

Unification Theological Seminary: Congratulations to the Class of 2023!

Thomas G. Walsh
June 5, 2023

On Saturday, May 27, 2023, Unification Theological Seminary (UTS) held its forty-seventh Commencement in New York City to celebrate the class of 2023.



Special remarks were offered by Dr. Yong Cheon Song, recently named to be the International President of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification International, and Dr. Chang Shik Yang, newly appointed as the Chairman of the Universal Peace Federation International.

Dr. Song recalled the founders' vision for the seminary and reflected on the significance of Dr. Walsh's presidency at this time:

"It is hard to believe that it has been 47 years since the founders, Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak

Ja Han Moon, founded UTS as an institution to raise up leaders who would make an impact on the world for the sake of building a universal, holy community - one family under God. Father and Mother Moon want the students at UTS to develop a deep foundation in theological studies, religious studies, and peace studies... Dr. Walsh comes to UTS to represent [Father and Mother Moon] and represent their ideal and prepare a new generation of highly educated men and women who can understand, explain and internalize the culture of peace that they have pioneered... As you graduate today, I hope you will devote yourselves fully to building a world of lasting peace. I know that Mother Moon is proud of each one of you."



In his remarks, Dr. Yang stated, "You may face many trials and tribulations on your journey after graduation. Life is a series of challenges and responses. You should not forget that you are not alone and that God, our Heavenly Parent, will be with you always - wherever you go, whatever you do. Let us keep absolute faith, absolute love, and absolute obedience to God and our beloved True Parents. Then God our Heavenly Parent will lead us. Father Moon taught us to 'love God, love humankind, and love your nation.' The power of love, faith, and a strong commitment to a public mindset will drive your future brightly. May God

be with you."

In recognition for his service to religious freedom worldwide, the Doctor of Humane Letters was awarded to the Hon. Ján Figel', former European Commissioner and Special Envoy for Religious Freedom, who also delivered the Commencement Address to the approximately 200 people assembled, both in person and online, which included UTS graduates and their family and friends.

In his address, Dr. Figel' shared three key messages with the audience: 1) the importance of religious freedom, 2) that freedom is calling for our maturity and responsibility, and 3) the deep and strong nexus between religious freedom and human dignity.



He stated that Freedom of Religion and Belief is a "very central human right - defining issues of personal conviction, lifestyle, the basis of cultural and spiritual life, identity, the principle of belonging to the community of the like-minded. [Freedom of Religion and Belief] is a litmus test of all human rights" However the reality of religious freedom in the 21st century is that "79% of the global population live in countries with high or very high obstacles for religious freedom... Evil is widespread today because it has

strong allies: indifference, ignorance and fear. If we don't care, if we don't know if we are scared to say something or to do something on behalf of the voiceless or the defenseless.

Like this noble institution, let us nurture allies of the common good: quality education for all, active engagement, and simple but decisive courage."

Dr. Figel' continued, "Freedom is a beautiful but fragile, vulnerable daughter. She needs to stay close to her wise and brave mother called Truth. Freedom without truth will die, and will cease to exist. Crisis can be interpreted as a lack of maturity and an absence of mature balance. There are two sides to each valid coin: freedom and responsibility, and my rights and my duties." He concluded with a call to action: "I call on all goodwill people, responsible governments, civil society organizations, and faith-based organizations: 'Help us, please, to raise awareness, focus on education and promote respect to the human dignity of everyone everywhere!' Mature freedom, respect for truth and culture of human dignity will follow as good fruits of this effort."



The class of 2023 was represented by 24 graduates, including five recipients of the Doctor of Ministry. In his congratulatory remarks, Dr. Thomas Walsh, UTS President, stated that through Father and Mother Moon's teachings, "we can understand ourselves as part of a providential history, a history that has a goal and a purpose directly linked to the purpose and meaning of our lives. What Father and Mother Moon have taught us is that it is our understanding of, and our relationship with God that is the most fundamental "root cause"; the root cause of goodness, justice, and peace.

He also expressed the recent guidance he received from Mother Moon: "She said that we must raise up graduates who are leaders like Luther and Calvin; that is leaders who are inspired by heaven, by our Heavenly Parent, and who educate themselves deeply, with passion and commitment, and who have both the capacities and the courage to speak and act to advance God's providence. Mother Moon also said that the highly educated members of our community should be engaged by UTS so that we may inspire, uplift and inform one another so that we may find ways to better contribute to fulfilling what Father Moon called "the hope of all ages" a "unified world of peace."

The class of 2023 graduate responses were delivered by Ms. Kaeleigh Moffitt, representing students in the MA in Peace Studies and Ms. Sungmi Holdus, on behalf of students in the MA in Religious Studies. Doctor of Ministry recipients were represented by Ms. Oluremi Alapo.

Following the conferring of degrees and the graduate responses, seventeen students and two faculty and honorary recipients were inducted into Theta Alpha Kappa, the national honor society for the field of religious studies, by Dr. Thomas Ward, UTS Provost.

Ms. Carla Mongado was presented with the Distinguished Service Award, and Public Leadership Awards were presented to Ms. Majlinda Ziko and Ms. Kaeleigh Moffitt.

Congratulations to the class of 2023!

You can watch the full recording of the commencement [here](#).

