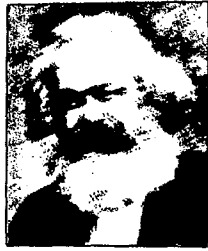


From

MARX



To

MOON



In the early '70s Barbara Underwood, a young feminist in Santa Cruz, became a convert to the Unification Church. Four years later her parents put her and the Unification Church on trial.

By

Bruce Dancis

"Today I was given the privilege of washing by hand Father's shirts, using His special detergent."

The "Father" is the Rev. Sun Myung Moon. The fawning servant who recorded this entry in her journal January 23, 1974, was Barbara Underwood, now the co-author, with her mother Betty, of *Hostage To Heaven: Four years in the Unification Church by an Ex Moonie and the mother who fought to free her* (Potter, \$10.95).

The Underwoods' story is told in alternating chapters, reflecting the often divergent viewpoints of Barbara (often taken from her journal) and Betty. Their book gives a unique look inside the Unification Church—its leaders, theology and practices—as well as the issues and events surrounding Barbara's parents' attempt to win a court-ordered conservatorship that led to their daughter's leaving the Church.

Hostage to Heaven has special meaning to me. Barbara Underwood was a friend of mine in the early '70s, a fellow student radical in Santa Cruz, Calif. One of the reasons she joined the Unification Church was because of her disillusionment with the left and feminist community in Santa Cruz. Later I ran into her, a glassy-eyed cultist, on a Berkeley street corner soliciting money for a Moonie front group, the Creative Community Project.

Betty Underwood seemed to be still trying to make sense of her daughter's experience, and she asked questions of Barb with me. We were joined by Gary Scharff, Barb's husband, also an ex-Moonie.

Why did you join the Unification Church?

Having been involved in the radical community in Santa Cruz, living in a small, collective house of people who were committed to high ideals and making significant changes in society, I was very discouraged. I felt very dissatisfied with the ability of the people in the collective to overcome separatist, individualized inclinations and unite to do something as a whole group.

When my freshman year roommate went up to Berkeley and discovered what she felt was a genuine utopian, revolutionary community, she invited me to come up and look at it. I was very interested, partly because I was almost desperately searching for community. It also intrigued me that they were people who were living out their ideals and believed that they could transform society through transforming themselves.

I went up to a weekend workshop in northern California. I was very moved by the 40 people I met up there. They were very much like me and there was a real kinship. They came from radical backgrounds themselves, many from Ann Arbor who had originally been involved in SDS. There was a whole inner cadre of political people, who had come to see some shortcomings in the political struggle and were searching on a spiritual level. I had some background in that myself, having spent a lot of time talking about the possibility of uniting a spiritual vision with a Marxian vision. I was moved by their sense of purpose, their inner confidence, a sense of roots and continuity, and the fact that they were powerful people. They had a direction to their lives and they knew who they were.

But on the other hand, they were so likeminded. There was no place for criticism, discussion and questions. Also, I had no more than five minutes to myself that whole weekend. Somebody was on my arms every instant and they made me feel very guilty if I wanted to act individually.

To what extent do you see your striving for a community as an example of the failure of the radical movement at Santa Cruz?

At the time I couldn't separate a realization of the private vs. the public from my own need to feel something very complete surrounding me in my life. No matter how much I knew that the world was a diverse place, that there were contradictions, I wasn't comfortable living with the contradictions of multiple viewpoints that I saw

around me. Unification offered a resting place emotionally and intellectually. *The early '70s were very difficult times for a lot of people on the left.*

Unification capitalized on the demoralization that was going on in the world, the sense that there were no solutions out there that had been considered yet except for their new solution.

They alienate you from your whole past experience.

Betty: Wasn't there also a question of personal morality, in the old fashioned sense, that was appealing to you?

Yeah. I was feeling ripped apart, confused, by the question of lesbianism and bisexuality. I was going through a lot of sexual identity questions—what is natural, what is right, what is liberal, what is free? I was looking for a system of ideas that told me what was natural. I happened to come upon one that said, "This is natural because this is God's plan."

Your book reminded me how much purism there was on the left and the feminist movement in the early '70s.

The set of ideas I heard in the first lecture program in the Moonies was about the individual's unique contribution to the whole. It was like a pantomime of "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." It was humanistic.

When did you make the switch from a communitarian to a cultist?

I was told that the teacher behind all this was Sun Myung Moon about three or four weeks after I moved into the group. I was not told any of this in the first two workshops I went to.

I think the thing that really grabbed me was the sexual and existential guilt. The group was saying "If you stay with us you will realize your ultimate potential, you will transform the world. How can you leave us without having done that? You're not going to do it out there." And here you are amid a group of amazing people, very energized, very unified, very sincere, and you think "My God, it's possible that this is something new in this time in history."

I began to evaluate my past life in negative terms, and also started questioning my identity, my perceptions, and my ability to make up my own mind.

How long a period did this process take?

Only weeks. It was probably about a month or two after I joined that I was standing on a street corner with a woman I trusted very much and she told me that this group justified the war in Vietnam. I was just shocked. I couldn't believe it. I was very upset and couldn't sell flowers for that night or the next day. I thought "Who am I to question the authority of God?" *I don't understand that leap. How did you explain it to yourself?*

I had just been introduced to a full spiritual world and I figured that I had a narrow perspective and that God had a larger perspective.

Gary: It's not a leap, it's a slide.

Barb, you wrote about wanting to bring some books up to the weekend retreat. Someone said that the only book you'd need was DIVINE PRINCIPLE. Didn't that set off alarms?

You slowly undermine your own trust in your own ability to evaluate. Your own intuitions become suspect in the face of an incredible, affectionate, overpowering, encircling group around you. My past intellectual life became not just head games, but leading to cul de sacs instead of emotional fulfillment. The trump card is God, and it's also happiness. And they promise you happiness if you just continue on with the formulas they offer you. I felt happy, partly because you have to act happy, and slowly it trickles in as you get reinforced.

How important is the absence of time to yourself in the slide?

It's crucial, along with not having contact with people who could corroborate your past experience and criticize your current one. I felt raped by the lack of time for myself. But because the group calls for a total willingness to

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