

Dr. Young Oon Kim's Unification Theology and Christian Thought

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Dr. Young Oon Kim

According to the oldest and most authentic stratum of Gospel tradition, John the Baptist and Jesus preached a simple yet bold message: "The Kingdom of God is at hand." Upon that basis, disciples were attracted and Christianity as an organized religious movement was born.

Church historians report that early Christianity expended most of its energy countering opposition. The Christians of the sub-apostolic age had to answer three basic charges levelled at them by their enemies—that they engaged in notoriously immoral acts, that they were only a political movement in the disguise of a religion, and that they were nothing but one more exotic cult imported from the occult East. What the irresponsible mass media and the fundamentalistic preachers are now saying about Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Unification Church was earlier said about the Christians of the Roman Empire.

After it had silenced the critics and replied to the campaign of smear and innuendo, the ancient Church tried to relate itself in a positive fashion to the world of the intellectuals. Particularly in the Egyptian city of Alexandria, Christians entered into a process of dialogue with the prominent religious philosophers. The publication of Dr. Young Oon Kim's "Unification Theology and Christian Thought" signifies an upward step to this higher level of witnessing.

Dr. Kim has the distinct advantage of being singularly well qualified to initiate this new advance for Unification Church. As a graduate of a Japanese theological seminary and a former professor in the fields of New Testament and comparative religions in a Korean university as well as a student at Canadian and American universities, she is very much at home in the academic and theological world.

At the present time, about 500 million people follow the teachings of Mohammad, the Prophet of Islam, and those closest to that remarkable Arab religious leader were known as his companions. To use Muslim language, among the select "companions" of Rev. Sun Myung Moon, Dr. Young Oon Kim alone has the professional training, technical skills and scholarly background to explain the theological implications of Divine Principle to seminary students, educated clergymen of the older denominations and well-read Christian laymen.

Archbishop William Temple of the Anglican Church once said that the ecumenical movement is the great new fact of our time. Having been a Korean representative at several interdenominational Christian conferences in Europe, Dr. Kim naturally displays in her book an awareness and appreciation of the variety of forms Christian theology has taken. Unification Theology and Christian Thought illustrates Divine Principle with materials drawn from a wide range of sources: Lutheran, Calvinist, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Jehovah's Witness, Methodist, fundamentalist and modernist Christians.

In fact, one will be amazed by the unusual number of parallels which can be found between what Unification theology affirms and what other theologians are saying. After reading her book, no one will be able to say that the Unification Church is not a legitimate expression of the Christian tradition when seen in its wholeness.

For example, the Unification Church's doctrine of the Fall is quite often accused of being a curious misreading of the Genesis account. Such a criticism seems valid until one takes time to examine with care what Jewish rabbis in the post-Old Testament period and Christian writers in the days prior to the Nicæan

Council of 325 A.D. had to say about the meaning of the Adam-Eve account.

The fact is that several prominent rabbis and a sizeable number of Christian authorities suggested an interpretation of the Garden of Eden narrative like that taught by Divine Principle.

Or take another case. Not long ago a young Methodist minister came to see me, obviously distressed by what he had read in a newspaper about our teaching concerning the unfinished mission of Jesus. Where did we ever get such strange ideas? he wondered. Actually, a study of what many theologians and New Testament scholars have discovered in a century-long search for the "Jesus of history" tends to confirm the conclusions of Unification theology.

Dr. Kim's book gives numerous illustrations of such corroborating evidence. In New Testament exegesis and in Christology, there are many points of contact between Divine Principle and what is being taught in the theological seminaries of the major Christian denominations.

Careful historical study of the Judea-Christian scriptures began a hundred years ago, yet even now there are unfortunately far too many devout laymen almost totally oblivious to what has taken place in this area. Since World War II four unusual developments have occurred. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls gave us firsthand knowledge of what some Jews were thinking about the time Jesus carried out his ministry. At last we had some light on sectarian Judaism which existed apart from Pharisaic legalism and Sadducean temple religion. Secondly, in Egypt another equally important literary treasure was uncovered.

Again, quite by accident, a library of Gnostic writings was found which gave us new information about the theological climate in the early days of Christianity prior to Nicaea. Thirdly, the creation of the Zionist state of Israel prompted a re-examination of the Zealot freedom fighters against Rome in the first century. Were they just deluded fanatics or were they patriot martyrs? Since Jesus was executed as a Zealot, what one thinks of this crusade for Jewish liberation is important. Finally, Professor Rudolf Bultmann of Marburg in Germany produced his startling demand to "de-mythologize" the New Testament. Dr. Kim's book takes into account all of these significant modern controversies. Possibly, just possibly everything from the Dead Sea Scrolls to Bultmann's essay were God's way of preparing the churches for new light to break forth.

These brief comments on two or three chapters should suggest the general approach taken in Unification Theology and Christian Thought. Starting with the basic teachings of Divine Principle, Professor Kim explains their meaning in terms of the books and ideas being discussed in the major seminaries of Christendom today. In one sense, what she does is provide an "illustrated edition" of Divine Principle.

Far too often Christians have misrepresented and ridiculed those with whom they differed in matters of faith or practice. Dr. Kim's book is free from all such bias. Every effort is made to let the various theologians speak their own minds. We can all learn from Paul Tillich, Karl Barth or Emil Brunner, for example. Divine Principle becomes even more inspiring and instructive when looked at from different angles and viewed through the eyes of others.

This new book is the first to explain what the Unification Church believes in the context of contemporary Christian thought. Because the field is such a broad one, it was virtually impossible to deal with every theologian and school of thought in the modern world. In the years to come, those who are so inclined may prepare in-depth studies of Unification theology and process philosophy or Roman Catholic thought or the mystical tradition of Eastern Orthodoxy, for instance. As a result of Dr. Kim's pioneering work future Unification theologians can look forward to many years of creative research and scholarly endeavor.

Unification Theology and Christian Thought should be useful for two rather different kinds of readers.

It seems to have been specifically designed to explain Divine Principle to thoughtful Christians in the main-line denominations. The minister or priest, seminarian or college student should find this book of great intellectual stimulation.

But Dr. Kim has prepared a publication which will also be of inestimable value for the Unification Church member. He can gain greater understanding of what is taking place in the theological world today and see more clearly the significance of his own faith.