

Remembering Sun Myung Moon's First International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences

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December 10, 2012



Science and religion are portrayed to be in harmony in Louise Comfort's Tiffany window titled "Education" (1890).

Just a little over 40 years ago, young Unificationists, including 27-year-old Glenn Strait, were abuzz with excitement about the leading edge of the convergence of science and religion through Rev. Sun Myung Moon's vision of the establishment of the first International Conference on Unified Sciences (later renamed the International Conference of the Sciences, or ICUS).

A pioneering and visionary endeavor, ICUS was the first Unificationist organization to give top scientists an interdisciplinary forum in which to discuss global problems, advance multidisciplinary scientific knowledge and pursue the scientific search for universal values, according to Strait.

Rev. Moon, known by Unificationists as "True Father," founded ICUS in 1972 with the conviction that science has the potential to bring about a unified world based on universal values. Each year from 1972 to 2000, he brought scientists and scholars of differing fields together under the themes of "Science and Values" and "Unity of Knowledge" to engage in an international, interdisciplinary dialogue that he hoped would contribute to the establishment of a unified, global ideology.

Rev. Moon explained the reason why he, a religious figure, created and funded a conference on science is that "God is the greatest scientist of all," He said further: "The complicated problems of the world cannot be fully understood within the narrow perspectives of individual fields of knowledge. I recognize that in the Middle Ages religious dogmatism blocked scientific exploration and limited man's material development. However, it is also a big mistake for humanistic thinkers since the Age of the Enlightenment to hold that religious belief is inferior to reason and that man's spiritual needs are in conflict with human reason."

Under Rev. Moon's vision, and with the imagination of Unificationists and the generosity of the Unification Church, the first ICUS conference was held November 23-26, 1972, at the luxurious Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City. The conference brought together 20 scientists from seven nations to discuss "Moral Orientation of the Sciences."

In January of 1972, Rev. Moon had commissioned Edward Haskell, a specialist in what he called "Unified Science," and the author of *Full Circle – the Moral Force of Unified Science* (1972) to organize the first ICUS. With less than three months to plan the event, Haskell chose Strait to replace his previous assistant and help him with the organization, arrangement and preparation of the inaugural conference on Thanksgiving weekend, 1972. At the time, Strait had been a church member for less than a year.

"Mr. Haskell loved the energy and support he received from these bright, young Unificationists, who anticipated the unification of science and religion being achieved as Unified Science represented science, and Divine Principle represented religion," wrote Strait to Unificationnews.com.

The first conference was successful both in the quality of presentations and as a building block for future conferences. Expanded guest lists and formats swelled the annual ICUS events until in 1981 at the Tenth ICUS, which met in Korea, the number of participants reached a record number of 808, according to *40 Years in America*, by Dr. Michael L. Mickler, a Unification Church historian



Richard L. Rubenstein, President Emeritus of the University of Bridgeport, has been an outspoken defender of the Unification Church's academic conferences. He attended many ICUS events and often introduced ICUS founder Rev. Moon.

Richard L. Rubenstein, president emeritus of the University of Bridgeport and a Harvard-trained historian of religion, has written in an article about his reflections of the passing of Rev. Moon in the *New English Review* that the ICUS conference was different than other academic conferences, because it was not “restricted to a single scholarly or scientific discipline...it was multi-disciplinary.” Rubenstein also wrote: “Sponsored by the International Cultural Foundation (ICF) founded in 1968 by Rev. Moon, participants included scholars of high reputation from every continent in every scholarly and scientific discipline, and there was absolutely no political or religious slant, save that Rev. Moon was our host and at his banquet, he quite legitimately spoke of his religious beliefs and hopes.”



Sir John Eccles, (1903-1997) was an Australian neurophysiologist and Nobel Laureate in Physiology who devoted his life to unraveling the secrets of the central nervous system. He oversaw ICUS V (1976) and ICUS VI (1977).

“At ICUS, I came to know two Nobel Laureates, Sir John Eccles, (Neurophysiology) and Eugene Wigner of Princeton (Nuclear physics). I also recall the participation of two other Nobel Laureates at one ICUS meeting, Friedrich Hayek (Economics) and Brian Josephson, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics at age 33. That conference and those that followed were by far among the best scholarly conferences I have ever attended,” Rubenstein added.

Regarding the long-term impact of ICUS, Unificationist Greg Breland, Executive Director of ICUS and Director of Special Projects at the University of Bridgeport, wrote to Unificationnews.com, “ICUS was one of the first organizations Father started in the United States that reached out to the higher echelon of society that is, renowned scholars, scientists, even Nobel Laureates. So, to some extent, it gave the movement some credibility in that we were addressing issues that Father and academics felt were important, namely, ‘Science and Values.’”

The impression ICUS made on the intellectual community is evident in remarks made by distinguished attendees.

Sir John Eccles, an Australian neurophysiologist and Nobel Laureate in Physiology, said of Rev. Moon and ICUS: “I greatly appreciate Rev. Moon's deep concern for the present predicament of mankind. He believes that intellectuals have a particular responsibility to use their knowledge and creative imagination in the urgent task of rebuilding society with values as the supreme guide.”



Dr. Friedrich Hayek (1899-1992), Austrian-born Nobel Prize-winning economist and social philosopher,

was a proponent of free-market capitalism. He received an International Culture Award (ICF) and the Founder's award at ICUS XIV (1985).

Another Nobel Laureate (Economics), Dr. Friedrich Hayek, Austrian-born British free market Nobel Prize-winning economist and social philosopher, has written, “Whatever may be said or believed about the religious foundation of ICUS, the scientific character of the meetings and their presentation and organization are thoroughly and admirably respectable. ICUS is attempting an almost unique job in devoting itself to clarifying the basic intellectual differences between the communist and capitalist worlds, and thus performs a very important task indeed. For these reasons I am grateful to have been able to contribute to its efforts.”

“Excitement, hope, assurance, satisfaction and confidence — all these and more is what we felt,” wrote Strait about his disposition at the time of the first ICUS conference. “Here we were at the leading edge of the convergence of science and religion as spoken about in the Divine Principle, and the Messiah was here to speak to these eminent scientists.”