

Book of Following Sung Myung Moon - Chapter III - Unification Theological Seminary

Herb Mayr
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Photo date and location unknown

[Two years of monastic life in a former Catholic monastery, studying the religion of Sun Myung Moon and studying the religions of the world from teachers from the various religious traditions.]

I am incredibly grateful for the two years I spent at the seminary. In some ways they were two of the best two years of my life. It was a time to learn what others had believed and taught about the existence of God and just how the different teachings of Christianity had developed and changed over history. It was a time to really examine the teachings of the Divine Principle and see how they measured up. It was time to reflect. It was a time to try to learn about and meet God.

I still, after all these years, consider my time at the seminary a wonderful blessing.

I had never actually thought that I would return to Barrytown, for I honestly had felt that I was not pure enough or holy enough to attend the seminary. For many, many months my daily survival struggles with "Satan", police, hostile people, and parking lots of volcanic temperatures had limited my worldview.

I had been living one day at a time. My days were broken down into two-hour segments of rushing to make the goals I made for selling the flowers or candy.

When I first arrived at the seminary, I placed my one suitcase in the lobby downstairs and I went up to the chapel.

Even now as I write this (over twenty years later) I can almost feel what I felt when I went to the chapel; it was such a warm feeling and so substantial that it was almost physical. I felt embraced by God. It was almost like I had come back to his living room and He was so happy to see me. I know that sounds silly, but it's true -- it was what I felt. The really amazing thing was that as soon as started praying, I immediately remembered that night so many months before when it seemed that I felt His Heart for a moment, stumbled out of the chapel, and was reduced to tears in the snow outside. It was like God was telling me now that even He remembered that moment as something special, and He was happy that I was back in Barrytown.

Its moments like these that kept me in the Church, that kept me believing in Reverend Moon. I know that many people may think this sounds silly or self-delusionary. I know that people who have really had religious experiences know what I mean.

There's been many times, I must admit, that I have been so frustrated by these experiences later. If I had never had such experiences, it would have been so easy so many times in the last twenty plus years to leave Unification Church, and to leave the issue of "who" Sun Myung Moon is completely up to God, and go live my own life. But the fact that these various religious moments have been so incredibly real haunts me, and makes me a prisoner of my own conscience.

Then another thing happened that I will never forget. When I went downstairs to get my suitcase there were people sitting in the student lounge reading newspapers and magazines. I couldn't believe it. I just couldn't believe it! How could church members be wasting time like this!

Thus began two years of learning that God loves each and every one of us, and not because we work 12 to 16 hours a day in parking lots begging for money.

We had a few weeks before classes started, and these were basically spent having Divine Principle lectures. There were almost twice as many people here than would actually end up being in this year's seminary class, and we were told so. For many of us this would only be a few weeks away from the "field" and a chance to recharge our spiritual batteries. Most of us had come from the MFT, and to all of the sudden be sitting still in lectures for hours was an incredible change. It was almost like a psychic detoxification from running on high adrenaline for months and months (or in many people's case, years and years). Anyway, the change was dramatic and many, many people would fall asleep in almost every lecture.

Father came several times the weeks before classes started. He talked to us about his vision for the seminary. He wanted it to be the religious education center of the world, where people could come from all over the world. He wanted the very best teachers from all the religions of the world to teach here. No matter what religious tradition a person wanted to study, this would be the place to come.

He also talked a lot about what he called the "Living Theology". He kept stressing that a true "theology" is a life with God. Books meant nothing compared to actually experiencing God. He told us this so many times. He told us to make a plan for the next twenty-one years. He told us to become great people for the sake of God and the sake of the world. You have to know God, you have to win people, and you have to be successful business people -- in that order.

Which is more important in building a foundation to save a nation," he would ask, "people or money?" And he would stare each one of down so sternly, and then someone would whisper "people" then he'd break into a huge beaming smile and say "Yes, people are more important. When you have people you can always get money."

"How can you control people?" he would ask. "Do you need people to fear you or love you?" And then he would talk for several minutes, talking about how he knew that church leaders were scared of him, that he was the most feared person in the church. And then he would ask us, "What about God? Does God want to control the world by fear or by love?" And then, after circling around the point for several minutes would conclude, "Yes, you need to be strong, and to be a strong leader people should fear you. But ultimately you can only control people by true love."

Some of these times that Father came were spent down by the riverside, and we would build a fire, and the evening took on almost a mystical feeling to it. And there were a couple of times that Father had Won Pil Kim, one of the very earliest disciples, give his testimony about early times with Sun Myung Moon.

Won Pil Kim was only a teenager when the United Nations Troops penetrated North Korea and Sun Myung Moon was liberated from the death camp that he had been in for over two and a half years. In those "early days" Won Pil Kim lived with Father in Pusan, before the "Unification Church" even existed.

I loved hearing these stories. Won Pil Kim for example, would talk about how Father used to gather all the members every month and give a detailed accounting of what he had done with all the money that they had contributed. Kim said that they were all so embarrassed that the Messiah would report to them like this, and they would beg Sun Myung Moon not to do so. But then, Won Pil Kim said, he realized that Father was teaching them about "reporting" and especially the use of "public money".

Another time, he told us the story about how they had been saving for a special supper, and finally Father took all the Church "leaders" to go out to a nice supper. On the way, they met a beggar of the streets of war-torn Korea, and Father gave him all the money which they had been saving for weeks, and so they went home without going to supper.

Just a side note here, years later another of the "elders" said that actually Father had turned to the member who was carrying all the money and told him to "give him money..." The member didn't know how much to give, but since the messiah had said "give him money" he gave him all that he had. Then after the beggar had left and Father found out that all the money had been given to him, Father started laughing and said "you gave him all the money!?" (To this day I still don't know which version is true.)

Won Pil Kim also talked about when Father was in the prison camp in North Korea. He said that Father would save the cup of drinking water they were given in the evening, and instead of drinking it he would save it for early morning to cleanse himself before praying.

Just another side note here, years after graduating, there was a book published in South Korea by someone who had been in the same prison camp with Sun Myung Moon. He is not a Unification Church member and actually in his book implies that he does not agree at all with the direction that Sun Myung Moon has taken. In his book, however, he has an entire chapter, entitled "A Saint in Prison," about Sun Myung Moon. It is an amazing collaboration of the elder members' accounts of Father's time in prison. In that book the author explains that most people used dirty water to rinse off the fertilizer that they worked with daily. He says that Sun Myung Moon did not wash in the evening, and that the itchiness of the fertilizer would wake him up a couple of hours earlier than the prison wake up time. He found this out because his weak bladder had him at times waking up extremely early and he would find Sun Myung Moon in the far corner of the bathroom praying.

The thing I remember most about what Father himself said about his prison time, was when he referred to a time that God did not talk to him for a few weeks because he judged someone. It was almost a side note, because at the time he was talking about "fear" and he was saying that the only thing a man should fear is losing the love of God. Then he had mentioned this time that God would not speak to him, and he said that it was one of the most miserable times of his life.

That was such an incredibly strong statement for me and yet I didn't really know the full circumstances. Years later I found out, via Won Pil Kim's talks, that Father had verbally judged a very bad abusive trustee and, in front of many of the other prisoners, he had with only words reduced this huge physical man to putty. That was the time that God did not talk to Father for weeks, because Father's position was too high to judge one like that (-- if the messiah "writes someone off", where can that person turn to??) This much of the story I had heard before. But what I didn't know is that this was when Father almost died. This was the time in prison when Sun Myung Moon caught malaria.... I had heard both stories before but I didn't know they were related.

Perhaps the most amazing thing about the seminary that Sun Myung Moon had established was that the seminary classes were about other religions. We had an ordained Jewish Rabbi teaching Old Testament studies, an ordained Lutheran teaching New Testament studies, a Catholic Priest from Fordham teaching us philosophy, a licensed psychologist teaching psychology, and a Greek Orthodox and a wild liberal Unitarian from Harvard teaching church history. The only Unification Church member of the faculty was Dr. Young Oon Kim, a very early member who had been one of the three missionaries that Father had first sent to the United States, and she had been a theology professor at a Presbyterian university in Korea before she had met Father. Even then, the main course she taught was World Religions.

That's the confidence that Sun Myung Moon had in his own teachings. He wanted his own followers to study all the other religions of the world. He wanted us to study all the angles, all the teachings, all the religious philosophies of all of history -- and he was sure that he would prove that he was right, that what he was teaching was indeed from God.

I was in what was only the third class of the seminary. We were extremely fortunate, because at that time Sun Myung Moon came very often. Sometimes he would come specifically to talk to us. Other times he would come and just go directly out to the railroad bridge and fish off the Hudson River. There were times he came and fished for hours, in silence, and then just left. Other times he would then go up to the buildings and talk to us.

It was extremely challenging to the professors there. We believed that Sun Myung Moon was the messiah and that his words and teachings were from God. For the professors, he was the founder of this school that wrote their paychecks. He was also a religious teacher who challenged their own beliefs and their own understandings of the history of religion.

The liberal Harvard product had us all do a research paper on the Catholic doctrine of "ex-cathedra", the doctrine of the infallibility of the pope on matters of faith. It was an obvious attempt to challenge our own belief in the infallibility of Sun Myung Moon.

Another professor talked one time for the entire three hours without a break, with the expressed desire to show us that he, like Sun Myung Moon, could talk for hours.

One day that Father came I really remember most was when he was talking about how we were going to study all different theologies...and then he scrunched up his face and made a spitting motion and sound and said (as close as I can remember after so many years): "THAT is what God thinks about all those fancy theological words! You have to learn the real theology of personally living with the living, loving God!"

Later that day, he said when he was in the prison camp in North Korea that when he lay down to sleep at night he felt that God lay down right next to him. "In a way," he said, "I miss those days." And then he prayed before he left...and that was the only time that I remember seeing, in person, Father start to cry.

I have to mention the time that Father asked me how to put on the life jacket....

He had come to fish at the railroad bridge, and many of us had gone down there and stood quietly by watching him fish. I don't know whether he wanted to get away from the crowds or what but he then wanted to go out on the rowboat out onto the Hudson River.

Anyway when he asked who could row him and colonel Han in the boat, I was one who most confidently said "yes", and having the broadest shoulders I was picked. (Actually I did not feel I was holy enough to be in the same small boat with the messiah, but I also felt that since I was such a strong person and familiar with rowing, that I had to volunteer.) Sun Myung Moon looked at me for a few seconds and then made this huge grin and said in a most heavily accented English, "Are you shhure?" I said "Yes," as firmly as I could and he laughed.

Then Sun Myung Moon asked me how to fasten his safety vest.

I was totally shocked, and I still remember this decades years later. I mean, here was the MESSIAH asking me how to put on a life jacket! I wasn't stunned that he would wear a life jacket, because even messiahs have a physical body and have to protect that. But what I was stunned about was the total humility and objectivity of this --- later, when I was thinking about this, I really felt that he had made the request not for his sake but for my sake. I really felt like he had "scanned" me, and that he knew exactly where I was "coming from" in how I related with him. So he was trying to teach me. To this day, decades later, I feel that he was trying to show me that "You don't have to Know Everything to be a "great person!"

If one talks to the people who were with Sun Myung Moon in the "early days of the church", almost without exception they will have a story like this; a story in which some small thing that Sun Myung Moon said or did seemed to be a very intentional holy lesson. With Young Oon Kim, she had one story about her back hurting. For many weeks she had been suffering from intense back pains, but she told no one. Her painful back became quite an issue in her own life of faith. She could not understand why she was having to suffer such pain, and why the messiah did not know about her pain and heal it.

Then one day, months after her back had healed, "out of the blue," and quite out of context of everything else, Sun Myung Moon asked her how her back was, asked her if it was better.....

For her this simple question took on immense meaning, and it helped form her life long understanding of the relationship between God's portion of responsibility and man's portion of responsibility in the fulfillment of God's Providence. She said that at that moment he asked her she felt absolutely sure that Father had known all along about the terrible pain that she had been having. In her prayer and reflection on this, she realized her suffering was her own course, a course that somehow she had to endure to indemnify for her ancestors and for her own life's fulfillment. Even though Sun Myung Moon knew of her pain, it was not really his responsibility to "interfere" in her offering. Finally though, after she had offered this course up for some time, Father could let her know "that heaven was aware, and that heaven did care".

I'm sure that one could easily dismiss such tiny incidences as being overblown by the believer, and I'm sure that there's all sorts of Freudian terms such as "transference" that a cynic would write off these meaningful moments as delusions.

But that's because such people didn't experience these moments....

For example, my first year at the seminary, Father came up and talked to us and he said that he was going to send us out fund-raising for Christmas. For some, this was very difficult to accept (we had people there from some of the top universities in the nation – and now it was back to “selling candy?”), but Father explained it in terms of training, and how we had to mold our character and determination.

Father then picked team leaders, had them go to the front of the room, and he proceeded to hand pick the teams. He was sometimes pointing at the person and then their team leader, other times he would grab someone's arm or shoulder and push them towards their team leader.

I was standing way in the back of the room and just as Father grabbed a student's shoulder and pushed him in the direction of the selected team, I thought, "Oh no. I hope he doesn't touch me, I am too impure for Father to touch me. “

I had not even finished this thought, and it was like I had shouted at him; he could hear my mind because his back was turned and at that very moment he suddenly spun around, stared at me, and came charging through the middle of the group straight at me all the way at the back of the room! He not only grabbed my arm, but marched me all the way to the team leader at the front of the room, and spun me around; then I could then see this huge grin on his face.....

If the moment hadn't felt so pure and wonderful, it would've been frightening that someone could be so sensitive to people's feelings....

There was another time at the seminary that I became very concerned about the timing of when I had joined the Unification Church.

When I had been in college, it seemed that there had been two chances for me to join Unification Church. One was a night in the French Quarter of New Orleans. It was about 2:00 am and I had just finished playing chess for several hours against foreign sailors at the Seven Seas Bar and I had stopped off at the Cafe De Munde for some Binge' French donuts. There were several college age people at the table near me, and they were different. There was just something about their spirit that was fresh and clean....

So I went over to their table and I asked one of the ladies who they were, were they part of a group or what? She told me that they were members of the Unification Church and that "It's a really good church. You should come to our center."

With the word "church," that had been the end of the discussion. You see, this was the time of the Vietnam war protests. I had friends getting drafted to go kill and be killed. There were serious issues in my daily living, and in this moral atmosphere I felt my Catholic church had failed me. I had tried several churches to find a coherent theology, and I had instead found only human pettiness and even corruption. The word "church" was a turn-off. I never went to their "center."

The second time that I could remember having a chance to join Unification Church was my junior year in College. I had changed my major from physics to psychology because I was having "ESP" experiences that my studies in physics could not explain. I had begun to study parapsychology and alleged accounts of the afterlife, and, somehow, I came upon a copy of Young Oon Kim's version of the “Divine Principle” (the “red book”) that somebody had managed to place in the Loyola University Library. But when the book started talking about the divine significance of the numbers 7 and 4 and so forth I quit reading it; I had been majoring in physics for three years and this seemed just flat silly. I only read a chapter or so, and never got past the very early part of the book.

So I had been "called" twice, but God calls a person three times; at least that is what the Bible indicates in I Samuel 3. So, a few years later, after graduating, I read a really strange ad in the Houston Post, and in responding to that really strange ad, ended up joining Unification Church.

But now at the seminary, and examining and reflecting on my life, the fact that years had gone by between the second and third “calling” bothered me. I had partied and partied and wasted a few years of my life, before having my third chance to join Unification Church. I couldn't understand why years had been “wasted.” So finally I prayed and fasted for a week about this question - "why had I only been called twice, and then so much time wasted before that third time."

The weekend after I finished the prayer and fasting "condition" I had to go down to New York city to go to the public library there. The seminary had a van that drove down to Manhattan every weekend, and it went to and returned from the New Yorker Hotel. I was walking through the lobby of the New Yorker when all the sudden a fellow named Peter Spoto, who I had known almost the entire three years that I had been in Unification Church, came running over to me.

"Herb, were you in New Orleans back in 1972?"

"Yeah, I went to college at Loyola in New Orleans."

"And you used to play tackle football in Audabon Park, didn't you!?"

"Well, yeah, ..."

"I saw you back then! I was on a witnessing team in New Orleans back then. I was going through the park one day and I saw you guys playing tackle football. And you were so small but you were so good, and tough! And I thought 'I have to witness to this guy.' So I kept on waiting to witness to you, waiting for the game to break, but it never stopped and I had to get back to the center. But I really felt that I should've witnessed to you. Wow. My God, I don't know why all the sudden I am remembering this after all these years...."

The strength of this story and the timing of it (coming as it did right after my prayer and fasting offering) was just too much for me to dismiss this all as coincidence. I felt I learned a lot from this experience.

For one thing, I felt it taught me that God can only talk to fallen man after mankind makes an offering. (Since fallen man stands in the middle of both God and Satan, he must make some condition to have give-and-take with God's realm. If God just has give-and-take with fallen man without some condition, then Satan can also have give-and-take without God being able to say no.) So this answer came after I had made the offering of the prayer and fasting.

Another thing I felt that it taught me, was that even God is dependent upon mankind fulfilling mankind's portion of responsibility for the providence to continue. God's portion of responsibility had been to prepare me to join Unification Church and to inspire Peter to witness to me. When Peter unknowingly failed this responsibility, then there was a few years lost until things could be "set up" again for me to join Unification Church.

Yeah, it was weird things like this that kept me thinking that there really was a spiritual world and that God really was aware of our lives.

My second year at the seminary I was a "team leader" of a group of eight students. I used to pray every evening for the members of my team. Sometimes I would go out to a small grotto out in the woods and pray. At night it would be very dark, and very quiet.

Sometimes as I was praying, spirits used to attack me. There were times that I was shoved ! It was so physical that I really thought that someone had snuck up on me and was playing a rude joke. When I looked and there was no physical person there, it would send chills down my spine. I mean we like believing in heaven and the existence of an eternal spirit world; but we don't like the idea of spirits being so real in our daily life, especially low class spirits.

One night as I was praying, when I started praying for one particular member, I suddenly spiritually saw a huge red crab (!?) which seemed to be about ten feet across and hovering in the air in front of me. I really felt that heaven was trying to tell me something, to warn me about this member.... I went to the library and looked up different mythology and symbology and structuralism books and tried to find out what a "crab" is supposed to symbolize.

Basically the books said that it was a sign of the gatekeepers of hell, and trying to always pull people into hell. I really felt that heaven was warning me that this member's spiritual life was in danger.

Three days later he left the seminary and left the church, at the request of an old girlfriend.

There was another time that I had a "spiritual experience" that was very unexpected.

This one student named Lee Shapiro was a real movie fanatic, and he used to show a movie for all the students every Friday night. This particular night it was the Grapes of Wrath. It's in the middle of the movie; I am in the back of the room and all of the sudden I start having this incredible urge to smoke a cigarette.

Now this is strange. I have not had a cigarette in the over two years since I joined the Church, and yet the urge is so strong its almost physical. It is so strong and so real and so strange that I even ask God, "God, what is going on here? Why do I suddenly have this sudden incredible urge to have a cigarette."

I am so intent on this issue that as I ask the question to God I am slightly tilting my head to look away from the movie screen. There on the empty chair next to me is my mother's father who passed over to

spirit world some nine years earlier. He is totally entranced by the movie (for he lived and suffered in those times) and doesn't even notice me looking at him....

I am shocked and surprised, and then in another second I don't see him, my spiritual eyes are closed again....

But my prayer has been answered, and I sort of understand. You see, my grandfather was a terribly addicted smoker who died of throat cancer and was still fighting the urge for a cigarette the day he died. My intuitive understanding of this experience was rather immediate, my thoughts were almost like words sounding in my head, saying:

“Sin is real. Our desires are real. We make our own spirit as we live our life and shape our desires. Spirits are what they have become; their desires emanate like waves from a tuning fork and people in the physical world are susceptible to feeling these desires if anything about their spirit can resonate with these ‘waves.’”

Please understand that moments like these are not a daily occurrence for me. I am not one who walks the sidewalks of Manhattan talking to myself and screaming at unseen entities. But I did have many moments like this during my two years at the seminary, and many of them were precious. I tell these stories almost reluctantly because I know it sounds so strange, but these experiences were integral to the development of my life of faith and my overall learning at the seminary. My training at the seminary was not just from books, but it was a combination of the formal education, the daily interaction with others who were actively developing, questioning, or ignoring their own life of faith, and my own searching for the "living theology" that Sun Myung Moon talked about and the search for the active relationship between the physical and the spiritual world.

I spent a lot of time praying. I spent a lot of time studying.

Although I am not Jewish and it was not part of the formal curriculum, I especially loved reading the "Midrash", the spiritual/psychological/down-home-philosophizing of the old rabbis... I really found these speculative interpretations of the hidden meanings of the old Testament stories to be incredibly rich in insight and in seeing God as a God of emotion.

Another thing I got “into” was studying original letters. For example one that really loved was the letter from a soldier at Valley Forge who had come across George Washington praying in snow-covered field in the middle of the night – and the soldier told his wife, “...if you had heard him pray, you would know there is no way God is going to let us loose this war!” Another set of letters that really stunned me was from a German soldier stationed at one of the concentration camps – it was seriously sobering how his letters went from total shock to total detachment as he became increasingly desensitized to his environment -- and he later could mention such horrific things in the same paragraph as he described what he had had for breakfast....

I also spent a lot of time alone in the woods. Sometimes I would just sit for hours and watch a herd of deer, or a school of fish visible in the shallow water of the inlet off of the Hudson...One time I was walking back to the buildings from one of my trips in the forest, and there were several birds on a telephone wire along the railroad track. Like a teenage brat, I picked up a rock and slung it (and I did use to have quite a pitching arm) and I killed one. I was so shocked! Its claws had been locked on the wire and so it spun around on the wire about three times, like some penny-arcade game, before it fell motionless to the earth. I went over and picked it up, and it was dead. Moments before there had been something called "life" in this tiny creature. Now it was gone and there was just an ounce of dead body and feathers in my hand. I felt like I had destroyed something precious in the universe. I just wanted to cry, I felt so rotten.

Another time I had a terrible flu and I was sick for three days in the infirmary

For almost all of that time I was alone and I was in that sweating state of partial awakesness and partial dreaming. But I had the incredible experience that I was not alone, but that I was surrounded by many, many monks had spent their last days on earth in this same room. There was so much energy in the room, it was like electricity.

This experience made me believe that we Unification seminarians, especially those of the first few years had an additional mission that we were not necessarily aware of. I began to believe that part of our mission at the seminary was to indemnify the failures and the frustrations of the clergy of Christianity.

So I did a seven day fast about this, and I will never forget the last day of that fast.

First of all, that morning I woke up thinking about a certain situation that I felt that some people were taking a very weak, unrighteous view about, and I realized I felt so incredibly agitated in thinking about this. Then later, this one team member forgot that he was scheduled to clean the dishes after lunch with me -- so I had to do them by myself and when I saw him I laid into him. And I realized I felt so incredibly righteous that he was wrong. Then later another team leader came up to me and started telling me that he had seen that I had signed up to play in a soccer game the next day. He started telling me that he was very concerned because he knew this would only be a few hours after I finished a seven day fast, and even though he knew I was extremely athletic I had to take care of this body that God had given me..... AND BOY did I tell this guy to buzz off – something like “don't tell me that I cannot play soccer and don't come at me with this sanctimonious I-know-better-than-you attitude !”

But when I went to pray that afternoon these events came to me very strongly and I began to wonder why I was acting so self-righteous, and feeling so morally superior and being so critical. I began to feel that a former monk of this former catholic seminary was "influencing me". I began to feel that I was "picking up the feelings and frustrations of this former monk. I felt that he had the highest motivations for joining the religious order, but had been so incredibly frustrated at the human foibles and petty nit picking and self-righteousness that ended up permeating the religious life there. The monks had been so critical of each other and instead of a life of joy it had become a life of "rules" and petty back-biting.

I began to feel that this was part of our life here at the seminary -- that we were actually at times experiencing the feelings and replicating the situations of the past and "restoring" all this and "liberating" religious figures of the past.

I also began to worry that this was kind of crazy thinking; that if one is not careful, one can go kinda crazy thinking like this.....

But it all seemed so real and so logical at that moment that I really had to ask God. And for some reason, which I still don't know why, I said out loud, "Okay, heavenly Father, if this is really all true, please have somebody say something about my stomach." And I immediately thought, "Have somebody say something about my stomach? That is a really strange thing to request as a 'sign' !!"

About an hour later I was in the typing room, working on a paper, and the student body vice-president, Tom Walsh, came in. He asked me how I was doing, I said fine. Then he actually reached over and lightly punched my stomach and said, "Hey, your stomach's getting smaller from that fast isn't it." !!!!

For myself, there were many experiences like this at the seminary. They weren't every day, they weren't often enough to live in some "mystical mode", but they were just often enough to get my attention!

A lot of times these experiences were so "mixed". It's not like the experience was always purely religious or spiritual, but was instead well mixed with the human and the absurd.

Perhaps the fish truck story is a good one to illustrate this point. But first I have to provide a little background.

Sun Myung Moon had, a year before I came to the seminary introduced the "tradition" of carp fishing from the Hudson River.

There is a huge lake-like inlet off of the Hudson River that comes up against the seminary property. It is dozens of acres in size and its sole interface with the Hudson River is one waterway which is transversed by a railroad bridge. The Hudson River is a river of tides, and fluctuates with the ocean, with which it meets with many miles south. This particular "lake" rises and falls with the Hudson River tides, and the effect is exaggerated in this small inlet to the point where it will rise and fall as much as three to four feet.

Anyway, Sun Myung Moon had the seminarians (in the freezing waters of February!) wade in this water and stretch nets all the way across this "lake" at high tide. Then, when the water went out at low tide there were hundreds of Hudson River carp fish stranded in the mud and low water. Then everybody went back into the (freezing) water and caught these fish by hand.

Now there was all sorts of "theologizing" going on about this, such as:

That it was some condition to indemnify the failures of Jesus' fishermen followers

That it was a condition to indemnify the disunity between the two classes (The 1st and 2nd year seminarians had developed some major disharmony over several issues (such as whether or not a dormitory cubicle should be enclosed or open)

That Father was teaching us how to fish so that we could go and teach the poor nations of the world how to fish.

But meanwhile we had these hundreds of fish, which, for the time being, had been transported in buckets up to the outdoor unused swimming pool that was a few hundred yards from the main seminary buildings.

Well, also meanwhile Kamiyama had built a huge pond at the "Whitehouse" in Tarrytown which was a Unification Church owned house in which he lived. The idea was now to transfer all the carp to this pond. The spin on all this was that the carp were known as koi fish in the orient and are valuable. (Wrong, as I found out later.....)

Anyway, so I finally get to the fish truck story. We had a ton-and-a-half utility truck at Barrytown that some of us lined with heavy plastic and filled with water. Then we proceeded to "recatch" the fish in the swimming pool and put them in the truck.

So as three of us are leaving with this mini-ocean of river carp in the back of the truck, David Kim, the president of the seminary and one of Unification Church's earlier members and one of the three original missionaries to the United States, comes running out of his house and he's all excited and he's yelling at us in broken English. "You people be careful. Satan always wants to attack you people! You people check this truck, okay. check this truck, and make sure okay. Okay!?"

So a mile up the road we pull over to get gas. All of the sudden a car going over forty miles an hour on the other side of the street hits its brakes and makes a U-turn. It pulls up next to us while we are pumping gas, and the driver says, "Hey! You guys better check that back tire -- looks bad!" and he drives off.

Well sure enough the tire has a huge bald spot on it that probably would've blown out in another five minutes.

So we changed the tire and proceeded again. There's no baffles in the homemade tank on the back of the truck. Every time we stop, no matter how gradually, all the thousands of pounds of water and fish come crashing up against the cabside wall of the truck bed, the front wheels are burning rubber to stop, and a tidal wave of water along with dozens of ugly river carp is flying over the cab...

Same thing on the turns and curves. If we turn to the right, thousands of pounds of water and fish go flying up against the left side of the truck. We are barely able to make curves in the road on two wheels and we are clobbering cars coming the other way with tidal waves of water and ugly river carp.

I could only guess how bad the accident would have been, and if people would've died, when that tire had blown out.....

So my feelings are so mixed. On one hand here is this looney-tune story of us "cultists" dangerously driving down the road in a truck rigged up to hold hundreds and hundreds of gallons of water and fish, showering the hoods of on-coming cars with filthy water and ugly river carp. On the other hand here is a mystical story of one of the early followers of Sun Myung Moon who seems "inspired" to warn us of danger, and then a driver traveling over 40 miles an hour on the other side of the road who "happens" to notice that there is a bald spot on the tire of our truck and makes a U-Turn to come back and notify us.

"Sleep spirits" are another example of the dilemma between the mystical or non-mystical interpretation of events.

According to Unification Church teachings, the spirit of an individual is eternal. Also in the original ideal the two worlds, the physical and the spiritual, would have been in complete harmony and each visible to each other. Because of the fall, however, the physical world lives in ignorance of the spiritual world, even though the spiritual world effects this world. Furthermore, spirits have interaction with the thoughts and feelings of people in the physical world.

So sleep spirits put Unification Church members to sleep in class.

This actually was quite a matter of debate. Some Unification Church members felt it was absolutely true, and other Unification Church members felt that it was total nonsense. But it was no matter of debate that, when a class started, the Unification Church students started dropping like mosquitoes hit with RAID. It was a regular topic of discussion, especially among the non-Unification Church professors. One of the professors would get so upset and start hitting the blackboard, another one would start laughing and yell "Hey! Everybody wake up!," and another one would just sit down and look around quietly for about a couple of minutes in amazement at all the passed out students and then finally say, "Is anybody out there?"

I spent a lot of time studying this. I used to sit on the far side of the classroom and watch these sleep things work. It was amazing. There would always be a particular sequence. There would be one "base", and this person would be the first one to fall asleep. Then the thing would proceed to move to different people and you could see them fighting it and trying not to nod off... If a person didn't nod out and actually "beat" the sleep spirit, then all the other people in the "chain" immediately woke up. It was totally weird and totally fascinating. The "sleep spirit" would then start over in exactly the same sequence as before putting the same people to sleep in the same order, only it would try a different person this time than the one that beat it. Also if someone woke up somebody in the chain, all the other people in the chain would wake up at the same moment. One class I actually saw three separate chains going on at the same time.

James Michael Lee, who in the world of Religious educators was generally regarded as one of the experts of the world (albeit, many feel, an eccentric one), was hired by the seminary for one semester to teach. So he would fly into New York every couple of weeks and then have a marathon of classes and then he would fly back to his own part of the universe. He would be driven back and forth to the airport by Richard Erlich, a Unification Church student who had a psychology degree (and later went on to get his Ph.D.) They would often talk about the seminary while on their highway trip and James Michael Lee one time brought up the subject of the students going to sleep.

"Richard, there's something I just cannot figure out. I've never seen anything like it! They'll be there, wide eyed and alert and listening to you and all of the sudden half of them are falling asleep. You can watch them! All of the sudden their eyes start rolling in their head and bingo, they're asleep. I've never seen anything like it."

"Oh. Hmmm... Well, we believe that there is a spiritual world and that evil spirits are putting people to sleep."

At this, Richard told me, James Michael Lee was completely quiet for quite a few minutes. Finally he replied, "Richard. I'm gonna have to think about that one."

Of all my classes at the seminary, I must admit that the one's I remember most were of the elderly Young Oon Kim's.

There was something special about this lady, and I believe that someday her books on World Religions and on Unification Theology will be recognized for the achievements that they are, thoughtful and insightful. She was the unusual theologian who lived her theology.

She stressed that theology is important; that theology is one's belief in what the relationship between God and man should be. Above all she stressed the personality and character of God as defining the history of the restoration of the intended relationship between God and man.

One time I answered a question in her class in a way that somehow caught her attention. At lunch time, instead of eating in the professors' dining room, she came into the students' dining room and sat next to me. She was trying to learn, I guess, "where I came from," for she asked me such questions as how long I had been in the church, and how I had joined, etc. I told her the story about finding her book in the Loyola library and not being able to finish it. For myself it sort of a confession, but I'll never forget what she said.

Nothing.

She just started laughing so hard and so heartily that even writing about it today I remember it like a fresh autumn breeze.

She was like that.

Another time she was out walking, and she came upon me reading in the woods of Barrytown.

"What are you doing?", she asked.

"Studying Korean"

She just started cracking up laughing. "Why do you want to do that!?"

Young Oon Kim passed away several years ago, but there have been times as I've written this chapter on the seminary that I have felt her spirit watching... (at times in amusement!)

Academically, I did well at the seminary. So I was rather surprised when I was not chosen to go on to theology graduate school ...I had thought that I would be one of the dozen or so picked, and that I would be a real fighter of a theologian; showing the amazing teachings of Sun Myung Moon and how they “solved” all the fundamental issues of theology, like the existence and nature of evil, the understanding of “predestination”, the “mystery” of the gospel as taught by Jesus being not of his death but the “good news” of the kingdom of God...and so on.

But now I was told that it was not to be.

So I prayed about it a lot.... And I decided to paint all the bathroom floors in all these old monastery buildings that comprised the seminary (it took me, doing this off and on about two weeks). I had to show God that I would accept whatever fate came at me – that it wasn’t important whether I went to the highest theology university in the world or whether I was on my knees painting the concrete floors of bathrooms with deck paint...what was important was if I could accept the path God put before me.

And then right after I finished painting the bathroom floors, I had to go fundraising....

Part of going to the seminary was to go out for a week each semester and fundraise for the expenses of living at and attending classes at the seminary. It was really more “symbolic” than anything else....it wasn’t really practical or financially so productive...it was more of an “offering.”

The seminary tried to coordinate our fundraising with the national MFT, so when we requested area that would not be crossing their efforts, we were given Albany, New York. Well, like I said, the whole idea for us was that it was more of a symbolic offering – Albany was incredibly anti-Sun Myung Moon, and the media had people convinced that Sun Myung Moon was evil and that we were brainwashed mindless idiots who blindly followed him. We found out (through the grapevine) that the average money made for a fundraiser in Albany was miserable -- less than \$19 for every person for every very long day.

It was an amazing week. I felt that the spiritual world was buzzing around me (and even

Louis Carrol could not have spun a wilder story...

The very first morning I was let off on the side of a highway going into the downtown of Albany, to fundraise all the businesses on the side of the road. I got out of the van with a bucket of flowers, everything still covered in plastic, and started to pray.... And all of the sudden a car comes veering off of the highway and screeching to a stop right next to me. The lady rolls down her window yelling, “How much are your flowers?”....

Even now decades later I shake my head how this lady, speeding along the winter highway, could know that guy (me) many, many yards off of the highway had flowers in that plastic covered bucket, and in that split second before she would’ve passed me decided SHE NEEDED FLOWERS.

Less than an hour later I entered in to an office building, somehow, and upon entering one office a lady screamed loudly, for everyone else to hear, “You’re selling those flowers for that Moon guy. And he’s worth a million dollars!” And the room went quiet. I shouted back, “That’s not true, “ and paused just a moment as it even got quieter, “HE’S WORTH A LOT MORE THAN JUST A MILLION DOLLARS!” And she and everyone were shocked with a lightning bolt of laughter...and everyone was laughing...and she and a lot of others bought.

The whole week was like that. It was wonderfully crazy with the spirits of God around me uplifting me and those around me....

The real “kicker” was the last night.... I somehow ended up walking into an “alternative lifestyle Halloween costume party” (for want of a better description)...for example, one “costume” was the clear plastic bag from a dry cleaner – yep, that’s all, just the clear plastic bag! Another “costume” was shaving cream – yep, that’s right folks, JUST shaving cream!

So anyway, some guy with his date (?) says to me “What are you doing?”

And I say, (with this incredible tone, like “How DARE you question my costume!”) “Oh, I’m a Moonie selling flowers! Do You want to buy some?” And he and his date (?) start laughing so hard – they LOVE it! ...and they buy.... So I keep going around to everybody saying, (with this incredible tone like “Don’t you just LOVE my costume?”) “Hi, I’m a Moonie selling flowers! Do you want to buy some?” And I am a “hit” everyone loves it and everyone is buying and everybody is thinking I am the most creative “best costume” person in the world and I completely sell out.

I averaged over \$240 a day that week.... And I KNEW that God had told me He appreciated my attitude about the new paint on the bathroom floors....

And weeks later, when we were “interviewed” before graduation by one of Sun Myung Moon’s close disciples, Reverend Kwak, on what we wanted to do in the church after graduation, I simply said, “Whatever God wants me to do is fine.”