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Michael L. Mickler, *The Unification Church Movement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022, 82 pp. ISBN: 978-1-0092-4146-5 \$37.52(pbk)

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“In fact, the UCM’s founding generation has set its sights on significant global expansion... Whether the post-Sun Myung Moon/post-Hak Ja Han Moon UCM will seek a denominational niche within which it might perpetuate, or whether it will maintain its world-transforming religious fervor, will be pivotal questions during the next stage of its development” (64). In the most recent monograph to be released in the *Cambridge Elements* series by Cambridge University Press on New Religious Movements (NRMs), Michael L. Mickler covers the generation and continuance of the Unification movement (known as the UCM, HSA-UWC, or FFWPU) of Reverend Sun Myung Moon. For the past few decades Mickler, Distinguished Professor of Historical Studies at the Unification Theology Seminary and Director of the SunHak Institute of History USA, has been chronicling the Unification movement’s past. This makes his recent work a brief but helpful and insightful tool for anyone trying to understand the overall history and trajectory of the religious movement.

Using a variety of primary and secondary sources, Mickler paints an overarching picture of Unification movement history broken up into six chapters. The first four chapters are chronological. The first chapter analyzes the prehistory of the Unification movement, and the second focuses on Reverend Sun Myung Moon’s biographical background, his struggles during interwar and World War II Korea, and his pre-Unificationist ministry. Mickler’s third chapter discusses the foundation of the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity (HSA-UWC), or Unification Church, and its history from the 1950s to the 1990s. Finally, his fourth chapter covers the historical transition from HSA-UWC to the contemporary Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), the establishment of the nation of *Cheon Il Guk*, internal fissures within the movement, and Reverend Moon’s death.

Chapters 5 and 6 are comprised of a non-chronological assessment of the current state of the Unification movement, summarized in an analysis of the breakaway groups of the Unification movement, and an evaluation of the Unification movement’s future. These sections cover the development of three major religious organizations generated after the death of Rev. Moon: The Family Federation for World Peace and Unification led by Rev. Moon’s widow, Hak Ja Han, the Global Peace Foundation led by his eldest

surviving son Hyun Jin (Preston) Moon, and the World Peace and Unification Sanctuary Church, led by his son Hyung Jin (Sean) Moon. Mickler deliberately notes that this coverage is not sociological or theological, but a historical representation of “the UCM’s mainstream development centered primarily on Sun Myung Moon and his family” (4).

Mickler succeeds in covering these topics succinctly but meaningfully, utilizing skilled narrative form and usage of historical documentation. His monograph is concise and easy to read, with a delivery reminiscent of an updated version of New Religious Movement scholar Massimo Introvigne’s *The Unification Church* (2000). Mickler’s longtime familiarity with the source material, discussion of growing tension between various groups within the movement (43), and engagement with controversial topics such as the “Six Marys” (36), the personal troubles of his son Hyo Jin Moon, and Reverend Sun Myung Moon’s extramarital affairs and potential illegitimate child (37), lend legitimacy to his overall project and intent. His willingness to discuss these issues candidly is undoubtedly a strength in his work.

Where Mickler’s analysis may have issues is an overreliance on Reverend Sun Myung Moon’s personal accounts of his own background in the first two chapters. The dependence on Reverend Moon’s own perspective to reformulate his early history could be considered hagiographic, which is understandable given Mickler’s background as a believer and historian of the movement. To his credit, Mickler does cross-check this background using alternative sources, one example being NRM scholar George Chrystides. Overall, the conclusion can be made that Mickler is writing from a confessional perspective but is not to blame for this shortcoming. This is something readers should keep in mind when reading, though.

An issue with the *Cambridge Elements* format that impacts Mickler’s work is the amount of room he has to discuss recent innovations, the schismatic organizations that have broken away from the Unification movement over its roughly seventy-year history, and why the most recent breakaways are of a different nature. For example, the Family Federation led by Hak Ja Han has undergone several changes after the death of Rev. Moon. Some of these innovations include revisions to the *Cheong Seong Gyeong (Divine Principle)* (46), the adoption of the “Only Begotten Daughter” theological innovation (which suggests that Hak Ja Han is the “Only Begotten Eve” sent to restore the Blood Lineage, downplaying Rev. Moon’s role), and a rumored reintroduction of Korean paganistic ritual practices.

Many of these topics are seen as controversial within schismatic perspectives, and likely due to space considerations, Mickler glosses over or does not mention some of them. This comes through particularly when discussing Hyung Jin’s (Sean, the founder of the schismatic Sanctuary Church) claim to heir apparent over the movement (58). A lengthier discussion on the earlier schisms (50-52) such as Jesus Morning Star (Providence) would have also been helpful.

This being said, Mickler does provide a wealth of information on the ongoing and recently resolved legal disputes surrounding the most recent schisms with Hyun Jin (Preston) and Hyung Jin (Sean). In these sections, Mickler discusses recent Family Federation lawsuits to remove Hyun Jin (Preston) Moon from the controlling board of an asset holding company called Unification Church International (56), a Family Federation lawsuit over trademarks involving Hyung Jin (Sean) Moon and the Sanctuary Church (61), and Hyung Jin (Sean)'s attempts to attain legal recognition as the legitimate heir of the Unification Movement (61-62). These recent legal disputes are undoubtedly crucial to understanding the continued development of the Unification movement and its schismatic organizations.

We cannot possibly expect Mickler to cover the whole historiographic background of Reverend Moon's accounts. Nor can we expect a full discussion of the recent schisms in the Unification movement at length within the *Cambridge Elements* form—to do so would be unjust. With these minor issues aside, Mickler has aptly managed to cover a wide amount of material in only sixty-four pages. He formulates a very condensed but narratively rich package; therefore, I wholeheartedly recommend this monograph, especially to scholars of New Religious Movements. Outside of this niche, however, Mickler's book would easily be of interest to students, sociologists, historians, and theologians who study international or high-tension religious groups and are looking for a quick but skillful introduction to the Unification case.