income tax evasion (failing to report interest) and fraud, and in 1982 was sentenced to serve 18 months in federal prison in Danbury, CT. After serving 13 months, he was released in 1985 on good behavior. While he was in prison, followers became more supportive, equating his suffering to that of Jesus. Moon also received substantial support from traditional religious leaders concerned about the precedent being set in the taxation of religious organizations.

Moon caught public attention by conducting mass weddings, one in Madison Square Garden in New York City in 1982 (2000 couples) and another in 1988 (6,500). In 1987 he expressed a desire to expand the church’s political influence over the United States government and population. To date Moon has built a financial empire in investments in religious, political, media, and business organizations. Millions of pieces of literature are distributed annually by the UC.

**Texts:** The Bible. *Divine Principle*. Works by Sun Myung Moon: *America in God’s Providence* (1976); *Christianity in Crisis* (1974); *Master Speaks* (a collection of sermons); *New Hope* (1984). Works by Young Oon Kim: *Divine Principle and Its Application* (1968);

*Unification Theology* (1980). Unification Church Training Manuals and various Unification Church Newsletters.

### **Beliefs and Practices:**

- Moon believes that he is the Messiah—although some members deny that he ever claimed to be. He claims travel to heavenly realms where he communicates with Moses, Jesus, Buddha, and various other departed spiritual leaders. Moon regards himself as sinless and holds that he alone has the power to forgive sins.
- The *Bible* is not “the truth” but a close approximation, much like a textbook. *The Divine Principle* is God’s revelation to his new Messiah, Sun Myung Moon. This book is divided into three chronological/theological periods: 1. The first Adam—all of creation fell into sin; 2. The second Adam—Jesus Christ who failed, however, on three counts: a. Died on a cross (seen by Moon as a tragic accident); b. failed to marry and procreate children; c. He failed to win the entire world. 3. The third Adam—Sun Myung Moon, whose mission is to complete work Jesus left undone.
- Adam’s *sin* was sexual in nature. Lucifer had sex with Eve. He fell from heaven. Eve then seduced Adam. Their shame caused them to cover themselves with fig leaves.
- *Salvation* in the UC is both a spiritual and physical salvation—the work that Moon has declared his mission on earth to be as “Lord of the Second Advent.”
- Moon divides time in 2000- year increments. Jesus came 2000 years after Abraham. The Lord of the Second Advent (Moon) comes 2000 years after Jesus.
- Recruitment techniques to promote Moon’s cause have caused much criticism controversy: “Heavenly Deception,” the charge that members have used dishonesty and falsehood to gain converts; use of Christian ministers to promote UC image and establish ecumenical ties; limiting outside contact; slave labor conditions; sleep deprivation; poor diet.
- Arranged marriages conducted en-masse (see above).
- The UC also owns various other religious organizations, political groups, and businesses (e.g., *The Washington Times* and the New Yorker hotel).
- The One World Crusade (OWC) is the evangelistic arm of the UC. Other related UC groups include: The Unification Theological Seminary in Barrytown, New York; The Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP); World Freedom Institute (WFI); New Ecumenical Research Association; International Religious Foundation; “The Washington Institute for Values in Public Policy;” International Federation for Victory over Communism; World Media Association etc.

## ***A Lutheran Response***

The Scriptures themselves teach that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God the Holy Spirit and that God is therefore the true Author of every word of the Bible (see e.g., 2 Pet. 1:16, 21; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Jer. 30:2; 2 Sam. 23:1-2). The Bible, therefore, is to be regarded without qualification as God’s Word, and not—as in Moon’s thought—an “approximation” of God’s Word. The central message of God’s Word, the Bible, is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that people are to listen only to Him (Matt. 16:16; 17:5; Acts 2:22-28; Rom. 3:21-24). His redeeming work on the cross was complete (John 19:30), “for Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God” (1 Pet. 3:18). Jesus alone is sinless and able to forgive sin (II Cor. 5:21). Before He left this earth Jesus warned His disciples against “false Christs” who will “appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect—if that were possible” (Mark 13:22). There is therefore only one Christ; all other claims must be rejected (Matt. 24:23-26).

According to Moon, “the Fall resulted from sexual intercourse between Satan and Eve, and then between Eve and Adam”<sup>1</sup> The Scriptures, however, teach that Adam’s sin was his act of disobedience to the Word of God and therefore unbelief (Gen. 3:1f.; Rom. 5:15-21). Moon teaches that salvation is possible through him (the Lord of the Second Advent) and his wife. “They are the modern Adam and Eve, the ‘True

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<sup>1</sup> H. Wayne House, *Charts of Cults, Sects, & Religious Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 232.

Parents' of humanity. Moon fulfills the Second Coming promised in the New Testament"<sup>2</sup> The Scripture teaches that salvation is through Jesus alone (Acts 4:12), whose purpose for coming into the world was to die for the sins of the world and to call to Himself those who would make up His true bride, His Church (Eph. 2:21f.). This bride has been spreading the Gospel throughout the world since the time of the New Testament and the apostles.

## ***For Further Reading***

- Barker, Eileen. *The Making of a Moonie*. Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1984.
- Chrystides, George D. *The Advent of Sun Myung Moon: The Origins, Beliefs, and Practices of the Unification Church*. New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1991.
- Dean, Roger Allen. *Moonies: A Psychological Analysis of the Unification Church*. New York: Garland, 1992.
- Melton, J. Gordon. *The Encyclopedia of American Religions*. Detroit, MI: Gale Research, 1996.
- Shupe, Anson. "Frame Alignment and Strategic Evolution in Social Movements: The Case of Sun Myung's Unification Church" in Anson Shupe and Bronislaw Misztal, eds. *Religion, Mobilization and Social Action*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998 (197-215).
- Sontag, Frederick. *Sun Myung Moon and the Unification Church*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1977.
- Yamamoto, J. Isamu. *Unification Church*, in *Zondervan Guide to Cults and Religious Movements*, Alan Gomes, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995.

## ***Links and Websites***

[www.unification.net/](http://www.unification.net/)  
[www.unification.org](http://www.unification.org)  
[www.ettl.co.at/unification](http://www.ettl.co.at/unification)  
[www.sunmoon.ac.kr/](http://www.sunmoon.ac.kr/)  
[www.washtimes.com/](http://www.washtimes.com/)

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<sup>2</sup> House, 233.