

CONTRAST BETWEEN CHRISTIAN AND MOONIE BELIEFS

Peter Henriot

“Just who are the Moonies? And is there some mysterious relationship between the Moonies and all the current fuss here in Zambia about the activities of an excommunicated Archbishop and a self-proclaimed Archbishop?”

These seem to be some of the questions raised in the minds of people I've spoken with, Catholics and others, during the past week, amid headlines, front-page photos, television discussions and lively debates. All this fuss has stirred controversy but not much clarity about issues like clerical celibacy and official membership in the Catholic Church.

About the issue of celibacy and whether or not it is forced upon unwilling priestly candidates, I leave that topic to the honest and open discussion of Zambian priests who have faithfully and happily lived their free choices. About the issue of whether or not former Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo is truly excommunicated from the Catholic Church, I recommend the clarifying comments made in a very lucid editorial in THE POST last Friday, 06 June.

IMPORTANT CONNECTIONS

What I suggest now would be helpful in all this discussion is to evaluate the status of the connection between former Archbishop Milingo, Father Luciano Mbewe and the religious group called the “Moonies” or the Unification Church. (Let me show respect and not use the term “Moonies” in what follows here.) This is the Church founded and still guided by the Korean, Reverend Sun Myung Moon.

Milingo tells us he has been protected and promoted by the Rev. Moon and has married a Korean woman picked out for him by the Rev. Moon. According to him, he has spent considerable time studying the central Unification Church literature, the “Divine Principle,” and admires its teachings. Mbewe used the Rev. Moon's Peace Embassy in Lusaka as a base of operations in setting up his own church. Whether or not he receives financial assistance for his church from Rev. Moon might become public knowledge if official GRZ registration is granted.

The current full name of Rev. Moon's movement (or “church” or “sect” or “cult” or whatever it might be called) is “The Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity.” It promotes a very large number of different organisations (professional groups, NGOs, youth groups, cultural and peace groups, media, etc.) all around the world, aiming to spread the central teachings of the Rev. Moon. (Go to “google” for his own home page and for many discussions, both favourable and unfavourable, about his activities.)

IMPORTANT QUESTION

So what is the Rev. Moon's message about traditional Christianity – not simply the Catholic Church, but any branch of Christianity, whether Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal? Is it likely that faithful Christians of any variety would be agreeable and comfortable with the central teachings of the Rev. Moon? I believe that this is a major question that needs honest consideration by Christians here in Zambia or anywhere else. The question may not be as “sexy” as issues like celibacy or new churches but can lead us to a more intelligent discussion of such issues.

A serious effort to look at that question was made by the Head of the Department of Philosophy and Applied Ethics of the University of Zambia (UNZA), Professor Clive Dillon-Malone. Father Malone, a Jesuit priest and Zambian resident for several decades, published his findings in two articles in THE CHALLENGE last year. He simply used the Rev. Moon's own writings to note the extremely sharp differences between Christian beliefs and the tenets of the Unification Church.

Let me present only a few major points and then ask readers what they feel should be a faithful Christian's reaction to the theological positions of the Rev. Moon.

IMPORTANT DISTINCTIONS

Who is Jesus Christ? Christians believe that he is the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary. The Rev. Moon infers that Jesus is the illegitimate son of Mary and the priest Zechariah, father of John the Baptist.

Who is the true Messiah? Christians believe that Jesus is the Messiah. The Rev. Moon teaches that he himself is the true Messiah, the "Lord of the Second Advent."

What is the central role of Jesus Christ? Christians believe that Jesus is the Saviour of the World who achieved our full Redemption through his death on the Cross and his Resurrection. The Rev. Moon teaches that Jesus was a failure since he did not achieve our full bodily redemption.

How do we learn the path to salvation? Christians believe that Jesus is "the way, the truth and the life" who instructs us by his words and witness to love God fully and neighbour as self. The Rev. Moon teaches that he and his second wife, Hak-Ja Han, are the "True Parents" of humanity who set examples of perfect families. Central to the ritual of his church are the large weddings of men and women chosen for each other by the Rev. Moon.

Where do we find God's revelation? Christians believe that God's revelation is complete in Christ and in the Holy Bible, with its richness being continually disclosed through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the Church. The Rev. Moon teaches that new revelations from God are expressed in "Divine Principle" which endorses Moon as a superior teacher to Jesus.

What about the "Second Coming" of Jesus? Christians believe that the Second Coming of Christ will be the fulfillment of all of creation at the end of time. The Rev. Moon teaches that the "Lord of the Second Advent" has in fact already now been born in Korea.

IMPORTANT CONCLUSION

Given these sharp distinctions between basic Christian beliefs and the key teachings of the Rev. Moon, is it not appropriate, indeed necessary, to raise that question I earlier introduced: "Is it likely that faithful Christians of any variety would be agreeable and comfortable with the central teachings of the Rev. Moon?"

This is not simply a question of theological niceties or pious pickings. Because it affects the traditional beliefs of the majority of Zambians, I consider it to be a matter that requires more honest explanation from those who closely follow or receive financial assistance from the Rev. Moon and his many organisations.

After his study of the writings of the Rev. Moon, Professor Dillon-Malone cautions that “Some unwary Christians may be misled into thinking that Unification Church theology is somehow an expression of Christian teaching.” But in fact, this teaching is “A total rejection of the central beliefs of Christianity.”

And that is something that excommunicated Archbishops and self-proclaimed Archbishops should be honest enough to acknowledge if they are not to be faulted for leading astray a lot of faithful Zambian Christians.

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