

Jack Corley on BBC Radio Discusses Whether the Unification Church Will Survive Passing of its Founder

Ariana Moon
January 9, 2013



BBC Radio 4's program "Beyond Belief" featured on January 7, 2013 a 30-minute discussion about the future of the Unification Church now that its founder and leader, the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, has passed away. Joining host Ernie Rae were Professor Eileen Barker, Director of Inform, an Information Network focusing on New Religious Movements, George Chrystides, Honorary Research Fellow in Contemporary Religion at the University of Birmingham and Jack Corley, Director of the United Kingdom branch of the Unification Church. The program can be accessed here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01pnmjx>

On the initial topic of Rev. Moon's passing, Corley said that the church leader is "still very much alive" to many members around the world. Professor Barker pointed out that the church needs a membership to survive, and that its future will depend on second-generation Unificationists because the "rate of conversion isn't very high at the moment." Discussion about Rev. Moon's charismatic character followed, drawing the observation from Barker that one does not need to see a person for that person to be charismatic, as many members who joined did not come in contact with Rev. Moon himself.

In response to questions from host Ernie Rae, Corley summarized the mission of Jesus as understood by Unificationists as having had "to marry and have a family and create a model that was never created by Adam and Eve in the beginning of history – a family under God, with God's love, wife and children." In addition, he said that the purpose of the church's mass weddings was "a public statement of the importance of the family, a commitment to the need for families to build a foundation for peace in society and to demonstrate it to a world becoming very confused about family issues."

Barker interjected with the idea that the mass weddings were more than symbolic affirmation. "There was also the Holy Wine Ceremony, during [which] the blood lineage of the people would be changed in some important way so that the children born of their union would be born without original sin," she said. Barker and Chrystides cited examples of "heavenly deception," or when members slipped holy wine into the drink of their loved ones outside the church in hopes that they would then gain access to the kingdom of heaven, yet Corley said that these church members were simply reaching out in "a very sincere way" with what they thought of as "an act of salvation."

On the following topic of brainwashing, Barker implied that if brainwashing techniques were used by the Unification Church, they were apparently inefficient due to the low retention rate of members. "I did a study of over a thousand people who were interested enough in the Unification Church to go to one of their workshop where these so-called techniques would be applied, but 90 percent of them said, 'Thanks very much, we don't want to be a Unificationist,' and

for the 10 percent who [stayed], the majority of them left of their own free will in a couple of years,” she said.

Corley said that when the charges against the Unification Church for kidnapping and physically restraining members were shown to be not true, critics of the church turned to alleging “brainwashing” as a convenient idea with which to attack. “I would rather use the word, ‘heartwashing,’ [because] that was my experience,” he said. “I was moved, and I was convinced intellectually and in my heart of the truth of the Divine Principle, and I made a choice.”

Richard Barlow, who joined the Unification Church in the 1960s and was Blessed in Marriage by Rev. Moon in Korea in 1975, joined the conversation midway to share his experiences. He explained that he has distanced himself from the church because it “was not there to help” when his daughter fell ill and because of the rumors of scandals involving Rev. Moon and his children, which involved the possibility of “concubines and illegitimate children.” To him, the movement has become a personality cult and a monarchy, and cannot survive the death of its founder in this present form.

Barker also pointed out the near certainty of schisms with the church as “people will reinterpret and are already reinterpreting the Divine Principle in different ways.” Along the same lines, Chryssides mentioned the inordinate amounts of money spent on lawsuits that are an attempt to determine which part of a current “schism” between Rev. Moon’s sons will emerge victorious. “Ultimately, it’s the money that determines what aspects of the religion actually survive,” he said. “We tend to think, when we study religion, that it’s about prayer and meditation and so on, but religions need money to keep going.”

According to Corley, the issue about the lawsuits refers to properties in Korea which were purchased by the efforts of members worldwide, and the money is being spent to recover those properties from being misused. He also clarified that Rev. Moon’s children could take responsibility on an administrative level, but none are going “to be inheritors of the mission, because only Rev. and Mrs. Moon able to fulfill that mission.”

Another topic addressed were allegations against Rev. Moon for having had sexual relationships with multiple women, to which Chryssides said that “It’s often characteristic of a religious leader that they can make the rules but at the same time be above the rules,” as well as the fact that the church owns a gun factory.

When asked, “What one piece of advice would you give to the Unification Church as a survival strategy?” Corley provided an answer that resonated with Mrs. Sun Myung Moon’s recent messages of returning to Divine Principle lecturing. “We should get back to the very roots of our movement,” he said, “which lies in the Divine Principle teaching and to the spirit of the earlier days. Second, I think that we must become much better at managing ourselves as an organization and developing a more caring and loving ministry.”

As a final comment, Chryssides said, “I’m reminded of what Rev. Moon himself said to the American people when there was the controversy many years ago about impeaching Nixon: ‘Forgive, love, unite.’ I think if the Unification Church leaders could take that on board, there would be a way forward.”