

EXCURSUS I

Paul Ramsey on Korean Creeds and the Rejection of Old Heresies

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost! Jimminy Cricket! Jesus Christ!...as the first wise man said when he stumbled over his Renaissance robes in stepping across the threshold of the stable that first Christmas Eve. ("You know," remarked Mary, turning to Joseph, "I think that's a better name than Irving.")

A National Council of Churches (NCC) report has declared that the Unification Church of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon is "not a Christian church." And why not? The NCC acknowledges that there are diversities among its member churches, but "certain dimensions of Christian doctrine stand out in sharp detail as essential and indispensable to whatever may be called 'Christian faith.'"

What are the essentials by which the Moon movement's basic book, *Divine Principle*, is judged and found wanting—indeed incompatible with Christian faith today? Belief in Jesus as the Christ and belief in the Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are, among other things, "essential to Christian identity."

That's the Apostles' Creed.

Moreover, the Moon book declares that "Jesus can by no means be God Himself." He was only a "second God (image of God)."

That's the Arian heresy, against which the Nicene Creed was directed.

It is hard to know what to make of this high Christology invoked to put Moon down. One wonders what the Hartford Declaration was all about. Its authors only called for a renewal of a sense of "transcendence" in our churches. But here we have the very essence of paradoxical transcendence said to be essential to Christian identity. Athanasius would have liked that!

The United Methodist Church is a member of the NCC, and I am a lay member of the Methodist Church. What happens when, on Sunday mornings at about 11:12 A.M., we turn in our Book of Worship (that is, to the back of the Hymnal) to confess liturgically our Christian faith?

There we find *four* alternatives: the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, A Modern Affirmation, and something called the Korean Creed. (The KCIA had nothing to do with that; it's been in the book a long time.)

It's good to have alternatives from Sunday to Sunday. It requires "mental reservations" from different segments of the congregation from Lord's Day to Lord's Day. But look or attend more closely.

When the Apostles' or the Nicene Creed is chosen for the day, the minister intones: "Let us unite in this

historic confession of the Christian faith." That puts all that high Christology, and the paradoxical transcendence of the Most High God who "for us men and our salvation was made man" into its proper place. The words we say are "historic," one of the stations along the way we have come as a people of God.

When, however, we recite A Modern Affirmation or the Korean Creed, the minister opens with no local reference. The words he uses are without time limit: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is the one true Church, apostolic and universal, whose holy faith let us now declare."

I have often wondered why we do not say "whose holy faith let us now declare" just before launching into the Apostles' and the Nicene Creed. The reason seems plain: Methodists today don't generally believe what those confessions say. I happen to prefer them, if for no other reason than that the modern confessions require me to believe in too many incredible things. For example, we are asked to declare our holy faith in these words: "We believe in the kingdom of God as the divine rule in human society, and in the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God." In addition, I am required to place too much of my own construction on the words that affirm belief "in the final triumph of righteousness." Nor can I, without dishonesty, pledge myself "to the end that the kingdom of God may come upon earth." Such words are beginning to sound too much like the family of God coming soon in the Unification Church.

All glory to the Triune God, however, for the NCC report's appeal to Him to define our Christian faith and identity! Perhaps we owe thanks also to Sister Agnes Cunningham, professor of patrology at Mundelein (Illinois) Seminary and president of the Catholic Theological Society of America, who is named as the principal author of the report for the NCC's Commission on Faith and Order. Unceasing praise to the God-Man (*homoousion*—without the iota—of the "same essence" with all the Divinity there is) for again becoming incompatible with something! Many skulls were cracked and a good deal of *faithful* theological reflection was done in the course of rejecting the word "*homoiousion*" ("similar" to God—only an image, as Moon says). I always thought that struggle over the faith should have more consequence than to wind up as an "historic" confession of the faith of the Methodist Church.

Moon's book teaches that Jesus *failed* as the Christ; he got himself crucified instead of getting married and forming a nucleus of the family of God on earth (which still seems to be the goal of both Moon's and our Methodist "Korean Creed"). To put it differently, the world failed God's first attempt to redeem us through Jesus. One does not understand the Moon movement unless one grasps its messianic joy combined with a most extreme form of "work righteousness" in order to avoid a second failure. We Protestants combine feverish work

righteousness with no messianism and often without Providence.

Contemporary Christians may not believe that Jesus Christ *came* to die, or that the Father *sent* him to die, or *gave* His only Son over to that Divine action for us. Still, we do not believe the crucifixion was a sign of failure, whatever view of the atonement we hold. Some Protestants hold the "moral influence" theory, the "example" of Jesus' undying dying love, or that this is God's way of dealing with evil principalities and powers. Some of these views of the atonement explain why *Worldview* has difficulty finding Christian *theological* articles to publish on "religion and international affairs." But on any view the crucifixion was no failure.

There is a second thing that distinguishes contemporary Christian identity from Moon identity; namely, the latter's teaching that sin came by sexual union between Eve and Lucifer in the Garden of Paradise. This teaching explains why Moon followers, although vibrant and attractive youths, are entirely chaste—unless and until the Reverend Mr. Moon *commands* them to marry. Both that chastity and the command to marry express the movement's deep *dualism* between flesh and redeemed spirit. Marriage is in no way an ordinance of God's creation; hence separation between true disciples and their natural families must be enforced to an extremity rarely approximated in quasi-dualistic monastic orders of the Christian past.

When I first heard the Reverend Mr. Moon preach—at the behest of a student of mine—I said to my student that this was the foot-stomping revivalist Christianity of my native South, carried to Korea by missionaries and now come back to our shores. When I read that student's Senior Thesis on the *Divine Principle* in the Department of Religion at Princeton, I revised that judgment and told him it was a form of Eastern religious dualism dressed in Western messianic garb. This student—then a true believer—has since come out of the movement.

So far as I can judge his exit was for two reasons. As a true believer at Princeton, he told some of his fellow students that the Unification Church was a form of Christianity; to others who wanted it another way, he said it was *not*. Now freed from what he does not hesitate to call "brainwashing" (I have argued that is too extreme), he affirms that he was *trained* to *deceive*. He recalls to me several occasions on which he *lied* to me. For this fine young man that came to be morally unacceptable. It was in no way the same as St. Paul's becoming all things to all men in order to save some. Nor was it what historians of religion in their academic toleration depict as a similarity between this and many other religious movements, namely, a *withholding* of the innermost secrets until a new convert can stand the strong meat of a new gospel. He had positively *lied*.

The second reason he came out was probably more important: His father persuaded a judge to make him "conservator" of his son. The simple fact

that his father would go so far activated in him (at twenty-four years of age) the awareness that the roles and relations of families do not end at some legal definition of majority. In any case, he was not kidnapped or "reprogrammed."

But let us return to the theological point. I said that the Moon movement's dualism would obviously be rejected by all contemporary Christians. This judgment requires severe qualification, if not withdrawal.



(Photo courtesy Abingdon Press)

The Moon movement: "A form of Eastern religious dualism dressed in Western messianic garb."

In the history of Christian thought there has never been a more dualistic age than the present with respect to human sexuality. Nor has there been a more atomistically individualistic one in our understanding of the roles and relations of husband, wife, and parenting. Doubtless, sexuality is not the original sin, as with the Moons; but it is *neutral*, set dualistically apart from our persons, our spirit. God's good creation has mainly to do with our spiritual persons. We are told that the family and procreation are no longer gifts and tasks to which we are created. *We contract* to be married, and then maybe *we contract* to have children together. Everything is subject to human spiritual autonomy. This is baptized as Christian.

For these reasons the so-called Christian theologians who have rushed to the defense of the Moonites mean to say more than the NCC report says. The NCC report says that as citizens we should defend "the freedom of the Unification Church to exist and propagate its beliefs under the protection of the First Amendment of the United States' Constitution." But these Christian theologians seem to say that the Moon movement has importance for contemporary spirituality in general. In saying this, they introduce contemporary secular "immaculate conceptions" of dualism (and not Moon's only) and atomistic secular libertarianism into the heart of the church and of the family as well. One would think that Christian theologians have more important tasks than to say "Amen!" to notions that have already dissolved the church in the present age.

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