

Locked and Loaded for the Lord

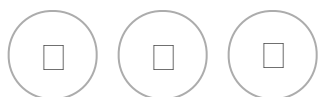
After the Rev. Moon died in 2012, his church split apart. Two of his sons established a new congregation. Their followers are eagerly awaiting the end times. And they are armed.



Hyung Jin “Sean” Moon, leader of Sanctuary Church, wears a crown of rifle shells and holds a gold-plated AR-15.

Story by Tom Dunkel Photos by Bryan Anselm

MAY 21, 2018



Sanctuary Church — whose proper name is World Peace and Unification Sanctuary, but which also goes by the more muscular-sounding Rod of Iron Ministries — stands inconspicuously on a country road that winds through the village of

Newfoundland, Pa., 25 miles southeast of Scranton. The one-story, low-slung building used to be St. Anthony's Catholic Church. Before that, it was a community theater, which is why there are no pews, only a semicircle of tiered seats facing the old stage, now an altar.

On a Sunday morning in late February, 38-year-old Pastor Hyung Jin "Sean" Moon, son of the late Rev. Sun Myung Moon, entered stage right wearing a white hoodie and cargo pants. He strapped on a leather headband and picked up a microphone. "Okay, take it away," he said to the electric pianist and two female vocalists who function as the choir. They launched into the first of four songs: "O, light of grace, shining above / lighting my dim shadowed way ..."

The 200-plus congregants packed into the room sang along with gusto. Pastor Sean stood by his front-row seat with his wife at his side, wringing his hands like an orchestra conductor. The song cycle ended and, after a brief prayer, he took center stage. "Look at all these crowns of sovereignty!" he exclaimed, gazing upon his audience. One tenet of the Sanctuary Church is that all people are independent kings and queens in God's Kingdom — a kind of don't-tread-on-me notion of personal sovereignty. Hence, symbolic gold and silver crowns bobbed on row after row of heads.





Members of the church during a blessing ceremony in February.



The congregation during a sermon.

This crowd was about twice the usual size because this service was the warm-up for a renewal-of-marriage-vows ceremony scheduled for Wednesday morning. Scores of couples already had arrived from Japan and Korea. That ceremony — officially, the “Cosmic True Parents of Heaven, Earth and Humanity Cheon Il Guk Book of Life Registration Blessing” — would cap a week of activities that thus far had included an arts festival, a survival skills contest and a goat-butchering demonstration.

The wedding-blessing event was generating nationwide attention — something new for Sanctuary Church, which, until now, hadn't even registered on the radar of the Pocono Record, the local daily newspaper. A key pillar of Sanctuary dogma is the importance of owning a gun, particularly the lethal, lightweight AR-15 semiautomatic, which the National Rifle Association has proclaimed “the most popular rifle in America.” Last fall, Pastor Sean had studied the Book of Revelation. It makes multiple references to how Christ one day will rule his earthly kingdom “with a rod of iron.” Although Revelation was written long before the advent of firearms, Pastor Sean concluded that “rod of iron” was Bible-speak for the AR-15 and that Christ, not being a “tyrant,” will need armed sovereigns to help him keep the peace in his kingdom.

As a result, a recent Sanctuary Church news release had noted that “blessed couples are requested” to bring with them to the upcoming Book of Life ceremony an AR-15 semiautomatic rifle “or equivalents.” This was unfortunate timing for the Church: The next day a young man walked into Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., and killed 17 people with an AR-15. Shooters had used that same model rifle to carry out mass murders in Las Vegas; Orlando; San Bernardino, Calif.; and other cities.

That latest tragedy was freshly imprinted on millions of minds, among them Pastor Sean's. He eased into his hour-long Sunday morning sermon by reminding everyone of what President Trump had pointed out after the Parkland shooting: “He said if the teachers were armed, they would have shot the hell out of that guy. This is the first time we've heard a president talk like that. This is God's grace, folks.”

Virtually the entire congregation was coming back on Wednesday for the big blessing ceremony, so he reviewed some safety precautions, like securing rifle triggers with a zip tie: “Remember, folks, you can never take back a bullet.” That was not to say worshipers couldn't pack heat. Anyone with a concealed-carry permit was welcome to bring their loaded pistol Wednesday (their “mini rod of iron”) in addition to their AR-15. You never know, “there may be a wolf in sheep's clothing who tries to make trouble,” said Pastor Sean.

After delivering a few social announcements (parents seeking marriage

partners for their adult children were meeting at 3 p.m.; tomorrow at 5 p.m. there would be an AR-15 “breakdown” tutorial on how to properly disassemble the rifle), Pastor Sean delivered the meat of his sermon. He plowed familiar ground at first, citing Bible passages where the “rod of iron” was used to smite evildoers. Pacing the altar, he then segued into a freewheeling, gunfire-and-brimstone diatribe.

“You must shed the slave mentality and adopt the royal mentality. ... The Democratic Party has become the Communist Party funded by Nazi collaborator George Soros. ... The fake ministers and fake priests are pushing a dictator-Christ.” He took potshots at some favorite targets: Hillary Clinton (“she was paying for the Russian dossier”), Pope Francis (“a socialist, communist devil”) and government that gets too big for its britches. “Jesus never centralized power. Jesus never created government,” he said. “The worst killer in all of humanity the last one hundred years is centralized government.”

He showed a video clip of younger Church members undergoing quasi paramilitary training as Sanctuary’s standby Peace Police/Peace Militia. They shoot rifles on the run in the woods. They wear camo for the Lord. They learn Filipino knife fighting. “It’s not about being a badass. It’s about practicing to be deadly because you love people,” Pastor Sean told his flock. “The way of the rod of iron is the way of love.”

In a few days, reporters, photographers and TV camera crews would swarm upon sleepy Newfoundland for the wedding-blessing ceremony — professional gawkers lured by the incongruous coupling of semiautomatic rifles and a house of worship. But the media circus also would quickly move on, without fully answering questions left dangling. Who, exactly, are these Sanctuarians? And, with their injection of guns into the country’s already divisive mix of politics and religion, what do they want?

“It’s not about being a badass. It’s about practicing to be deadly because you love people.”

— Pastor Hyung Jin Moon

When the Rev. Sun Myung Moon died of complications from pneumonia in 2012 at age 92, it set off a power struggle within his family. Sean, with backing from older brother Kook Jin “Justin” Moon, contends he was selected from among his 10 adult siblings to inherit the Unification Church mantle and be crowned the next-generation “Second King” — not a full-fledged messiah like his father purported to be, but nonetheless responsible for finishing the work of building God’s Kingdom. Meanwhile, their mother, Hak Ja Han, claims the Rev. Moon, her husband of 52 years, passed the baton to her.

The church they were fighting over has roots in both Korea and America. The Rev. Moon — born in 1920 in what is now North Korea but was then part of Japan — said Jesus appeared to him when he was 15 and asked him to take on the “special mission” of completing God’s Kingdom on earth, Cheon Il Guk in his native Korean. First, however, he went off to study electrical engineering in Japan and got arrested (and tortured) twice for his activity in the Korean independence movement. He returned home, married and after World War II moved to Pyongyang, where the communist government threw him in a labor camp for preaching Christianity. When that camp was liberated near the end of the Korean War, Moon headed south.

He established a church in Seoul in 1954, dubbing it the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity. He codified his beliefs in a text titled “Divine Principle.” One core construct says Satan seduced Eve in the Garden of Eden. This caused “the fall” of humankind by contaminating the bloodlines she and Adam transmitted through Cain and Abel. God sent Jesus to serve as a Second Adam to find sin-free love and salvage the family of man. But Jesus didn’t live long enough to marry. It thus became Sun Myung Moon’s destiny to step in as a Third Adam and redeem the world.

His ministry put a premium on the sanctity of traditional marriage and condemned premarital sex, divorce and homosexuality. That conservative message found an audience in Seoul, though police arrested him twice — for suspicion of having religious sex orgies and ducking the draft. (Both charges ultimately were dropped.) By 1957, he’d built a network of 30 churches and was wired into the South Korean

business community and government. The only glitch was that his own marriage proved imperfect, ending in divorce. However, Hak Ja Han soon entered his life. They married in 1960, and followers hailed them as God's anointed "True Parents."

A decade later the Rev. Moon came to the United States, a necessary foothold for uniting the planet under his Unification banner. Moon spun a web of foundations and interlocking companies, reportedly becoming South Korea's first billionaire. His followers were untroubled by his wealth, but Congress investigated his empire, and then the Internal Revenue Service came after him. In the mid-1980s Moon served 13 months in prison for failure to declare \$162,000 in taxable income. Ever the entrepreneur, he made arrangements in prison to start the conservative Washington Times, saying he did it "to fulfill God's desperate desire to save this world."

Unification Church membership figures have always been elastic, ranging from tens of thousands to several million. In 2009, the Washington Times cited 110,000 "adherents." Whatever the correct number, it had peaked by the late 1990s. Yet the Rev. Moon pressed on. In 2003, a double-page ad in the Washington Times trumpeted this news: All 36 deceased American presidents acknowledged Sun Myung Moon's greatness. What's more, each one had written an endorsement letter from the Great Beyond. "People of America, rise again. Return to the nation's founding spirit," said Thomas Jefferson, once characterized as a "howling atheist" by political opponents. "Follow the teachings of Rev. Sun Myung Moon, the Messiah to all people."

Jefferson was, of course, one of the architects of America's system of government — which will become obsolete if the Rev. Moon's vision of God's Kingdom on earth comes to pass. Pastor Sean is convinced that will happen, and in preparation, he has taken it upon himself to write a Constitution of the United States of Cheon Il Guk, grounded in principles articulated by his father.

If all proceeds according to divine plan, the country will be ruled by monarchs drawn from his branch of the Moon family. If the Kingdom comes in Sean's lifetime, he'll take the reins as king of the United States. Brother Justin — who serves as Sanctuary Church's de facto assistant pastor — is set to be inspector general, a super special prosecutor

charged with rooting out government corruption. Don't worry. It's not a theocracy, Sean says: "We would refer to it as a libertarian Christian monarchy or maybe a libertarian republican democracy."



The Rev. Sun Myung Moon's crown sits atop his robe.



Moon's son \\%u201CSean%u201D\\ Moon.

The Moons primarily raised their 13 children on an estate north of New York City owned by the Unification Church. The main house at East Garden had 12 bedrooms, seven bathrooms and Church minions catering to their every need. But life was far from idyllic. One son died in a car accident, another committed suicide and a third succumbed at a relatively young age to drinking and drugs.

Sean Moon wrote about the downside of their gilded childhoods in a 2005 memoir. “We grew up many times seeing Parents one or two weeks, combined over various visits, out of the year,” he recalled. “I

many times felt scared, abandoned, and neglected. ... We were surrounded, constantly, by [Church] members. ... I sat and seethed in anger many nights, as I drifted off to sleep.”

Rev. Moon fancied himself an outdoorsman. There were guns around the mansion, and, at 14, Justin fired one. It was love at first recoil: By 18 he had a permit to carry. He went on to major in economics at Harvard and earn an MBA at the University of Miami, tinkering with gun designs in his spare time. After graduate school he opened Kahr Arms in office space across the Hudson River from East Garden, using a \$5 million loan from his father. His immediate goal, he later told *American Handgunner* magazine, was to create “an ultracompact 9-millimeter pistol.” And he did.

Kahr introduced its palm-size K9 model in 1995; people and police departments gobbled it up. Justin’s success with the company caught his father’s eye. Kahr soon was absorbed into one of the Unification Church’s corporations. Justin moved to Korea to take on the added role of president of a sister subsidiary. By 1999, Kahr had enough cash to buy the company that produced the storied Thompson submachine gun once toted by gangsters such as Baby Face Nelson. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives reports Kahr sold 40,274 pistols and 9,086 rifles in 2016.

Justin Moon is a hyper defender of the Second Amendment. Private citizens, he says, should have unfettered access to any handheld weapon the U.S. military uses. “Were every woman in America to exercise their right to bear arms, America would basically eliminate its crime rate,” he told me one morning at Kahr Arms. “Nobody would be able to rape them or rob them.”

While Justin was climbing the Unification Church’s corporate ladder, Sean followed in his footsteps only as far as Harvard. He got a bachelor’s degree in liberal arts and a master’s of theology, and spent eight years studying Buddhism in the United States, Korea and India.

He had a compelling reason to go off in search of himself. Sean was in college in October 1999 when his brother Young Jin “Phillip” Moon jumped out the 17th-floor window of a Las Vegas hotel. He was 21, a year older than Sean. They had been inseparable growing up. “For most

of our lives we shared the same room, the same video games, and the same Doritos chips,” Sean wrote in his memoir.

In July 2007, the prodigal son returned to the fold of the Unification Church. Sean had telegraphed his intentions the previous fall by doing 12,000 prayer bows over six days; on one of those days he also made a poster-size calligraphy of the Korean character seong (“sincere”), using a paintbrush dipped in his blood, which had been extracted by a physician.

Sean’s initial job was pastor of a Unification Church in Seoul. Within 10 months, he was put in charge of international Church operations. On three ceremonial occasions, he says, his father named him “heir and successor.” However, he also sent conflicting signals to oldest brother Preston and to Hak Ja Han. A few days after her husband’s passing in 2012, Hak Ja Han summoned Sean to the magnificent Peace Palace the Moons had built in the mountains north of Seoul. According to Sean, she put him on notice that “I’m God. I’m *Hanamin*.” To which he replied, “Mummy, please, you can’t say that. Father’s not going to be happy.”

He says she phased him out of Church activities and stopped taking his phone calls. In September 2013, on the first anniversary of his father’s death, Sean went to the palace in hopes of seeing his mother. In his version of events, she had security guards shoo him away.

Justin Moon sided with his younger brother. Coincidentally, around that time, the New York legislature passed several gun-control measures that irked him. He decided to extricate himself and Kahr Arms from the Unification Church and move Kahr headquarters elsewhere. Eastern Pennsylvania beckoned: reasonable cost of living, excellent schools for his seven children, and 900,000 NRA members within a 300-mile radius of the state capital, Harrisburg.



A member of the church holds her assault rifle during a blessing ceremony.

By spring 2013, both brothers' families were ensconced in Pennsylvania. Sean began holding Sanctuary Church services in his living room (in a town appropriately named Lords Valley). When the congregation outgrew the space, he did his preaching in the banquet room at a Best Western. In May 2014 Sanctuary settled into the former Catholic church in Newfoundland. Members voluntarily have dug into their pockets, contributing \$683,000 in 2015 and \$491,000 for the first six months of 2016. A foundation Justin runs in brother Phillip's name supports Sanctuary with grants (almost \$380,000 combined in 2015 and 2016), plus it bought the church site. That revenue stream should keep the

lights burning for the foreseeable future and Pastor Sean's camouflage-colored Jeep Wrangler on the road.

In January 2015, Sean publicly renounced his mother for hijacking the Unification Church and rewriting and editing his father's religious texts. He has since taken to calling her the "whore of Babylon." Last September, Sanctuary Church shunted Hak Ja Han aside, and a posthumous wedding was thrown for the Rev. Moon. He (well, his spirit) married 90-year-old Hyun Shil Kang, supposedly the first person to join his ministry in the early 1950s. She moved to Pennsylvania to live with Sean and his family.

Hak Ja Han did not comment on specific allegations made by her son, but Ki Hoon Kim, continental chairman of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification USA, responded in an email: "I know with certainty that Dr. Moon has reached out to her son, Hyung Jin, numerous times since February 2013 asking him to come back to Korea to meet with her, but he has refused each request. ... We can't know exactly what took place in private discussions between mother and son, but it's clear that he holds an escalating resentment towards her. ... Even if Dr. Moon had made such a statement [that she is God], it is in line with our theological beliefs that she and her husband are one with God, just as Jesus said, 'I and the Father are One.' "

In Jin Moon, second oldest of the surviving children, took an active role in the Unification Church until about eight years ago. She currently lives in New Jersey and has never before spoken out publicly about Sean and Justin. However, she says, "the language that's coming out of Sanctuary Church is quite alarming," so she feels obliged to raise her voice. She loves her brothers "ferociously" but says that the possibility their commingling of God and guns could inadvertently incite violence "is the great concern for the family." And, yet, she thinks healing and reconciliation is possible. "I still believe in the unity of my family," she says.

There seemingly is not much interest in reconciliation on the part of her brothers, however. Indeed, kicking Mom out of the family tree was not enough to satisfy Justin Moon. At a question-and-answer session with Church members in 2016, he explained that if a queen tries to usurp a

king's throne, the ultimate price must be paid: "It's the king's responsibility to arrest her and execute her."

Any second thoughts about Hak Ja Han having committed a capital offense? Sitting at his office desk one morning, sporting his ever-present Kahr Arms baseball hat, Justin told me he stands by his earlier remarks: "It's a comment on the record. I'm not going to walk it back." All he was willing to do was change the analogy: "I love my mother," he said, but what if she attempted to overthrow the U.S. government? "She should probably be tried for treason."

“Our government does not make it easy on you, either from a shooting perspective or from a manufacturing perspective.”

— Eric Trump

A year and a half ago, Sanctuary Church bought a larger house for Pastor Sean, his wife and their five children. Heaven's Palace is perched on a hill overlooking Matamoras, the easternmost town in Pennsylvania, hard by the Delaware River. Sean has a brown belt in Brazilian jujitsu and several nights a week teaches a class inside his converted garage. The students are Church members, most in their 20s, and most of them active in the so-called Peace Police/Police Militia.

On a Wednesday in late March, eight women and five men paired up for a practice session, trading positions as Moon guided them through a series of jujitsu holds and mini bouts. Dressed in a salmon-colored kimono top and loosefitting black pants, he sat yoga-style on his knees facing the class. "Work it! There you go! That's definitely burning it into your muscle memory, your hippocampus."



Church members do outdoor circuit training. Some members are part of the church's Peace Police/Peace Militia.



Members during a martial arts class taught by Moon in a converted garage at his home in Matamoras, Pa. Moon holds a brown belt in Brazilian jujitsu.



A participant listens to instruction during martial arts class.

A burst of action. A pause for sips of water and a few push-ups. Repeat, repeat. More guidance. Using his son as a prop, Sean stopped at one point to demonstrate the kimura hold, a double-wrist lock you can put on an opponent's shoulder and upper arm. "Once we have the kimura position, we're going to capture the shoulder with chest pressure," he said while tying his son in a knot. "Basically, you're sitting on the head so it doesn't move."

"He explains things well," said Doug Williams, a retired police officer and Sanctuarian who lives next door and studied judo in his younger days. "He's strict, but he's inspiring at the same time. The kids know that."

They obediently ground each other's faces into the mat for two hours. Everyone then knelt and recited the Lord's Prayer in unison. Sean lifted his arms and murmured, "All glory to God." Class dismissed.

Sean Moon never raises his voice teaching jujitsu in the garage. Inside the house, however, he regularly unleashes the higher-octane side of his personality. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 5 to 8 a.m., Pastor Sean records a live webcast, called "The King's Report," in a room next to the kitchen. He sits at a desk with an AR-15 rifle prominently displayed next to his microphone, always decked out in a shirt and tie, the camouflage suit jacket he bought on eBay, and a crown made of

polished rifle shells. He'll interview an occasional guest and show clips from the NRA's digital TV channel. But mostly he discusses the latest stories being featured by his conservative-media holy trinity — the Drudge Report, Breitbart News and Alex Jones's paranoia-pushing Infowars — and riffs at length about current events, from Oprah Winfrey's potential presidential bid (“She worships Satan. She promotes the New Age Christian view of God, which is a relevant God, which is, of course, Satan”) to gun-control advocates (“They are complete demons. ... They want to make you completely vulnerable to the predations of the wicked”).

While the Rev. Moon seldom indulged in personal attacks, Sean and Justin regularly toss verbal grenades. They're also more enamored with guns than their father — and more overtly political. “No question about it,” Sean told me one afternoon as we chatted in the orchestra section of the theater-turned-sanctuary: God's hand was at work in the 2016 presidential campaign. A week before Election Day, Justin spoke to a group of Japanese Sanctuarians who were visiting Pennsylvania and described in biblical terms what was at stake: Hillary Clinton, he said, was the “Fallen Eve” who would start a war (possibly nuclear) with Russia. Donald Trump was the “Adam-type figure” who wanted to attack and “bring judgment on the government, on the archangel.” Depending on the outcome, he added, “the nature of God's judgment on this world will be dramatically different.”

Both Moons shoot straight on and off the firing range. Sean on Al Gore: “A fricking nutbag.” Sean on 9/11: “False flag.” Sean on Hollywood liberals: “The most despicable, thieving, conniving, manipulating, evil, wicked, iniquitous demons on the planet.” Justin on the United Nations: “Satanic.” Justin on welfare recipients: “Parasites.” Justin on Democrats: “There are a lot of pedophiles in the Democratic Party. They realize that Trump is coming to get them. Literally. Round them up and put them in prison and execute them.”

Their straight talk caught up with them three weeks before the blessing ceremony. The Southern Poverty Law Center, which monitors extremists, issued a “Hate Watch” on Sanctuary Church — ironically, further raising its profile. SPLC took issue with a “cult leader” urging followers to carry guns and with comments Sean made about public school children “getting indoctrinated into the homosexual political

agenda” and “the transgender agenda.” Sean responded by posting an alert of his own on Facebook: “Southern Poverty Law Center is well known as an extreme left hate group.”



Moon records “The King’s Report,” his live webcast, in his home studio.

In December 2013, Justin Moon paid \$2 million in cash for a 620-acre industrial site north of Newfoundland. On Aug. 30, 2016, he held the grand opening of Kahr Arms’ Tommy Gun Warehouse showroom-store, the place to go for rifles, pistols, knives and the Brooklyn Smasher steel baseball bat that in an emergency can be used to club an intruder or a deer to death. The grand-opening guest of honor was Eric Trump. “That came about because God made it happen,” Justin told me. Somebody from the Trump campaign had called him out of the blue and said, “Eric wants to come.”

So Eric came, and Sean introduced him by saying: “It’s my opinion that we must elect a president that will protect and expand the right to bear arms. ... I hope we can all agree that Hillary Clinton should never be the president of the United States. ... God bless the U.S.A., and please buy some guns and ammo!”

Eric, in an open-collar shirt and dark sports jacket, stood in front of a wall of rifles and next to a U.S. flag. “This election for every gun owner is a huge thing. It will be the difference between adding to our Second Amendment freedoms or not adding to our Second Amendment

freedoms,” he said, then switched to the topic of America hemorrhaging jobs. “We don’t make anything here anymore. That’s why Justin deserves a tremendous, tremendous round of applause. ... Our government does not make it easy on you, either from a shooting perspective or from a manufacturing perspective.”

A year and a half later — on a Saturday night before the renewal-of-vows ceremony — Rod of Iron Ministries and Kahr Arms hosted a “President Trump Thank You” dinner at the Best Western in Matamoras. This time the only Trump in attendance was a life-size cardboard cutout of the president.

The event doubled as a fundraiser for Gun Owners of America, an organization Executive Director Emeritus Larry Pratt said takes “a more robust position” on guns than the NRA. Pratt lives in Northern Virginia and served one term in the House of Delegates in the early 1980s. His dinner speech not only denounced any restrictions on gun sales and possession, it went a giant step further by asserting “the feds should have nothing to do with law enforcement anywhere.”

Sean Moon echoed that ultra-libertarian theme. “Government is becoming a totalitarian crime syndicate,” he warned, on its way to creating “a dystopian, Christ-hating hell on earth.” Justin alluded to his father, saying, “without our property and our guns, we’re nothing but laborers in a communist death camp.”

The dinner opened with a moment of silence for the Parkland shooting victims, followed by a prayer led by Sanctuarian Ted O’Grady, who gave thanks for Trump: “This room knows that this is only the beginning ... that you will be the president that ushers in God’s Kingdom on earth.”

It ended with Hyun Shil Kang, Mrs. Moon No. 3, selecting the winning raffle ticket for the door prize: an AR-15 rifle donated by Kahr Arms. The winner was a middle-aged woman whose reaction was surprisingly muted; it turned out she already owns an AR-15.

A few days later, on Wednesday morning, about 20 demonstrators gathered outside Sanctuary Church armed with only signs. “Father Forgive Them.” “Pickles for Peace, No More Absurd than Guns for God.” As a precaution, all students at the elementary school a half-mile away

had been bussed to other classrooms for the day. But no wolves in sheep's clothing tried to make trouble.



Moon, left, and wife Yeon Ah Lee Moon, right, lead prayers at church. Moon holds a crown to be placed next to Hyun Shil Kang, seated, to whom his father was posthumously married.

John Hind, a lifelong Newfoundlander, soaked in the scene from his front porch across the street. “They’re good neighbors,” he said of the Sanctuarians. “They haven’t bothered nobody.”

“But they’re weird,” snorted his friend Carol Wood, puffing a cigarillo. “And blessing their guns? It’s confusing and it’s irritating.”

Inside the church, Timothy Elder, acting as master of ceremonies, informed the overflow congregation and some 50 reporters and cameramen lining the walls (plus about a hundred people watching a video feed in the adjacent community room) that “this is not a blessing of inanimate firearms.” It was strictly a recommitment of sacred wedding vows — for people bearing firearms.

Just before 10:30, Elder asked everyone to remove their AR-15s from their cases, “being careful to point the muzzle up and remove your finger from the trigger.” Camera shutters clicked crazily. Attendants in pink-and-white vestments led a procession into the sanctuary, followed by a three-man, armed color guard dressed in combat fatigues. Next came Pastor Sean, the “Second King,” and his wife, Yeon Ah Lee Moon, the

“Queen,” both clad in white. Justin Moon was on their heels, his dark suit topped off by his baseball hat. Mother Kang took a seat in a white-and-gold chair on the altar. A crown was placed on the chair next to her, representing the absent Rev. Moon.

Pastor Sean carried a bound copy of the Constitution of the United States of Cheon Il Guk, which he carefully laid on a table on the altar. His wife cradled a gold-plated AR-15. “The King and Queen will now place the Rod of Iron on its ceremonial stand where it will guard the Constitution,” Elder explained.

The brides and grooms in attendance, some 500 total, jointly sipped from tiny cups of wine. They took their vows (“Do you promise an eternal bond as husband and wife?”). The King said an extended prayer, acknowledging their “right to sovereignty, the right to keep and bear arms, the right to inherit the earth and protect it from socialism, communism and political Satanism.” Husbands and wives then exchanged rings. The sanctuary filled with applause, then cheers.



A group of protesters outside Sanctuary Church.

Outside a polite battle of words raged. On the front lawn, a contingent of Korean Sanctuarrians unfurled a 20-foot-long banner referencing their divided country: “Thank you USA. We will never forget America’s grace. Trump chosen by God, relocate the tactical nucleus to the 38th line.” A chest-high rail fence runs along the property line, hugging the road. The

Sanctuarrians occupied one side, the protesters commanded the other.

Two adversaries faced off in gentlemanly mouth-to-mouth combat. Gideon Raucci is a second-generation Unificationist in his late 20s who switched allegiance to Sanctuary Church. He's active in Sean's Peace Police. Teddy Hose, 39, is a writer-graphic artist who flew in from San Francisco. He was part of a film crew shooting a documentary on cults. He's also a second-generation Unificationist who grew up near East Garden in close contact with the Moon family. Hose left the Church years ago.

"It can take just one bullet to change everything," he told Raucci.

"I totally hear you about being responsible with guns," Raucci replied.

"What I feel is not coming across to the rest of the community around you, this is scaring people ..."

"This might open up something beautiful where people understand where we're coming from," Raucci said. "Your focus is on loving your neighbor, I'm totally down with that. ... We're taught to never be the initiators of violence."

"David Koresh and Charles Manson both used the Book of Revelations," Hose reminded him, "because it's a very extreme part of the Bible."

It went back and forth like that for about 10 minutes. Then they reached over the fence, and hugged.



Kook Jin "Justin" Moon, Sean's older brother and owner of Kahr Arms' Tommy Gun Warehouse. Justin Moon is Sanctuary Church's de facto assistant pastor.



Taxidermied animals shot by Justin Moon on safari in Tanzania are on display at the warehouse.

The day after the blessing ceremony Regis Hanna, a Georgetown University graduate in his late 60s who recently moved to Pennsylvania to join the Sanctuary Church congregation, walked into Kahr Arms' Tommy Gun Warehouse showroom with his wife, Nancy. Right inside the door stands a taxidermy triptych: a lion and a leopard attacking an antelope, all three animals shot by Justin Moon on safari in Tanzania. "Infowars" was playing on the big-screen TV. Posters of beautiful women in spiked heels, flashing slit skirts and Kahr pistols, adorn two walls. Hanna was thinking of buying a handgun. He moved here from Panama, where gun laws are strict and where he

spent 21 years doing missionary work for the Unification Church. He and Nancy did a lot of family counseling with unwed couples. Theirs was one of the early American marriages arranged by the Rev. Moon. They've been together 43 years and have seven children.

After the Unification Church rupture, the Hannas chose to cast their lot with Pastor Sean. Regis, a round-faced man of mellow temperament, is now part of Sanctuary's paid staff, and today it was his job to field any post-ceremony calls. The Church's main number had been forwarded to his cellphone, which rang shortly after he entered the showroom. It was a New Jersey area code. He put the call on speaker phone.

"Are you f—ing insane! You don't know the meaning of religion! You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!"

A minute later, another call came in. Oklahoma area code: "I was wondering if you're accepting more people into your group." Hanna told the man he could catch Sanctuary services on YouTube.

Another call. British Columbia. "I love what you guys are doing. I love Sean."

"Thank you, brother," said Hanna.

Hak Ja Han's ascension to the head of the Unification Church had ripple effects, and many hundreds of people faced the same decision the Hannas did. Friendships got torn apart, marriages blew up and families were divided as Church members declared different loyalties. Most Unificationists stayed with the parent church; some went with Pastor Sean; a few followed oldest brother Preston Moon, who established a secular Global Peace Foundation in Seattle. Others quit the movement altogether.

Kyle Toffey, 65, was a longtime Unificationist who lived in Korea for 10 years. He admitted to me that "at first it did sound a little bit off the wall" when Pastor Sean added an AR-15 twist to the blessing ceremony, but he and his wife participated. He has learned to "reserve my skepticism" and trust Sean's judgment. Plus, he has grown to appreciate the responsibility and self-confidence that comes with being armed: "In

the morning when you strap on a pistol, you feel like the sheriff of the town.”

Dan Fefferman used to worship with Regis Hanna at a Unification Church in Washington. He and his wife were married in the same group ceremony as the Hannas. They live in Bowie, Md., now and stayed with the Unification Church, but Fefferman visited Sean Moon’s congregation several times.

“A lot of us went to check it out,” Fefferman said in a phone interview, “hoping we could talk sense into him.” In his opinion, the Moon brothers “attract the more unbalanced members” that can be found in any religious sect. He considered Rod of Iron a “far-right group with a paramilitary aspect to it.” Not a hate group per se, “but I certainly hope and expect the FBI is watching them closely.”

For second-generation Church members, these choices are more emotionally complex. The Unification Church is the only anchor they’ve known. Andrew Stewart’s parents raised him in the Church. He spent several college summers as an intern on a nondenominational farm near Newfoundland, where he got exposed to Sanctuary Church. He helped with some minor building renovations and attended Sunday services. The vibe grew progressively darker, he said. Although personally fond of many people he met, it struck him as odd that, theologically, “the Church thrives off the ability to make people angry.” He gradually drifted away from Sanctuary and this spring left the Unification Church, too.

Somiya Chapman Gabb — whose father was part of the Unification Church support staff at East Garden — was so offended by Hak Ja Han’s revising of Rev. Moon’s religious texts that she jumped to Sanctuary in early 2015. She and her husband were then living in Yonkers, N.Y., a three-hour round-trip drive. But she and her family felt increasingly out of tune with Sanctuary’s often “scathing” sermons. Also, a member of the congregation told her that another Sanctuarian had pulled a loaded gun on him. By the end of 2017, the Gabbs stopped making that long Sunday drive to Pennsylvania. They read the Bible and pray at home now. Gabb thinks “there’s still hope” that Sanctuary Church can right itself but said Sean Moon “is one word away from a violent situation and he may not even know it.”



Sharon Barnett of Florida holds an AR-15 and bows her head in prayer during a blessing ceremony at Sanctuary Church.

Individually, Sanctuary Church members come across as honest, reasonable, upright folk, the stuff of good neighbors. Collectively, the dynamic changes. So much of the Church discourse can't abide contrasting opinions and worldviews. You don't hear much talk about, or empathy for, the poor, the infirm, the weak. Most enervating, though, is the steady drumbeat of dystopia. To be a devout Sanctuarian requires almost superhuman faith in the cleansing waters of catastrophe. It's like standing on the deck of the Titanic and rooting for the icebergs.

Justin Moon told me we've entered "that End of Times time frame" prophesied in the Book of Revelation, when God and "his champions" will "take the political power in the earth" away from Satan. Viewed through that lens, the 2016 election was "very different." Actually, hugely different. "I believe God is using Donald Trump," he said, a sentiment his brother shares. "He is an imperfect person, a sinner, but God has chosen to use him. Just like King David was an imperfect person."

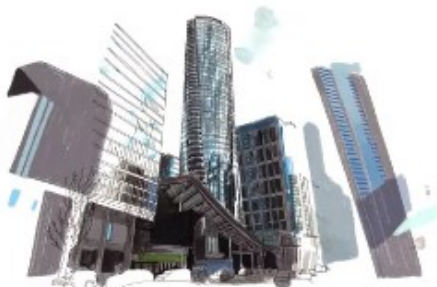
The apocalyptic events predicted in the Bible began unspooling, Justin explained, during his father's lifetime: World War II, the Cold War, famines, disease epidemics and "the continuing confusion we see today." Biblical timelines are unpredictable, but he is confident the End of

Times and the corresponding advent of Cheon Il Guk will come in his son's lifetime, if not his own. His father, the Rev. Moon, said so.

Sean Moon's Constitution of the United States of Cheon Il Guk is a powerful document. It throws the country in reverse and then steps on the gas. Consider just these few provisions: The House of Representatives will elect the president. The king will pick Supreme Court justices. Congress cannot levy income taxes or property taxes; nor can it fund health care, education, Social Security or Medicare. The constitution specifically states there will be no Central Bank, Environmental Protection Agency or national police force.

Oh, and there will be no standing military of any kind. Justin Moon says the United States will follow the "Swiss model" of national defense. For example, he says, the Swiss Air Force has a small number of paid managers who schedule airplane maintenance and design training regimens, but citizen volunteers take care of all the planes and fly them, too. He says the Swiss defense system has kept Switzerland safe and secure for a long time. This is true, though being a neutral country may have a little something to do with that.

Related



What I figured out about America's future from visiting Trump resorts throughout the world



She led Trump to Christ: The rise of the televangelist who advises the White House

President Trump was doing a fine job implementing God's plan, the way Pastor Sean saw it — that is, until he signed the omnibus spending bill that added another trillion dollars to the national debt. Then came the April airstrikes on Syria. A few days later Sean Moon addressed these developments in a "King's Report" webcast: "This is very, very disturbing for the actual Trump supporters who got him elected. We don't want war. We're sick of foreign entanglements. ... He's completely doing a 180. He's becoming frickin' Hillary Clinton. ... If he continues down this road, America is dead, folks. ... He's a man with many flaws, many sins, and now he's capitulating to the most evil wickedness on the planet."

That wickedness kept getting worse. The day he recorded this particular “King’s Report,” news broke that the judge overseeing the court case of the president’s personal attorney, Michael Cohen, had officiated at the 2013 wedding of George Soros (“the Antichrist; he has his Rothschild fingers in everything,” Pastor Sean moaned) and Nancy Pelosi was a guest. The fix is in, he said. One way or another, the “deep state” is going to take Trump down.

Then again, for Pastor Sean, the good news is that all this bad news is actually great news. He perceived a hidden hand at work, puzzling it out live on “The King’s Report.” The quicker the country goes down the toilet, the quicker Americans will come to their senses and embrace the Rod of Iron and Cheon Il Guk. It now appears to him that God is using Trump to run America into the ground, not make it great again. “We didn’t know exactly how it would unfold,” Pastor Sean told his fellow Sanctuarians, YouTube watchers and the world, “but we knew that in the end times, it gets worse before it gets better.”



A reflection of Sean Moon at his home.

Tom Dunkel is the author of “[Color Blind: The Forgotten Team That Broke Baseball’s Color Line](#)” and is at work on a book about the German resistance in World War II.