

Unification Church and mainstream Christianity

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The relationship between **the Unification Church and mainstream Christianity** has been marked by conflict and disagreement, as well as by cooperation at times. The Unification Church was founded by religious leader Sun Myung Moon in South Korea in 1954. Its teachings are based on the Bible, but include new interpretations not found in mainstream Christian tradition.^[1] The church spread to most countries of the world in the second half of the Twentieth Century although with relatively few members.^[2] Mainstream Christianity is usually defined as those Christian churches which follow the Nicene Creed and includes the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and most Protestant churches.^{[3][4]}

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History

From its beginning the Unification Church has claimed to be Christian and has tried to promote its teachings to mainstream Christian churches and organizations. The Unification Church in South Korea was labeled as heretical by Protestant churches in South Korea, including Moon's own Presbyterian Church. In the United States the church was rejected by ecumenical organizations as being non-Christian. The main objections against it were theological, especially because of the Unification Church's addition of material to the Bible and for its rejection of a literal Second Coming of Jesus.^[5] Protestant commentators have also criticized Unification Church teachings as being contrary to the Protestant doctrine of salvation by faith alone.^{[6][7]}

In 1974 Moon founded the Unification Theological Seminary, in Barrytown, New York, partly in order to improve relations of the Unification Church with other churches. Professors from other denominations, including a Methodist minister, a Presbyterian, and a Roman Catholic priest, as well as a rabbi, were hired to teach religious studies to the students, who were being trained as leaders in the Unification Church.^{[8][9][10][11][12]}

In 1977, church member Jonathan Wells, who later became well known as the author of the popular Intelligent Design book *Icons of Evolution*, defended Unification Church theology against what he said were unfair criticisms by the National Council of Churches.^[13] That same year Frederick Sontag, a professor of philosophy at Pomona College and a minister in the United Church of Christ,^[14] published *Sun Myung Moon and the Unification Church* which gave an overview of the church and urged Christians to take it more seriously.^{[15][16][17]}

In 1982, Moon was imprisoned in the United States after being found guilty by a jury of willfully filing false Federal income tax returns and conspiracy. (See: United States vs. Sun Myung Moon) Unification Church members launched a public-relations campaign. Booklets, letters and videotapes were mailed to approximately 300,000 Christian leaders in the United States. Many of them signed petitions protesting the government's case.^[18] Among the American Christian leaders who spoke out in defense of Moon were conservative Jerry Falwell, head of Moral Majority, and liberal Joseph Lowery, head of the Southern

Christian Leadership Conference.^[19] The American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A, the National Council of Churches, the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference filed briefs in support of Moon.^[20]

In the 1980s the Unification Church sent thousands of American ministers from other churches on trips to Japan and South Korea to inform them about Unification Church teachings. At least one minister was dismissed by his congregation for taking part.^[21] In 1994 the church had about 5,000 members in Russia and came under criticism from the Russian Orthodox Church.^[22] In 1997, the Russian government passed a law requiring the Unification Church and other non-Russian religions to register their congregations and submit to tight controls.^[23]

In 1995 the Unification Church related organization the Women's Federation for World Peace indirectly contributed \$3.5 million to help Baptist Liberty University which at that time was in financial difficulty. This was reported in the United States news media as an example of closer relationships between the Unification Church and conservative Christian congregations.^[24]

In 2001, the Unification Church came into conflict with the Roman Catholic Church when Catholic archbishop Emmanuel Milingo and Maria Sung, a 43-year-old Korean acupuncturist, married in a Unification Church Blessing ceremony, presided over by Rev. and Mrs. Moon. Following his marriage the Archbishop was called to the Vatican by Pope John Paul II, where he was asked not to see his wife anymore, and to move to a Capuchin monastery.^[25] Sung went on a hunger strike to protest their separation. This attracted much media attention.^[26] Milingo is now an advocate of the removal of the requirement for celibacy by priests in the Catholic Church. He is the founder of Married Priests Now!.^[27] Archbishop George Augustus Stallings, Jr., also a former Catholic priest, who had founded his own Imani Temple African-American Catholic Congregation, is also a supporter of the organization.^[28]

In 2003 Moon began his "tear down",^[29] or "take down the cross"^[30] campaign. The campaign was begun in the belief that the cross is a reminder of Jesus' pain and has been a source of division between people of different faiths. The campaign included a burial ceremony for the cross and a crown to be put in its place. The American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC), an interfaith group founded by Moon, spearheaded the effort, calling the cross a symbol of oppression and superiority.^[31]

See also

- Unification Church and Judaism
- Unification Church and Islam
- Unification Church view of Jesus

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 - a. The Unification Church has a seminary in Barrytown, New York called The Unification Theological Seminary.
 - b. It is used as a theological training center, where members are prepared to be leaders and theologians in the church.
 - c. Since many people regard Moon as a cult leader, there is a false impression that this seminary is academically weak.
 - d. Moon's seminary, however, has not only attracted a respectable faculty (many of whom are not members of his church), but it also has graduated many students (who are members of his church) who have been accepted into doctoral programs at institutions such as Harvard and Yale."
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External links

- History of Christianity (http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/History_of_Christianity) article in Unification Church sponsored encyclopedia.

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