



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on September 4, 2012

Controversial Religious Leader, Sun Myung Moon, Dies at 92

Sun Myung Moon, head of the cultic Unification Church and one of the world's most enigmatic religious leaders, died September 3 at age 92 in his native South Korea. A statement from his church's headquarters said its founder died at one of its own medical facilities of complications from pneumonia.

Moon, who assembled a conglomerate of businesses in the 1950s that produced such items as ginseng tea, pharmaceuticals, marble vases, and firearms, founded the Unification Church in 1954. The church, which conferred messianic stature on its founder, reportedly has millions of adherents worldwide, and in recent years was most notorious for its mass wedding ceremonies between brides and grooms that Moon himself had selected for one another. Moon presided over the ceremonies, donning an ornate robe and wearing a crown upon his head.



[Voice of America News](#) reported that while Moon was once considered a staunch anti-communist, “he later set aside ideology to do business with North Korea’s founder, the late Kim Il Sung. A church-affiliated firm, Pyeonghwa Motors, established a carmaking business in partnership with the North Korean state in 1999.” Moon had reportedly hoped to help facilitate the reunification of the two Koreas during his lifetime.

The [Washington Post](#) reported that under the control of Moon — and in recent years some of his children — the Unification Church has “quietly amassed lucrative business ventures ... including the *Washington Times* newspaper; the New Yorker Hotel, a midtown Manhattan art deco landmark; and a seafood distribution firm that supplies sushi to Japanese restaurants across the U.S. It gave the University of Bridgeport \$110 million over more than a decade to keep the Connecticut school operating.” In South Korea, the paper continued, it “acquired a ski resort, professional football teams, schools, hospitals and other businesses. It also operates the Potonggang Hotel in Pyongyang, jointly operates the North Korean automaker and has a huge ‘peace’ institute in the North Korean capital.”

Moon, who was born in 1920 in what is now North Korea, claimed that when he was 16, Jesus Christ appeared to him and commissioned him to “finish” the work He Himself had initiated 2,000 years earlier. The would-be religious leader left North Korea for the south when war broke out in 1950, leaving behind a wife, whom he divorced in 1952.



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South Korea, which has a strong Christian foundation, proved fertile ground for Moon's hybrid faith, which the *Post* described as a "mixture of Christian, Confucian, and traditional Korean values." In the early 1960s Moon began conducting mass weddings in Seoul in an attempt to grow his movement, which was enjoying healthy momentum among young Koreans. Over the next two decades the strange religious movement gained adherents beyond Asia, and in 1982 Moon conducted his first mass wedding outside South Korea, at New York's Madison Square Garden, during which thousands of couples were wed by the self-anointed messiah.

"International and intercultural marriages are the quickest way to bring about an ideal world of peace," Moon said of the mass-marriage concept in his 2009 autobiography. "People should marry across national and cultural boundaries with people from countries they consider to be their enemies so that the world of peace can come that much more quickly."

As for his own personal life, Moon married his second wife, Hak Ja Han, more than 20 years his junior, in 1960. The couple, who had 13 children (10 of whom survive), are considered the church's ideal couple and the "True Parents" of its members.

The [Los Angeles Times](#) reported that while Moon was seen as a kind of Korean Billy Graham when he arrived in the United States in the early 1970s, he "gradually emerged as a religious figure with quite different beliefs, whose movement was labeled a cult and whose followers were mocked as 'Moonies.'" At its peak the church claimed some five million members worldwide, "a figure that ex-members and other observers have called inflated," reported the *Times*. "Those numbers are believed to have fallen into the thousands today."

While he claimed his beliefs were Christian, Moon's ideas were "often seemed bizarre," the *Times* recalled. "He believed in numerology, proposed building a highway around the world and for a while embraced a Zimbabwean man as the reincarnation of a son who had died in an accident."

According to the [Associated Press](#), Moon began handing the reins of church and business power over to his children in the past few years, but "there have been reports of family rifts. One son sued his mother's missionary group in 2011, demanding the return of more than \$22 million he claimed was sent without his consent from a company he runs to her charity. His mother's group eventually returned the money after court mediation."

The *Washington Post* noted that over the years Moon "developed a good relationship with conservative American leaders such as former Presidents Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush." His American friends had a decidedly eclectic bent, including Moral Majority founder Jerry Falwell, who stood up to defend Moon during a 1980s tax evasion trial, and the Nation of Islam's Louis Farrakhan, who shared a pulpit with him.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported that in 1978 "Congress conducted an investigation of the Unification Church as part of a broader probe into Korean influence-buying. A congressional subcommittee concluded that Moon's organization had violated U.S. tax, immigration, banking and currency laws."

Four years later, in 1982, Moon was convicted of tax evasion, and served 11 months in federal prison. That same year he launched the *Washington Times* newspaper, which he positioned "as a conservative alternative to the *Washington Post*," reported the *Los Angeles Times*. "It won loyal readers in the White House and among conservative strategists, but has been a chronic money-loser, surviving on more than \$2 billion in subsidies from the church."

According to the *Washington Post*, one of the "more bizarre chapters in Moon's relationship with



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Washington came in 2004, when more than a dozen U.S. lawmakers attended a ‘coronation ceremony’ for Moon and his wife in which Moon declared himself humanity’s savior and said his teachings have helped Hitler and Stalin be ‘reborn as new persons.’ Some of the congressmen later said they had been misled and hadn’t been aware that Moon would be at the event.”

Throughout the 1970s and ’80s, Moon attempted to exert his influence in conservative causes through millions of dollars in contributions and investment. But in a 1988 report on Moon and the Unification Church, John F. McManus, publisher of *The New American* magazine, noted that while Moon was throwing millions of dollars into supposedly conservative and anti-communist groups such as News World Communications (parent group of the *Washington Times* and *Insight* magazine) and the Confederation of Associations for the Unity of the Societies of America (CAUSA), to name just two, his agenda appeared to lean more toward control and manipulation than liberty and freedom.

Even his take on communism seemed to be at odds with that of most true anti-communists. “In order to combat communism,” McManus quoted Moon’s right-hand man, Col. Bo Hai Pak, as declaring, “we must fight with the same weapon that they use: ideology. A false ideology must be subjected by a superior one.” McManus noted that there is “little else that communism treasures more than being considered and ideology” rather than a dangerous, deadly, oppressive conspiracy against freedom. McManus went on to quote noted Soviet defector Lev Albut, who explained that contrary to Moon’s multi-million-dollar viewpoint, communism was never “an ideology except in the minds of some confused and misled individuals, usually doomed to be duly exterminated by true Communists.”

McManus’ analysis concluded that far from aiding in the fight for liberty that many good conservatives were engaging in at the time, Moon appeared to be little more than a bizarre cult leader who used his skills in both business and manipulation to curry unwarranted political influence and favor amongst some easily duped individuals and groups.

Photo of Sun Myung Moon: AP Images



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