

# Moonies

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outlines the church's beliefs and goals.

Morrison estimates there are currently about 40,000 Unificationists in the United States and about 3 million in 127 nations. The largest concentration of Unificationists is not in the United States, but in Korea and Japan. But sceptics say the American Unification movement numbers about 4,000.

Moon came to the United States in 1972 and entered the public spotlight when he supported former Pres. Richard Nixon during the Watergate scandal.

Moon now owns four estates throughout the United States worth more than \$3 million. The Unification Church also has extensive holdings in Central America, particularly in Uruguay, where the church reportedly has invested almost \$100 million in the city of Montevideo.

Some have called Uruguay the Switzerland of South America, raising sceptics' contentions that the Unification Church is nothing more than a business organized to amass financial and political power. In addition, the National Council of Churches has contested the Unification Church's claim that it is a Christian organization.

When the 63-year-old Moon was convicted of evading taxes of more than \$150,000 in July 1982, sceptics said the conviction proved that the Unification Church is not what it claims to be.

Morrison denies accusations that the church is primarily a money-making venture.

"It's clearly not true. Our national budget as a church is peanuts compared to other major churches," Morrison says, although he does not know the exact figure. "I know one church that makes a billion bucks on bingo each year, and what do they do with it? We're not into big buildings that are used two hours a week. But with the monies that are raised, there are significant projects going on, conferences that bring together different religions and international relief foundations that have distributed millions of funds in food and medical supplies to needy countries."

Criticisms extend beyond the church's financial holdings and anti-communistic political stance, but to its techniques for recruiting and keeping followers, as well.

Accusations of brainwashing, deception and coercion of its followers are not uncommon.

Morrison scoffs at these criticisms and says they are "hogwash, total nonsense. It is unbelievable."

He says Moon's conviction and the criticisms of the church leader are examples of religious persecution, which is common to all fledgling religions.

"I feel like that's what's happening here. We have a new religious movement and a yellow man from the East. There is a certain amount of racism. We have a potential explosive situation."

"I know Rev. Moon quite well and his wife and 13 children. He's a very sacrificial man, contrary to the public notion. He works harder than all of us. I've seen him stay up the whole night just talking to members. He's a man of deep religious commitment. It's painful to me that he has been so misunderstood in his own time, and I think that time will reveal the value of his teachings. He has good company," Morrison says, citing Christ's persecution as a similar example.

As far as people being locked up against their will, Morrison says "It's never happened."

"It's hard to get out of the University after two years," he says. "If you make a commitment to a religious way of life, it's hard to leave. But there's no

physical coercion. We do believe that it's important to be living for God at this time, so (leaving the church) is not an easy decision to make.

"Look at us. Do we look brainwashed? There was no way that anyone was ever coerced into staying. Everyone was free to go any time. There were no walls or fences."

Besides, Morrison says, people have had more traumatic experiences from overreacting parents who have snatched their children — against their will — from the Unification Church's week-end retreats or seminars.

In such instances, parents have sometimes "de-programmed" their children, which usually involves marathon discussion sessions between the parents and children.

"People have had terrible experiences from being kidnapped and violently de-programmed, which I think is a violation of a person's freedom of religion, freedom of thinking and their liberty. Period. It's illegal. If anything, that's the brainwashing — if you're coerced and locked up in a hotel room so you can't leave, and they keep you all hours of the night and blow smoke in your face and criticize your beliefs."

"That's entirely different from anything that happens in the church. We have education seminars just like going to school. We teach a set of principles that are very logical. If you choose to accept them, then you may decide to work with us," Morrison says.

Although he admits the church has made some past mistakes, it has "never been the intention of Rev. Moon" to deceive people. "He has always stressed being out front, being truthful, being proud of being a Unificationist. That is the policy of the church," Morrison says.

Criticizing the church is an example of how people often seek to discredit public figures, Morrison says.

"Look at the kinds of things any president has to deal with. There are always those who disagree with what you're doing."

But Morrison admits that being confronted by a "hostile world makes it tough to be a Moonie."

"You can't be a self-centered person and make it in the church. If you're out for a free ride and an easy time, you'll never make it. It's a life that teaches selflessness. We are working toward a revolution from selfishness. But to change the world, one has to change himself first."

Ultimately, the Unification Church hopes to usher in a New World free from violence and hatred, Morrison says, with Moon as its leader.

"The person on the street doesn't see the scope of what Rev. Moon is trying to accomplish," he says. "I feel that Rev. Moon is trying to save the world and that's what Messiah means — not some supernatural guy who walks on water and brings about miracles — but someone who is trying to bring about the resolution of conflict."

"I feel that God is working through him at this time as a prophet, as someone who is bringing an important message."

But despite the church's good intentions, Morrison says he has "been burned by the media so many times."

"How I Was Brainwashed By the Moonies" is a sexy story. It always makes headlines," he says.

"Our movement is not a cult — it's not a personality cult like Jim Jones. (Jones and his 913 followers in the cult, The Peoples Temple, committed mass suicide by drinking cyanide in Jonestown, Guyana, in 1978.) We're not into Rev. Moon. We're into discovering what's real and true in the world."

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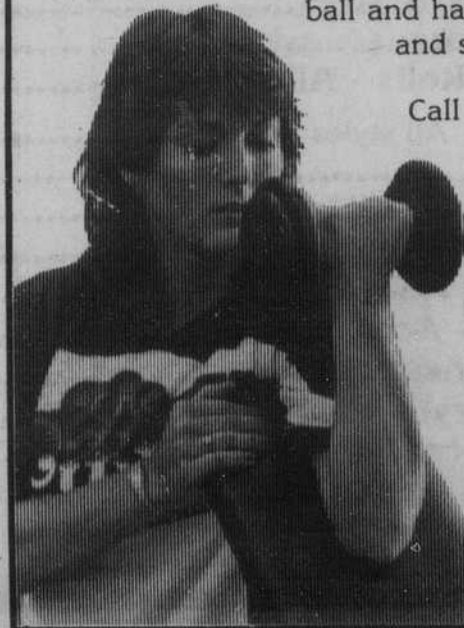
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