

Fundraising

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When I look back now on my MFT days (that's Mobile Fundraising Team days) and I read my diaries, I am shocked. I am embarrassed at my own narrowness and simplicity and childlike faith. I am even more embarrassed by how pure I was and how innocent I was and that I, in a way, miss those days.

Sun Myung Moon in talking to my Seminary class, once said that when he was in prison in North Korea he felt that God walked beside him every day and that at night when he slept even God stayed next to him. He said "In some ways I miss those days in prison."

My understanding in my own life of faith is that my MFT days were a tiny bit like that. It was a very simple and primitive time in my faith; yet I felt there were incredible precious moments with God. It was also a certain time in my own course (and even in the course of the Unification Church) that cannot and should not be repeated.

I will somehow try to describe it.

Again, as I mentioned before, the theological/philosophical understanding taught by the Unification Church about fundraising begins with Adam and Eve. (!?!). When Adam and Eve fell, they became beings of Original Sin. They became beings who carried both God's original nature (albeit not yet matured) and beings who had also received elements of the very nature of Satan. Originally, Adam and Eve were to be masters of all creation, but because of their sin, Adam and Eve, and their descendants, actually fell below the rest of creation which was without sin. This is why we see in the history of religions that in the earlier stages of religion, and still manifested in the more primitive forms of religion today, man has actually offered up things to God.

There are different stages of maturity in religions, and in the religious life of individuals. In the lowest stages men offer things to God based on fear, in a more mature stage they offer obedience to God's Laws based on loyalty, in yet a still more mature level men offer good deeds based on love of God, and on an even higher level men and God are inseparable, sharing the same heart.

In one's own religious life one also has to go through these stages.

MFT, (short for mobile fundraising teams) was, at least for myself, a religious act of faith.

First of all it was an offering, pure and simple. The very fact that I was out working 12 to 24 hours in a given day and not asking anything and handing all the money over to the Church, HAD to be recognized and accepted by God. I thought about this often, and I realized that even if Sun Myung Moon was Satan in disguise and had fooled me into doing this, that my motivation was still honest and pure and that it was therefore God's responsibility to show me if there was anything wrong with my offering.

The day for an MFTer actually began the night before. Each evening one prayed about the day to come, and one made a financial "goal". The idea of the goal was to try to make an offering to God, and that this was the offering one would try to make. The amount of the goal was to be realistic yet very difficult; a goal that could only be achieved by one's own 100%. The standard understanding was that good people in the spiritual world would help us to achieve our goal, by influencing from the spiritual world the people on earth we fundraised to. Each evening's prayer would be a reflection on how my own attitude had been during the day. If I did not make my goal, it was either because my attitude had been wrong, I had not worked hard enough, or that I was missing some key point that God was trying to show me....

It was a spiritual discipline. It was not just the external offering of so many dollars that I turned in each day, but more important was my internal content of the day. What I was really offering to God each day was why I was raising money, and how I treated each person I came into contact with each day. It was a daily struggle, a spiritual battle with both heaven and hell watching and trying to influence both me and each person I talked to. Each person I met was placed in my path by heaven for my sake and their sake. Each person was a mirror for me to see my own weaknesses or my own beauty in front of God. (And if

they did not give, well forgive them and hope to leave a good feeling to them still, that maybe the next chance they had it might be easier for them to give.)

I approached each person with the attitude that they had a chance to give money directly to God's Providence, that God's very special representative, Sun Myung Moon, was now on earth and it was a lucky moment for them to be able to help. Whether people gave a donation or not was actually a very important moment in their life, although they themselves could not really know that.

This is what we were taught and believed. But some Unification Church members did not think about this point fully and deviated from God's Principle. One dreadful cancer that invaded MFT was the idea of "heavenly deception", that one should even trick someone or lie to someone if it was seen necessary to get the donation, whatever it took.... The media, of course, had a field day with this one.

One reason that the Restoration of Humankind has taken so many thousands of years is that God cannot separate the means and ends. Yes, it was important that people gave, but it was also important that they did so from a good reason, from their own heart. Many Unification Church members forgot this point, that each person also has their own portion of responsibility, and that this ultimate eternal dignity of each individual cannot be denied. Therefore if one cheats or steals or lies to another to get the money for "God", is this really an offering that God can accept?? Some people thought, "Yes because I am getting the money with a pure heart." But the deeper point is that the person who is actually giving the money is also part of the offering. If that person later feels resentful or hateful because they were lied to and thought they were donating to something else, then I believe, that this nullifies the offering, let alone the fact that they end up believing that Sun Myung Moon and his people are a bunch of no good liars who cheat people of their money.

So this was a point where many Unification Church people failed because of what I call religious arrogance. Some Unification Church leaders (especially the Japanese leaders here) even taught that "Heavenly deception" was okay, because later when people really understood who Sun Myung Moon was that they would be so grateful that they had been tricked into giving money to Sun Myung Moon. But I always thought that this was wrong, that it was totally wrong. Instead of helping people to come closer to Sun Myung Moon, I thought that it would only make it so much harder for people to believe that Sun Myung Moon was a good man if they were lied to or deceived by his followers.

I know many Unification Church people to this day believe that this was the greatest failure of the Unification Church in America, that this spiritual arrogance manifested in "heavenly deception" greatly damaged the reputation of Sun Myung Moon. I have heard some Unification Church members talk about the failure of MFT in America being that we forgot the means, went only for the goal, and in taking this "spiritual shortcut" lost the respect of the people in the USA - if we had all worn ID cards, and even if it meant more persecution and taking a "pounding" daily, we could have totally won the respect of the American people.

I am still proud of those MFT times. There was a certain sense of freedom and lightness that was almost unfathomable in a fundraising day. There was, on many many days, an incredible "high" of the purity of the offering, of the purity of approaching people being completely "empty" in terms of not judging them whether they gave or not, only just offering them the opportunity. At the end of the MFT day there was the prayer, which was many times a very deep experience. There were days when I was absolutely exhausted, and could think of the hundreds of people I had approached in the parking lots and the wide range of emotions that had been returned upon my approach. And I could feel that this was, in a very real sense, what God himself has been experiencing for thousands of years -- trying to get people to sacrifice so that they could be saved, and being misunderstood rejected and accused.

And there were some very special days, when the entire day felt like a continuous prayer, like a continuous dialogue with God, when God seemed to be right with me all day and I felt so much energy in the air and even the people seemed to be extremely influenced by spiritual world with their reactions being magnified by the influence of spirits - people becoming extremely good or extremely negative - possessed by good or evil spiritual world right in front of me. The air seemed to buzz with energy all day long and I felt such a tenderness, a love, for every person I talked to. It was not totally rational, it was more of a "feeling", and even if its very difficult to describe, it was very real and it was these special days that kept me going and gave me faith.

Yes there were those days when I felt that God was walking next to me, watching me, even thanking me for my work. I felt loved by God. It was not logical, it was not something you could "show" someone; but it was real and it was incredibly beautiful. On those days you could feel how the early Christian saints could go singing to their deaths, because there was nothing else in the world that could match that feeling of being loved by God.

But these days were only occasionally. They were special, they were a blessing that God could not give every day. Usually the life of the MFT fund-raiser was pretty miserable. The special days came only often enough to let one know that the whole thing was very real, that there really was a god that cared. Usually the day was one of being rejected and humiliated by people, of trying not to resent these people, of trying not to resent this lousy life of faith which demanded such incredible sacrifice by those of us who were fortunate (or unfortunate?!?) enough to have recognized the existence of messiah on earth before others and who had to sacrifice to make the path easier for others to follow.

It was a pretty schizo feeling at times. We saw ourselves as the only ones who had understood God's providence and that this person Sun Myung Moon, whom the media had painted such an incredibly terrible image of, was actually the unrecognized savior of the world. We were the fortunate (?) ones who knew this and therefore were actually sacrificing our lives for all these same people who were humiliating and ridiculing us. The people that we fundraised to were very much like the people in Jesus' time, ignorant -- they had no idea that the messiah was actually right there in their midst. God put the messiah on earth, it was peoples' own responsibility to follow him. We saw ourselves as making a foundation for people to accept the messiah -- that we had to help build a foundation of "disciples" and a foundation of financial power for the messiah so that bad people could not destroy him and that good people could have an easier time believing. The people that we fundraised to were unknowing figures in the Restoration Process, watched by God and Satan -- asked by a total stranger to help "church work" or "Christian missionary work" or Christian youth centers" -- and if they donated then they were helping to build the foundation for the world to accept the messiah and bring in God's never-fulfilled Ideal. If they only believed the negative media and persecuted us and has us thrown in jail or beaten or some of the other crazy things that (possessed?) people sometimes did to us, then they were uniting with evil spirit world to try and stop God's Providence. Therefore when we drove our van down the interstate to the next town or city it was like we were secret agents or underground soldiers or something. It was a pretty schizo feeling at times.

Of course we could never publicly argue this case - it would only make us look really crazy. All we could do was say that Sun Myung Moon was a good man and that mistreated by the media and that we as a church had the same legal constitutional rights as every other church.

And also, the real war was not whether a person gave money or not. The real war was inside ourselves, the MFTs. It was whether we gave up and went home to friends and family. It was whether we could keep believing and remembering those "special days" when everything else practical and logical said "Quit. This is crazy! Go home. Get a career. Get a life!" And, most importantly, it was whether we could accept our role as sacrificers without resentment - God needed us to sacrifice; but could we do it out of understanding and love for his situation or would we stay only because we had to and resent the very work we were doing.

The very special days usually came after long silences from God, after days and days of struggle with people being incredibly mean and hateful, after days and days of struggle with whether this was all true, whether I could keep doing this, whether there really was a God and this really was an offering that He could accept and use...

So we found ourselves trying to be "crazy for God." Sometimes we would go out of the way to make a statement to God and to the spiritual world that we did believe and that we would not give up. So there were days when one might fast all day. Or there were days when one might work for forty hours without sleep. The whole idea was to make a statement, to make an offering.

This could be very saint like. Our it could be very crazy .

It was one thing when one decided to do it himself and it was a beautiful offering that God accepted. It was even more powerful when a whole team of 8 to 12 people united in such an offering, and at the end of the day the very van seemed to actually glow in the love of God. It was a total disaster when people were forced to do it.

One has to remember that we were basically all in our early twenties, we were young, we were not the most mature leaders or people in the world. The "team captain" was appointed in the hierarchical manner of the church and not elected. They could be saints. They could be saints who destroyed people in their own simple and immature faith. (I am reminded here of the presentation of Gandhi by the authors of the book "Freedom at Midnight")

For example I had one team leader, 19 years old, who would sometimes in his intensity to "get victory" completely forget to feed us. Many, many times he would just keep going and going and going with the team and then someone would remind him that none of us had had supper; but by that time it would be too late! (At which times my whole life of faith would be not only centered on whether or not this was

real and if I should stay in the Unification Church, but it rather upon suppressing this incredible desire to strangle this team leader !)

Yeh, and we would work from early morning until very late, often getting only three or four hours of sleep a night. There was another team leader, Hercules Pettis who used to who had something like six accidents in two months falling asleep waiting at red lights and plowing the van into the back of the car in front of him. He finally solved this accident streak by putting the transmission of the van into "park" at every red light. This created other problems, however. There were then times when he would suddenly wake up at a stop light in some small town in the middle of the night, having dozed off for a few hours; and having no idea what state he was in, what town he was in, or where he had dropped off all the members of the team!

Another team leader, Ann Glesne, was arrested for driving while intoxicated in Little Rock Arkansas because she was so sleepy that she was weaving all over the highway.

Yet another team leader, Tim Forrester, was driving all over the road fighting sleep when he was pulled over by the police. Everyone else was so conked out that they didn't even wake up with the sound of the siren. The police talked to him and realized he was indeed just sleepy . And when they shone the flashlights into the van, and observed everybody (so tired) stupid-looking and dead asleep and even some with their mouths open and drooling, they suddenly became extremely sympathetic and started giving him directions on where a coffee shop was because they thought that he was driving a bunch of mentally retarded people back to the "center"!

Jim Boothsby was another gung-ho team leader I had who could not figure out why "Satan could keep on invading". He kept having accidents from falling asleep (even in the middle of the day) and every time he would add an hour of prayer to his nightly prayers and have everyone on the team do a seven minute cold shower condition. After five accidents in less than eight weeks (all minor accidents, thank You, God!) he finally let someone else drive, and after a couple of weeks of getting a few hours more sleep every day falling asleep next to the driver, Satan somehow was conquered and we quit getting in accidents.

It was real hell sometimes when one just hadn't quite gotten enough sleep to be human. There were days when I was so sleepy that it was an incredible struggle to keep going and talking to people, and I would even find myself bumping into walls with my shoulders or bumping into the shelves in stores when fundraising shop-to-shop. My favorite story though is about Art Brown. He was in Syracuse, New York in a supermarket parking lot, and he kept falling asleep while talking to people. Right in the middle of a sentence he'd nod off asleep; and it was actually frightening the hell out of some people. So he prayed in a loud voice and determined to "overcome" and he decided just to run as hard and as fast as he could to every person he fundraised to and he would just outrun any sleep spirit. So sure enough, this lady was putting groceries into her car when all the sudden she sees this guy in an all out sprint running straight at her. Well, Art fell asleep while running and ran smack right into the side of her car, candy boxes flying everywhere and scaring this poor lady half to death.

Yeh, there were a lot of times the police were called out about our fundraisers, and it wasn't always persecution - we came across as absolutely strange. I'll never forget the time outside of Tulsa we had finished fundraising the bar strips and about three o'clock in the morning we started a forty minute prayer condition. It was out on a golf course somewhere and we were doing unison prayer and we were pretty loud and I guess somebody in one of the nearby houses called the police. They arrived while we were still all praying, and we just all kept on praying out loud with our eyes closed. They would huddle for a while and talk, and then they would walk all around and shine the flashlights in our faces and then they would go back into a huddle again. To their credit they didn't force the interruption of our prayer condition, but the team leader had to do some pretty smooth explaining....

There was this one small town in New York that I fundraised a year and a half after another team had done a "forty hour condition" offering of fundraising. I mean, it was not a big enough town for a couple of people to do five hours of fund raising in and yet a whole MFT team had assaulted this town with candy bars for a solid forty hours. A year and a half later people had not forgotten and many, many people there described the event to me. I had people tell me how they got fundraised to six times in one day, three times by the same person (who couldn't remember them after the first time...) and how with the one 24 hour diner in the town the fundraisers just kept coming in several times an hour and talking to the same people and sometimes fell asleep while they were talking! It was impossible to try to defend or explain things like this....

Again, we believed that good people in the spiritual world would help us to achieve our goal. Prayer would be a focused on my attitude during the day. If I did not make my goal, it was either because my attitude had been wrong, I had not worked hard enough, or that I was missing some key point that God was trying to show me....

There were so many days were something so dramatic would illustrate the point. So many times the money just stopped - hours would go by with nobody giving. Stopping for prayer some thought would come. Often it would be about some person who was sooo snotty or mean earlier in the day - it might make me realize that in certain ways I was exactly this same way to God or to others, it might make me realize how sad God felt that such people were so miserable.... And all of the sudden money would start pouring in; like God was saying "Yes! That's the point I wanted you to see..."

Or the time I was feeling so miserable and so abandoned by God and forty dollars short of my goal. I was blitzing a red neck bar in Nowhere, Oklahoma when the old man with leather weathered skin man pulled down the kerchief around his neck to show a deep and ancient scar that spoke decapitation.

"You really doing this for your church, boy?" He asked.

I said I was.

"See that?" he said, "I was alone when it happened and it was only me and God then. And he saved my life..." He left me a fifty on the bar and walked out with tears in his eyes.

There was one day in Oklahoma City that I had a goal of \$220. But I only had \$197 and it was getting close to 2 am in the morning. I had the team leader drop me off for one last 20 minute "blitz" down the feeder street of the highway with a couple of motels while he left to pick up the rest of the members.

The first motel was a total zero. I crossed the highway to the other motel to fundraise a very tired and amused night clerk who had already been hit three times that day by us. As I was about to leave, he mentioned that I might go out back into the courtyard as there were a bunch of fraternity guys...

Well, sure enough there was a whole fraternity in full swing there, celebrating from the earlier annual fraternity formal with several small room parties still in progress with open doors. At that time of the day and with the previous several hours' experiences, they were all feeling no pain. I was making money hand over fist with drunk fraternity guys buying flowers for their drunk dates.

One drunk frat got wise, though. "WHAT church !??" he demanded. I told him. He got possessed. At first, everyone else was too drunk to notice, the choice of colors among the flowers being an intellectually demanding task in their conditions. But he started following me from one room to the next bellowing, in that drunk "hurt" tone that drunk frats use at these times, that I was with that Sun Moon guy and don't buy the flowers.

Now inside I've got this internal prayer going, asking God what should I do to keep this guy quiet, because he's about to taint the whole group. In between rooms I decide to use shock. I set the flowers down, spin around and grab him by both shoulders, lifting him and shaking him and yelling at him strongly "I don't know what your problem is, but you better quit hassling me!!" It is like a deer in headlights. He didn't expect this. Immediately a few of his frat buddies are there.

"Hey dude, what's going on?"

"I don't know what your friends problem is, but I'm just selling flowers for my church and he's giving me a hard time. You better keep him off my back!"

"Hey, no problem. Hey, how much are the flowers?"

So I'm continuing to pull in the bucks. But out of the corner of my eye I can see that the drunk possesso is going around getting some friends riled up about who I am.

I hurry up and finish and take my money and the remaining flowers out the side exit to run around the motel and back to the highway. The possesso and two other frat guys are following me. So I'm climbing down the hill to the highway, praying and asking God what I should do. It obvious that these guys are going to try to beat me up, and I don't know whether to just let them or do defend myself with the karate skills that I do have and maybe put somebody in the hospital. Its a spiritual dilemma for me and I don't want to fight, but I don't want to just let these drunks have their way with me...

Suddenly a pickup truck, tires squealing, pulls of the highway and squeals to a stop on the feeder street right in front of me. The three drunk frats high behind a tree like something out of a three stooges movie.

The window rolls down and the driver, with a huge beard and long hair, yells in this huge booming voice, "Hey what are you doing?" His voice echoes over the whole side of the hill.

“Selling flowers for my church,” I say.

“What are those guys doing?” the driver yells in that huge booming voice.

“Well I think they’re gonna beat me up because I sold flowers to their fraternity...” I say, loud enough so that the frat guys can hear me too.

“Well goddamn!! I don’t think they should do that!” the driver yells in that same huge booming voice, and he bends down to pull out something from under his seat.

“HE’S PULLING OUT A GUN AND HE’S GONNA SHOOT THEM,” I think.

Actually its like a voice on the hill, “HE’S PULLING OUT A GUN AND HE’S GONNA SHOOT THEM!” Its almost like some spirit is screaming this, like somebody is on a public announcement system, yelling, ““HE’S PULLING OUT A GUN AND HE’S GONNA SHOOT THEM” I am not just imagining this, because the three frat guys hear this too, and they start running like hell away - because “HE’S PULLING OUT A GUN AND HE’S GONNA SHOOT THEM.”

I have a brief moment of panic because I think that he is actually gonna pull out a handgun and start shooting at these three scrambling souls on the hill. But instead its a wallet that the driver pulls out from under his seat, “how much are they?” he asks, in a voice that is somehow suddenly a fraction of the volume it was previously...

The team leader pulls up as the truck leaves. I have made my goal, and more....

I could spend a whole book just on fundraising stories. Especially since I lead a team for a half a year in Kansas, which was a particularly negative area for us. Some members had come from prominent families there, and the press had been particularly nasty. Even senator Dole had been dragged into all the negativity about Unification Church.

One time the police in a mid-size town “arrested me” and I suddenly found myself brought into a room in front several of the town’s local ministers, who proceeded to try to save me.

Another time I was arrested six times in one day by the police in a town in Kansas. They would take all the way to the police station and just let me out on the sidewalk. Six times. Everybody else on the team got the same treatment, two to five times a person.

Another time the state police followed our van over two hundred miles and several hours. Every time that we tried to stop and check into a motel, they would go talk to the clerk and then he would tell us that we could not check in. As we kept going further down the highway, trying to put distance between us and there redneck cops, another state trooper car would be waiting for us, alerted by radio.

Another time our van was suddenly surrounded by four state police cars who forced us off the road and searched the van.

Another time I went into the police station, and asked if we needed any permits to fundraise in the town. I was told no. Within an hour everyone had been arrested for “disturbing the peace”. Later the MFT regional headquarters remembered that they were suppose to tell me to stay away from that town - the previous year the police had taken some of the male members of a fundraising team into the woods, stripped them naked, and beat them up.

Other towns were more social. I remember one police chief who, when asked about a permit, starting laughing uproariously and with tears in his eyes said, “Hell no, boy. You don’t need a permit.... But the folks here will kill you.”

He was right. It wasn’t always the police who gave us problems. There was one town we were fundraising that was incredibly negative. All day long the members of the team were having shotguns poked in their face when they rang doorbells. By sundown we became aware that a small posse of young men had come together to get us. We were hightailing it out of town when we suddenly had a small army of pickup trucks, cars, and a motorcycle tearing down the road after us. As the started to surround us on the highway, I pulled an incredibly sharp braking turning maneuver that took us off a highway exit while the pickup posse went barreling down the road. Only a motorcycle, with two rednecks on it, managed to

make the turn. A little later I applied the brakes and the motorcycle went off the highway and down the grassy hill.

Now I was dying inside. I never intended for the motorcycle to go off the highway. I had no idea if they were smashed up and hurt, or even worse. But also there was no way that I could go back and check on them, because the pickup posse mob would be there soon, and there was no doubt in any of our minds that we would get hurt or killed if they got their hands on us.

It was incredibly quiet in the van. Everyone was scared and everyone was praying. Including myself. I remember thinking that I could very well go to prison in this redneck country. I was praying that those guys weren't hurt. I was praying that nothing that happened would damage the reputation of Sun Myung Moon, that the reputation of the Messiah should not be tainted by the actions of these rednecks or by my own actions.... And I was praying repentance for whatever failures on my part had led to present situation....

About thirty minutes later my prayers were answered when I noticed that the motorcycle was following us in the dark, with its lights out on the highway.

We traveled further up the highway and, ninety miles away from where the pickup posse had started, we pulled into a huge truck stop. I drove off to the back of the lot and I told everyone to act like they were asleep. Sure enough, several minutes later the motorcycle guys snuck up to the van to take a look. When they saw we were seemingly asleep, they took off to go get their buddies.

As soon as they left, we took off and an hour further up the highway road took an intersecting highway to assure that we lost that mob forever. It was very late and we were all emotionally exhausted when we checked into a motel. When I called MFT regional headquarters I got a sermon preached to me about our low results for the day.....

When I began thinking about writing this book I taped interviews with different church members. Some of their stories were extreme, to say the least. But one thing that amazed me was that people could not just tell the stories - they also, almost always, had to describe what they were thinking about and praying about when all these crazy things were happening.

It is really impossible to convey how intensely internal/psychological/spiritual the whole MFT experience was.

One interview was with Mike Huntington, who was shot while fundraising in the middle of the night. He described to me the thoughts, emotions and prayers he went through while he dragged his paralyzed body with his arms three blocks in a Queens New York factory area not knowing if he was going to live or die.

It was incredible to hear his story/testimony. The amazing thing was while he was describing this most serious life-or-death experience, at the same time he was laughing with tears in his eyes as he also described the theological thoughts and prayers he went through while he was dragging his paralyzed body down the concrete - thoughts and prayers that only another MFTer could appreciate....

For one and a half years I drank my coffee standing up at the counters at coffee shops. I did not want to sit down, I wanted to show God that it was only out of necessity that I was stopping at all. I thought sometimes of the story of Gideon's soldiers who took water at the stream; and that God looked at the way they drank their water as indicative of their overall attitude towards their mission, choosing those to serve Him by the way they drank their water.

My last day on MFT was a Sunday, a six hour workday in ninety five degree temperature. I drank my coffee that day standing up, but I was not making my goal that day. It was getting close to pick up time, and when I was repenting about this and telling God I was sorry that I was not better for Him, I had one of those special moments with God. I just had the deepest feeling that He knew my heart and that He appreciated this attitude. When the team leader picked me up, he told me I would be catching a plane tomorrow morning and leaving the team. I was being called to go the Unification Theological Seminary, and that I would not be coming back....