

Rev. Moon's Unrecognized Influences on Christian Theology

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March 23, 2015



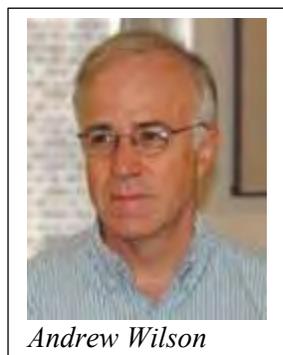
Although members and friends of the Unification Church recognize the awesome significance of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon, what about his importance for those who do not believe—specifically to conventionally-minded Christians? While some enlightened Christians have learned to love and appreciate his church as a new and uniquely Asian manifestation of the Christian faith, or his works on behalf of interreligious unity or anticommunism, for the most part Christians have been dismissive of him.

Yet in fact, Rev. Moon has been influencing Christianity quietly and unbeknownst to them through some of the new teachings he shared with the world in the Divine Principle. I say “indirectly” because often the causality is not determined. Perhaps Rev. Moon was an early proponent of certain

teachings that were already in the *zeitgeist* of the late 20th century. Or perhaps God, in seeking to plough the field for Rev. Moon, moved to open Christianity’s theological horizons so it would be receptive to his proclamation. After all, God is the Source of truth, even the truths revealed by Rev. Moon. Suffice it to say that the theological landscape of Christianity in the early 21st century is quite different from what it was in the early 20th century, and many of those differences are congruent with Rev. Moon’s teachings.

Let me share five such instances:

1. The suffering of God



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Dr. Chang Shik Yang observed, Rev. Moon “plainly teaches about God’s sorrowful situation... after His children’s fall and their expulsion from Eden, God the Father became the God of sorrow and grief, who every day sheds countless tears and emits mournful sighs.”

Traditional Christians have long held that God is impassible, standing outside the suffering and misery of human life. Yet today many Christians have revised their theology to include the idea that God suffers. Japanese Christian theologian Kazoh Kitamori, professor at Tokyo Union Theological Seminary, wrote of this in *The Theology of the Pain of God*, which was published in 1946, just one year after Rev. Moon began his public ministry. This idea influenced

the internationally famous theologian Jürgen Moltmann in his book the *Theology of Hope*. More recently, Terence Fretheim, a major biblical theologian, wrote *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (1984), in which he speaks at length about God’s vulnerability because of His covenant relationship with humankind. Interestingly, this book was well received in America, with little controversy.

2. Qualifying God’s omnipotence and omniscience

The Divine Principle upholds the principle of the human “portion of responsibility, with which even God does not interfere.” This qualifies God’s omnipotence and omniscience, because “God’s purpose of creation can be realized only when human beings complete their portion of responsibility.” In contrast,

traditional Christian theology holds to God's absolute omnipotence and absolute omniscience: God is responsible for everything and knows in advance the choices that human beings will make in the future. This is especially stressed in Calvinism with its doctrine of double predestination: God predestines people before they are born either to heaven and others to hell, and He knows which way they will turn.

However, recently in Evangelical Christian circles, the movement called Open Theism has arisen, which takes a position quite close to that of Divine Principle. Open Theism is the belief that God does not exercise meticulous control of the universe but leaves it "open" for humans to make significant choices, in free will, that impact their relationships with God and others. This means that God has not predetermined the future. Nor does God know everything that will happen in the future. This allows God to be surprised, and even delighted, by what human beings do out of love. Since God is most essentially love, God designed the created world such that human beings would give Him delight by what they do, in freedom. Proponents of Open Theism include Clark Pinnock and John Sanders, who wrote *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, which won a Book of the Year award in 1995.

These contemporary Christian thinkers draw their strength from the way God is depicted in the Bible, where He is often portrayed as disappointed with human choices. However, while the Bible has been around for thousands of years, Open Theism only developed after Rev. Moon wrote and proclaimed the Divine Principle.

3. God as Heavenly Mother as well as Heavenly Father



Rev. Moon meets with theologians at East Garden in 1979

Jesus prayed to God as his Father, and traditional Christian belief is nearly unanimous in calling God, Father (There is, however, a suppressed or hidden teaching about Mother God in Mormonism). In contrast, the Principle of Creation teaches that God has dual characteristics of masculinity and femininity. This is based on the scriptural teaching that the image of God is both male and female (Gen. 1:27). Accordingly, the full embodiment of God on earth requires not just a male Christ but a couple — True Parents — who are to fulfill God's ideal for Adam and Eve as the substantial

being of God.

To underline this teaching, just prior to Foundation Day, Mrs. Hak Ja Han Moon declared on January 7, 2013 that we should refer to God not as Heavenly Father but as "Heavenly Parent." The word "parent" in Korean is *bumo*, "father-mother."

This was not her own invention; she was reaffirming what her husband Rev. Moon had been teaching since the very beginning of his ministry. In 1951 he wrote in *Wolli Wonbon*:

A couple represents Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother. Spouses stand as object partners who are extremely precious to each other. Therefore, they should respect and attend each other on behalf of Heavenly Father and Mother. (*Wolli Wonbon*, manuscript, p. 368)

What is interesting is that after the Moons' Holy Wedding in 1960 which established this messianic reality in both genders, mainstream Christians began to explore God's femininity as well. Beginning in the 1970s Christian feminists, including Phyllis Trible, Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza and Mary Daly, began to speak out about this ignored dimension of God and about God's manifestation in the lives of Her daughters as well as His sons. The late UTS professor Young Oon Kim recognized these Christians as grasping an essential truth, writing in *Unification Theology* (1980): "As theologian Mary Daly insists, modern theism must go *Beyond God the Father*."

4. God's ideal is marriage and family, not the celibate life

For 2,000 years Christianity has upheld the special value of celibacy as the lifestyle most closely following the way of Christ. Yet Rev. and Mrs. Moon proclaim that in a Blessed Marriage God is more fully present than to a celibate monk or nun. They confronted the Catholic Church on this issue when in

2001 they blessed Emmanuel Milingo, a Roman Catholic archbishop from Zambia, with a Korean woman, Maria Sung. This created an international sensation that rocked the Catholic world. For a time, Milingo separated from his wife in obedience to Church authorities, but in 2006 he rejoined her and began campaigning for a married priesthood, forming an advocacy organization “Married Priests Now!”

Yet even apart from Milingo, voices within the Catholic Church have been growing ever more insistent that it drop its celibacy rule and allow a married priesthood. Since 1960 an increasing number of priests and nuns have forsaken the vow of celibacy and marrying, even though it meant stepping down from their priestly office. Many of these devout men and women of God do not view their decision as a fall from grace but rather a positive step on their journey of faith. Today, many high-ranking Catholic leaders question whether this practice should continue. Even Pope John Paul II said in 1993 that celibacy “does not belong to the essence of priesthood.” Recently, Pope Francis remarked that celibacy “is a matter of discipline, not of faith. It can change.”

5. Jesus was supposed to marry

One of Rev. Moon’s most controversial teachings about Jesus Christ was that he was supposed to marry and raise a family. In his speeches, Rev. Moon spoke about Jesus’ intended bride as John the Baptist’s sister. For traditional Christians this seems blasphemous. Yet in the Christian cultural world of North America, millions of people now believe that Jesus may well have been married to Mary Magdalene, on the strength of Dan Brown’s best-selling novel, *The Da Vinci Code* (2003), and the popular movie (2006) of the same name. Today numerous Christians are at least open to the possibility.

Rev. Moon anticipated this development more than 50 years earlier. In *Wolli Wonbon*, he wrote that after Jesus’ family was unable to arrange his marriage to John the Baptist’s sister, Jesus in fact conducted a secondary course to find his bride through a relationship with Mary Magdalene. His intention was to restore Mary Magdalene from a position of fallen Eve and partner of an archangelic figure to restored Eve and partner of Jesus:

Mary Magdalene... was someone whom Judas Iscariot had feelings for, but at the same time she was absolutely obedient to Jesus and would do as he willed. Jesus... gave Mary Magdalene to Judas Iscariot to be his wife, in order that she would represent Eve in the position of Satan’s wife. Then he began the dispensation by choosing her, Judas’ wife, to be the one representative Eve whom Adam takes back. (*Wolli Wonbon*, manuscript, p. 243)

Even Dan Brown does not make the connection between Mary Magdalene and Judas Iscariot, but Rev. Moon does, and he states that Judas’ unresolved feelings of jealousy over Mary Magdalene were his primary motive for betraying Jesus.

This is not to say that Rev. Moon teaches that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were husband and wife. But their relationship existed, and occurred within a providential context to restore Eve, a wife for Jesus. Rev. Moon is clear that God intended Jesus to marry and that he and his wife would become the new Adam and Eve. And this is precisely what Rev. Moon and his wife, Hak Ja Han Moon, became.

These five of Rev. Moon’s theological insights have made an impact on the Christian world. The Christian church, which held basically to the same consistent beliefs for nearly 2,000 years, is now in a time of unprecedented theological ferment, and Rev. Moon’s teachings are at the cusp of those changes.

Adapted from “Significance of Reverend Sun Myung Moon for Christianity,” Journal of Unification Studies 15 (2014). The entire 2014 issue is now available online.

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Photo at top: Rev. Sun Myung Moon speaking at IIFWP’s (UPF) “Now is God’s Time” rally in New York, June 2005.