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## THE CAT-AND-MOUSE CHASE: MOONIES IN BULGARIA

Archimandrite Pavel Stefanov

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The motley religious panorama of Bulgaria would be incomplete if one fails to consider the Unification church of Rev. Sun Myung Moon and its local impact. The official name of his organization is Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity known in Korea as ‘Tong-il-Kyo’.<sup>1</sup> It is inseparable from the person and teaching of its founder. **THE FOUNDER: SUN MYUNG MOON**

Yong Myung Moon (which means Shining Dragon Moon) was born on 6 January 1920 in the village of Jung-Joo in the North Korean province of Pyungan Buk-do. His parents professed Buddhism before converting to a hard line form of Christianity called Presbyterianism. The seed of the Unification church was sown at Easter 1936 when the then 16-year old Moon, steeped in prayer on a Korean mountainside, later claimed that Jesus Christ had appeared to him and asked him to complete the mission which he had left

J. I. Yamamoto, *The Puppet Master: An Inquiry into Sun Myung Moon and the Unification Church* (Downers Grove, IL, 1977); M. D. Bryant and H. W. Richardson, *A Time for Consideration: A Scholarly Appraisal of the Unification Church* (Lewiston, NY, 1978) (Symposium Series, 3); E. Barker, *The Making of a Moonie: Choice or Brainwashing?* (New York, 1984; reprint Aldershot, 1993); W. Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis, 1985), ch. 13; J. Biermans, *The Odyssey of New Religious Movements: Persecution, Struggle, Legitimation. A Case Study of the Unification Church* (Lewiston, NY, 1988) (Symposium Series, 19); R. A. Tucker, *Another Gospel: Alternative Religions and the New Age Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1989), ch. 11; G. D. Chryssides, *The Advent of Sun Myung Moon: The Origins, Beliefs*

*and Practices of the Unification Church* (Basingstoke, 1991); J. I. Yamamoto, *Unification Church* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1995).

RELIGION IN EASTERN EUROPE XXIII, 6 (December 2003) page 41.

unfinished 19 centuries later. In spite of being poignantly aware of the terrible challenges and hardships that lay ahead, he accepted the call to be the second Messiah whose task would be to bring to fruition the salvation of all humankind.

In order to prepare for his mission, Moon acquainted himself with the doctrines of many religions. He joined a fringe group of eschatologically minded Pentecostals who were confident that Korea was the New Jerusalem of the Bible and that the Messiah would be born in Korea. These elements were incorporated in his teaching. In 1945 Moon received a grand revelation that he was God's true son and changed his name to Sun Myung Moon (Shining Sun and Moon). Later he was arrested twice by the communist authorities for bigamy and capitalist activities and spent nearly three years of hard labour in the Hung-Nam prison. This tragic period of his life played a decisive role in his formation as a virulent anticommunist. Like St. Augustine before him, he saw the world in Manichean terms as divided into two irreconcilable areas. One was the world of democracy, led by the USA, which had a chance to build a perfect social order by implementing the 'divine principles' invented by Moon, while the other was the world of communism ruled by the Devil and doomed to destruction.

In October 1950 Moon was liberated and fled to Pusan in South Korea. He gathered a small band of his followers and officially established his church in 1954. Its centre was Seoul. A year later he was again taken into custody for draft evasion and promiscuity because of rumours that he used to 'purify' sexually his female followers. It took Moon three years to produce the first version of a book titled *Divine Principle*. His

followers believe that it is nothing less than the third testament of the Bible, often called the 'Complete Testament', because it is thought to reveal the hidden (occult) truths of God's revelation.

By 1960 Sun Myung Moon introduced a new facet of his doctrine claiming in a chiliastic vein that the end of the world was at hand. In April 1960 he inaugurated the

RELIGION IN EASTERN EUROPE XXIII, 6 (December 2003) page 42.

"marriage of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:7). After divorcing his first wife, who bore him three children, he married the 18-year old Hak Ja-Han in order to form what he called "the perfect family" which God had envisaged during his creation of the world. Two years later their "perfect son" was born. Thus, Moon and Han are "true parents" while the community of believers became their "new family". The Unification church grew in South Korea being subsidised by its large secular business ventures and helped by the government.

#### AN INTERNATIONAL UNIFICATION CHURCH

The Divine Principles were first translated into English in 1961 and became accessible to the Western audiences.<sup>2</sup> Moon's inaugural 'Day of Hope' tour of the US in 1971-1972 attracted media attention. During his next tour in November 1973 he drew criticism for his staunch support of President Nixon who faced impeachment because of the Watergate scandal. In February 1975 American TV-viewers were amazed to witness Moon's first mass arranged marriage of 1800 couples, including 70 from the US itself.<sup>3</sup> Their numbers increased. In 1992 in Seoul 30 000 couples married, in 1995 they became 360 000 but the expected goal of 3 600 000 couples in 1997 was never reached in spite of strenuous efforts. After being blessed by Moon they drink wine mixed with drops of his and his wife's blood in clear imitation of Jesus' sacrificial communion and beat

themselves ritually. The ceremony is preceded by at least six years' celibacy, followed by three years' celibacy before consummation of the marriage.<sup>4</sup>

In the late 1970s Moon took up residence in Irvington, New York, and set up a missionary fund deposited in his own name. After a noisy row with the US fiscal authorities he received a 13-month prison sentence for tax evasion. He served it at the federal prison in

S. M. Moon, *Divine Principle*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York, 1977).<sup>3</sup> D. G. Bromley and A. D. Shupe, 'Moonies' in America: Cult, Church, and Crusade (Beverly Hills, CA, 1979).<sup>4</sup> J. H. Grace, *Sex and Marriage in the Unification Church* (Lewiston (NY)-Lampeter, 1985).

RELIGION IN EASTERN EUROPE XXIII, 6 (December 2003) page 43.

2

Danbury, Connecticut, from 1984 to 1985 and it is admitted that he was an exemplary inmate.<sup>5</sup> Moon's followers viewed this sentence not as ruining his reputation but as proving that he was a victim of religious persecution and a martyr for 'true faith in God'. The church is still attacked because of its sprawling industries, including production of arms, and aggressive fund-raising campaigns done mainly by full-time volunteers.<sup>6</sup> One of the most colourful scandals in recent years is connected with the former Roman Catholic Archbishop of Lusaka Emmanuel Milingo. He became attracted to the Moon cause and married a Korean woman but after the Vatican threatened to excommunicate him, he left the Unification fold.<sup>7</sup>

Another dubious feature of the church of Moon is that it often hides its real identity under many other labels. There are said to be about 60 scientific, academic, feminist, cultural, ecological, peace-promoting, art, sport etc. subsidiaries founded and sustained by Moon. His News World Communications owns the Washington Times, the

United Press International news service and the Paragon Press. Leaders and theologians are prepared in the Unification Theological Seminary in Barrytown, New York (1975), and the Sun Moon University in South Korea (1988). Prominent on college campuses all over the world are the Collegiate Association for the Research of the Principles (CARP) and the Professors' World Peace Academy (PWPA). The United Federation of Churches often convenes conferences and seminars for promoting family, ethical and ecumenical values which are attended by retired and acting world dignitaries. After Moon's meeting with Mihail Gorbachov on 11 April 1990 and signing a 100 000 USD check for the cultural foundation of Raisa Gorbachova, the Russian Ministry of Education adopted a Unification church textbook and introduced it in 2000 schools.<sup>8</sup> It is claimed that members of the church worldwide number about 10 million.<sup>5</sup> S. M. Moon, *God's Warning to the World: Reverend Moon's Message from Prison* (New York, 1985).

B. Kilbourne, "Equity or Exploitation? The Case of the Unification Church", *Review of Religious Research*, 28, 2 (1986), 143-150.<sup>7</sup> A. Ivereigh, "Milingo and Maria: read all about it", *The Tablet*, 23 November 2002.<sup>8</sup> T. Gandow, *Imperia "prepodobnogo" Moona*. (Moscow, 1995), pp. 16-19, 101-104.

RELIGION IN EASTERN EUROPE XXIII, 6 (December 2003) page 44.

6

## DOCTRINE AND THEOLOGY

What is the doctrine of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon? It is based on a radically unorthodox reinterpretation of the creation account of the Bible. According to Moon, the sin of the first human couple consisted not of literal eating of a fruit in a garden, but it was of sexual nature. Eve committed sexual intercourse with Lucifer and later repeated it with Adam. This act was not only unlawful but constituted the spiritual fall of all humanity which she represented. It must be noted that the same explanation for the fall of the first human couple is provided by the dualist Bogomil sect which appeared in

Bulgaria in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and later spread as far as France. Whether Moon is familiar with it is doubtful. In his view God tried to redeem mankind by sending prophets such as Abraham, Moses and David but all they failed. Finally he sent Jesus who was due to marry and have sinless children in order to establish the kingdom of Gods on earth. Jesus was betrayed by John the Baptist and saved mankind spiritually but not physically because he never married. A second Messiah from the East must accomplish the task which the Man from Nazareth never fulfilled. The Unification Church does not believe like other Christians that Jesus is co-eternal Son of God and a second Person of the divine Trinity.<sup>9</sup>

Unificationists have a unique understanding of the Messiah as well. He must perfect himself, his family, his nation and the world. They believe that Moon has already accomplished the first two conditions.<sup>10</sup> He reached personal perfection, they say, when he subjugated Satan after struggling for nine years with him after 1936. By marrying Hak Ja Han and producing 12 children who symbolise the 12 tribes of Israel Moon established the Lord's heavenly family on earth. The last two requirements are expected to be materialized when

<sup>9</sup> M. D. Bryant and S. Hodges, *Exploring Unification Theology* (New York, 1978).  
A. Parsons, "Messianic Personalism: A Role Analysis of the Unification Church", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 25, 2 (1986), 141-161.

RELIGION IN EASTERN EUROPE XXIII, 6 (December 2003) page 45.

10

Korea is united and all religious and secular efforts are devoted to the Moon cause. The mass weddings conducted by the church are not publicity stunts but sacraments which displace the Christian ones and introduce the era of the Completed Testament. In March

2003 Moon launched his own political party called “Party of the Lord, Peace and Home” in order to speed up the unification of Korea.<sup>11</sup>

## UNIFICATION CHURCH IN BULGARIA SINCE 1989

Bulgaria is a small and poor country whose population is one of the least religious in the world. In spite of that, it attracted the attention of Unification church missionaries soon after the fall of communism in 1989.<sup>12</sup> In November 1990 a scientific conference organised by the British Academy for World Peace took place in Sofia.<sup>13</sup> It was announced in February 1991 that in Bulgaria 400 people were attending a 21 day Unification workshop.<sup>14</sup> A Logos educational and linguistic centre was registered on 1 July 1991 at 9 Slaveykov Square whose head was Kate Simpson. It belonged to the International School for Religious and Ethnic Tolerance and began spreading Moon’s ideas by means of lectures in various universities in Sofia, Plovdiv and Blagoevgrad and opening its branches all over the country. In May 1995 a mentally unstable member called Svetoslav Chamourdjiev stabbed another member, Anna Abadjieva, to death.<sup>15</sup> The state authorities availed themselves of the ensuing public outcry to ban the Logos centre. At the same time a number of Unification-related organizations proliferated in Bulgaria: CARP (1992), the Women’s Federation for World Peace (1993), the Bulgarian Association of Volunteers (1993), the Bulgarian Federation of Uanhuado (1993), the Ashoka Foundation (1994), the Family Foundation for World Peace and Unity (1997) etc.

<sup>11</sup> “Sekta Moona prihodit k vlasti v Yuzhnoy Koree”, <http://www.vokruginfo.ru/news/news3305.html>.<sup>12</sup> In writing this article I received no cooperation whatsoever from the frightened Unification Church leaders in Bulgaria whose addresses I received from Prof. Eileen Barker and others.<sup>13</sup> B. Asenov, *Religiite i sektite v Bulgaria* (Sofia, 1998), pp. 295-298.

“Reverend Sun M yung M oon Speaks on Sunday Service, Belvedere International Training Center, February 17, 1991,” <http://www.unification.net/1991/910217.html>.<sup>15</sup> “Opit za pokushenie zaradi Moon,” 24 zàñà, 138 (23 May 1995).

14

In 1992 the Unification church tried to get a registration from the government but failed. Its second attempt two years later was also rejected on the grounds that it is a theocratic organization involved in politics which has a totalitarian structure and violates human rights. In 1995 the public prosecutor also removed the registration of CARP from the statute books.

Several right wing Bulgarian politicians, consisting of Nansen Behar, the Rev. Hristofor Subev, Mihail Nedelchev, Elka Konstantinova, Yunal Lyutvi and Yanko Yankov, talked with Moon in 1991 about the budding local democracy. The next year several known intellectuals such as Prof. Nansen Behar and Prof. Tsvetan Kardashev were married by Moon. Prof. Margarita Bradistilova also freely admits that she is a member of the PWPA.<sup>16</sup> But the Bulgarian politician suspected to be most closely linked with the Unification Church is the former right wing foreign minister Stoyan Ganev, although he has always denied this connection. As a chairman of the 47<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly of the United Nations Ganev went on record on 13 May 1993 as extolling Moon's lectures titled Message of Hope. At the moment Ganev lectures at Bridgeport University in the US sponsored by Moon. Among the 30-40 Bulgarian students there, none are Unification church members.<sup>17</sup>

When Moon's spouse Hak Ja Han tried to deliver a lecture in Bulgaria during her world tour in November 1993, she declined to enter this country because she faced a barrage of protests and threats fuelled by the tabloid press.<sup>18</sup> A year later the US Ambassador to Bulgaria attended one of the International Women's Friendship Conferences in Washington DC, a project of the Women's Federation for World Peace, founded by Rev. and Mrs.

<sup>16</sup> M. Bradistilova, *Narodna sudba i tvorcheska uchast* (Sofia, 2001), back cover.<sup>17</sup>  
<http://www.mediapool.bg/site/izbori/2001/06/25/0004.shtml>; L. Lyubomirova,  
“Adaptatsiata na detsatav chuzhbina”, <http://kontakti.search.bg/13/adaptatio.htm>.<sup>18</sup> T. M  
achkovska, “Zhenata na Moon pristiga u nas”, *Troud*, 266 (13 November 1993).

RELIGION IN EASTERN EUROPE XXIII, 6 (December 2003) page 47.

<sup>19</sup> Moon. A Bulgarian army officer from Plovdiv participated in a mass wedding in 1994 without asking for leave. After that he was not only sacked but he was also given a suspended sentence of six months in prison.

The Unification church activities increased sharply in Bulgaria in 1996-1997. In June 1996 the Family Federation for Unity and World Peace and the Women’s Federation for World Peace conducted meetings in Sofia attended by some 200 participants. A seminar of coordinators from the Balkan countries took place in Bankya near Sofia in March 1996. There was an attempt to form a Bulgarian branch of the World Federation of Families for Peace in November 1996 but it was foiled.<sup>20</sup> The authorities reacted violently. Armed police stormed into Moonies’ houses in Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Kyustendil, Asenovgrad, Petrich and Rila and confiscated large amounts of books, lectures, journals, posters and photos. This concerted action revealed that all Unification church followers in Bulgaria were closely monitored and spied upon. The protests tabled by the church in the courts were rejected.<sup>21</sup>

In August 1997 the leaders of the Unification church in Bulgaria gave a press conference, during which they claimed that their followers numbered about 400 and that 10 000 families were sympathetic to the cause. These figures are considered to be wildly exaggerated. The committed members must be no more than 50 who live ascetically in isolated communes. At least three of them have committed or tried to commit suicide.<sup>22</sup>

In many cases families were given the equivalent of 5 USD if they opted for a Unification

wedding.<sup>23</sup> Part of the official salvo against the church was the publication of two books. The first one was a translation from the Russian translation of a book by the German Protestant

<sup>19</sup> Damian Anderson (damian@unification.net) in a message dated 5 August 1995 to D'Angelo Carmine(dcarmine@sun0.urz.uni-heidelberg.de), <http://www.unification.net/faq/uniffaq04.html>.<sup>20</sup> B. Asenov, Op. cit., p. 296.<sup>21</sup> “Pravata na choveka v Bulgaria prez 1997”, <http://www.bghelsinki.org/bg/annual/bg1997.html>; “Pravatana choveka v Bulgaria prez 1998”, <http://www.bghelsinki.org/bg/annual/bg1998.html>).<sup>22</sup> B. Asenov, Op. cit., pp. 297-298.<sup>23</sup> “Moonisti razdavat po USD 5 za venchavka”, 24 chasa, 208 (1 August 1997).

RELIGION IN EASTERN EUROPE XXIII, 6 (December 2003) page 48.

missionary Thomas Gandow.<sup>24</sup> It was followed by the memoirs of Moon's daughter-in-law Han Suk Hong which disclosed that the atmosphere in the “divine” household was far from perfect.<sup>25</sup>

In February 2000 about 80 Bulgarian Moonists took part in a mass wedding and a demonstration in Seoul against promiscuity.<sup>26</sup> The Family federation for World Peace, whose leader in Bulgaria is Biser Boichev, staged a well advertised seminar at the luxurious Sheraton Hotel in Sofia in March 2002. This time the authorities did not dare to breakup the gathering but instead State President Georgi Purvanov forcefully retired a female official who worked in his office and sent a congratulatory telegramme to the seminar.<sup>27</sup> The Federation promised to publish its own newspaper in Bulgaria but its intention has not been realised yet.<sup>28</sup>

Bulgaria is striving to enter NATO in 2004 and the EC (European Community) in 2007, and it is looking forward to increased economic and cultural cooperation with Korea. Its cat-and-mouse chase with the Unification church hardly contributes to

enhancing its image as a democratic country nurturing religious freedom. Bulgaria is still struggling to come to terms with its communist past and it is riddled by widespread corruption and lack of morals. One may not welcome the divine claims of Rev. Sun Myung Moon but his insistence on traditional Christian family and ethical values deserves attention. One hopes that the Unification church will be registered in due course in Bulgaria and it will be enabled to operate within the limits established by the law.

T. Gandow, *Imperiata na Moon* (Sofia, 1999). Its text is available on the Internet as well:

<http://tavor.hit.bg/chitalnia/knigi/moon.htm>.

25 H. S. Hong, *Moiat zhivot pri Moon* (Sofia, 2000).

26 -S. -H. -Choe, "500 -Attend -Sex -Rally -in -S. -Korea, "

<http://www.unification.net/news/2000/news20000212.html>.

27 "Purvano v -pensionira -chinovnichkata, -sgaf ila -s -pismoto -do -Moon " ,

<http://www.segabg.com/19032002/p0020010.asp>.

<sup>28</sup> O. Stoyanova, "Posledovatelite na M oon shte izdavat svoy vestnik", *Dnevnik* (19 March 2003).