

UNIFICATION CHURCH FOUNDER MOON DIES

The Rev. Sun Myung Moon died Sept. 3, two weeks after being hospitalized with pneumonia. He was 92.

In mid-August, the founder of the Unification Church “felt ill suddenly and was hospitalized in Seoul in ‘grave condition,’” according to a CNN report. The news article also stated Moon was “unconscious” and “breathing through a respirator.” The initial prognosis was described as “very critical” and gave him “only a 50% chance of survival.”

A few days before his death, his condition worsened and he was moved from Seoul’s St. Mary’s Hospital to a church-owned hospital near his home in Gapyeong County. He is survived by his wife, Hak Ja Han, and 10 children. He is preceded in death by three sons.

Upon his death, the Unification Church held a 13-day mourning period. The funeral was held Sept. 15 in a packed stadium at the church’s headquarters in Gapyeong. He was buried at Cheongseong Mountain, where his home is located. More than 30,000 church members attended the elaborate funeral, which equaled the pomp and circumstance of any head of state. Thousands of mourners flew to South Korea from overseas for the funeral. During the mourning period, prior to the funeral service, more than 150,000 came to the stadium passing by a massive portrait of Moon to offer their last respects to the self-proclaimed messiah.

Moon founded the Unification Church in Seoul in May 1954. He claimed that Jesus Christ’s mission to save mankind was thwarted when He was killed on the cross. Moon further claimed that in 1936 Jesus personally commissioned him to undertake and complete the mission of physical salvation for mankind. This is said to happen through devotion to Moon and his wife.

While religion was Moon’s fundamental ambition, the church acquired numerous businesses, including hotels, newspapers, fisheries, sports teams, universities, and hospitals. Some of the business concerns were lucrative; others were not. According to the Associated Press, “One expert said the church’s business prospects appear brighter than its religious future.” The Rev. Hyung-jin Moon, the youngest U.S.-born of Moon’s sons, was appointed to the church’s top leader position in April 2008 when he was 28 years old. Unification officials are tight-lipped about the exact worth of the entirety of church businesses, merely describing them as a multibillion-dollar enterprise.

Moon savored political relationships on several fronts. He developed associations with a number of conservative U.S. leaders, including Presidents George H.W. Bush, Ronald Reagan, and Richard Nixon. He also cultivated ongoing friendships with the late North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il, and Kim’s father, the country’s founder, Kim Il Sung. In 2004, more than a dozen U.S. legislators were part of a “coronation service” for Moon and his wife that declared Moon to be the savior of mankind. Following the event, those leaders maintained that they had been deceived as to the true purpose of the gathering.

For years prior to Moon’s death, internal conflict amongst many of the church’s business entities has existed. Those keeping a close eye on the church suggest that discord may now widen and accelerate. The Unification Church boasts a worldwide membership of 3 million members. However, non-members who are familiar with the church claim the number of followers at no more than 100,000.

—MKG

MORMONS CONTINUE TO ELIMINATE CULT DESIGNATION

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints continues to make progress in gaining acceptance and credibility, not only with the American public but within Christian circles. The candidacy for the U.S. presidency of Mitt Romney, a prominent LDS church member, has further eroded the Mormon church’s status of “cult” in both evangelical and charismatic camps.

Christianity Today magazine published on its website an article with the headline: “After Romney Meeting, Billy Graham Site Scrubs Mormon ‘Cult’ Reference.” The news story, which was posted exactly three weeks before the national election, revealed, “The Billy Graham Evangelical Association removed language labeling Mormonism a ‘cult’ from its website after the famed preacher met with Republican nominee Mitt Romney last week and pledged to help his presidential campaign. The removal came after a gay rights group reported that the ‘cult’ reference remained online even after Graham all but endorsed Romney, a Mormon, last Thursday (Oct. 11).”

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