

The Legacy of Unification Political Theology

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"Political theology" investigates the ways in which theological concepts relate to politics, society and economics. In this article, I examine the ways in which the expression of the political theology of the Unification Movement has evolved since its early days, especially in the U.S.

From its beginning, Unificationism has had to deal with tensions between its vision of One World Under God and its commitment to ridding the world of threats to that vision, especially that of communism. This tension led to various alliances in the political world that have impacted the Unificationist community significantly and remain unresolved today.



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Victory Over Communism

From the 1960s through early 1980s, the expression of Unification political theology in the public realm was largely focused on "Victory Over Communism." The movement's commitment to world unity transcending race and nationality was prominent in its spiritual and evangelical work, but took a back seat to VOC in terms of activism.

Divine Principle (DP) itself provides the rationale for giving priority to VOC:

"The Third World War is the final conflict in the providence of restoration. Through this war, God intends that the democratic world bring the communist world to submission and build the ideal world... [W]hether the Third World War is waged by force of arms or as an ideological conflict depends upon the responsibility of the people...serving the providence of God.... [I]t is inescapable that this worldwide conflict take place."

Reflecting this imperative, Rev. Sun Myung Moon founded the International Federation for Victory Over Communism in 1969 as a major ideological offensive. IFVOC established coalitions with other anti-communist organizations throughout the world. In the U.S., members created the Freedom Leadership Foundation (FLF) as the American affiliate of IFVOC.[1] Thus, it created a "hawkish" face in terms of public image, despite its equally strong commitment to world peace, which remained somewhat hidden.

Until the Watergate period, Western Unificationists worked in coalition with both Democrats and Republicans who opposed the Soviet threat. Their attitude was that differences on domestic issues should be set aside to concentrate on the overarching need to defeat communism.[2] After Watergate, however, the VOC movement aligned more directly with Republican causes. The tendency to align with the right was strengthened when Father Moon launched the CAUSA International movement in 1980. CAUSA

developed into the American Leadership Conference, which featured sophisticated presentations of VOC ideology coupled with DP-inspired critiques of secular humanism.



A CAUSA-USA national leadership seminar in Washington, DC, in the mid-1980s

In 1980, Rev. Moon also enthusiastically supported the Reagan presidential campaign. In 1982, in the midst of his federal trial, he launched *The Washington Times* as an alternative to the liberal voice of the *Washington Post* in the nation's capital. In 1983, he founded the Professors World Peace Academy and instructed it to hold a seminar on "The Fall of the Soviet Empire" in 1985.

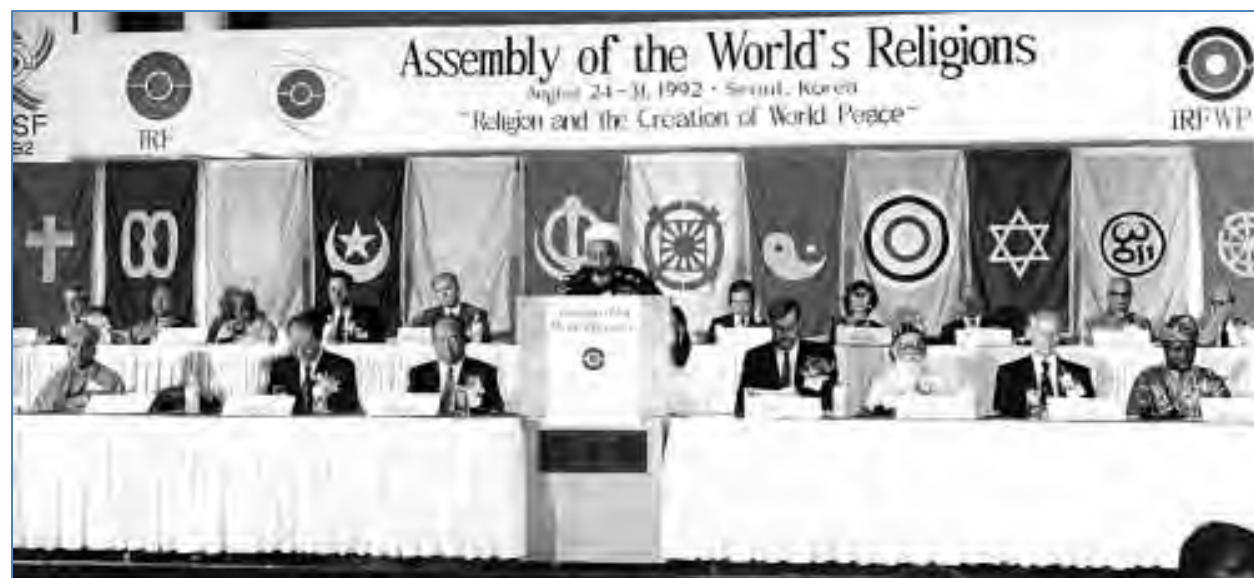
Peace Initiatives

By the late 1980s, however, a shift away from the right could be discerned. The term Victory Over Communism was used only rarely, and by 1987 Rev. Moon coined the term "head-wing thought" to describe his own ideology, which he also referred to as "Godism." He explained:

"Now is the era marking the end of left and right... Thus, unless we, with the God-centered way of the Parent and head-wing thought, discuss the realm of unity at a place that is free from the accusations of the left or the right... God's kingdom cannot be established. Such is the time now."

The VOC thrust had always been accompanied by globalist projects such as the One World Crusade and various scientific, ecumenical and peace initiatives. The first of these was the International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences (ICUS), begun in 1972 in New York and held annually throughout the 1970s into the 1980s.

In terms of religion, a basis for a serious ecumenical effort was established by the founding of Unification Theological Seminary (UTS) in 1975. On that foundation, the New Ecumenical Research Association (New ERA) was initiated in 1977, as was the National Council on the Church and Social Action. The Assembly of the World's Religions hosted several impressive international gatherings of religious leaders and academics.



The Assembly of the World Religions in 1992 in Seoul

As the Soviet empire began to crumble, Rev. Moon reached out to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and conducted the concurrent World Media Association and Summit Council for World Peace conferences in Moscow in 1990. This was followed by Rev. and Mrs. Moon's trip to North Korea in 1991, where he famously embraced his former persecutor, Kim Il Sung.

After his meetings with Gorbachev and Kim Il Sung, Father began to launch various "federations for world peace." By the late 1990s, there were more than a dozen such federations. Among the more notable were the Federation for World Peace, the Women's FWP, the Youth FWP, the Martial Arts FWP, the Island and Peninsular Nations FWP, and the Mongolian Peoples' FWP. Many of the peace federations coalesced under the Inter-Religious and International Federation for World Peace (IIFWP) in 1999. The Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), launched in 1996, however did not come under the IIFWP umbrella.

Tension Between Tendencies

The emphasis on peace initiatives in the post-Soviet era, however, did not do away with Rev. Moon's alliances on the right. Instead there emerged two increasingly distinct tendencies: one focused on world peace as described above, the other on combatting the remnants of Marxist ideology and promoting traditional family values.

In the United States, the flagship of the latter tendency was the *Washington Times*, initially under the leadership of Dr. Bo Hi Pak. Dr. Pak also headed the American Leadership Conference and the American Freedom Coalition (AFC), a grass roots political education movement with chapters in all 50 states.

In New York, on the other hand, Rev. Chung Hwan Kwak led the various peace federations. The tension between the two tendencies resulted in members openly speaking of an ideological split between New York (globalist and UN-focused) and Washington (promoting American exceptionalism and countering moral relativism). This tension was sometimes reflected in seemingly contradictory policies enunciated by Father Moon himself.

For example, in an effort to avoid what he called a "holy war" in the Middle East, he advised President George H. W. Bush against military action in Iraq in 1991.[3] But on the other hand, he urged the Grand Mufti of Syria to use his influence to get Syria to join the U.S. military coalition against Saddam Hussein, and he approved a major effort by the American Freedom Coalition in support of the American war effort.



Reverend and Mrs. Moon meeting Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in 1990 in Moscow

In the mid-to-late 1990s, partly due to movement-wide budgetary cutbacks, AFC was disbanded, and most of the peace federations coalesced under IIFWP (later renamed the Universal Peace Federation), many being completely absorbed by it.

The advent of Hyun Jin (Preston) Moon as heir apparent in the mid-2000s seemed to mark the end of the VOC tendency of the UM, or at least to signal that the peace tendency had gained a strong upper hand. The son-in-law of Rev. Kwak, Hyun Jin Moon's main focus, outside of various business concerns owned by the Unification Church International (UCI), was to develop the Universal Peace Federation and its Global Peace Festivals.

Meanwhile, the lack of a clear enemy, such as communism, allowed underlying differences of opinion on domestic issues to come to the fore. After 9/11, some Unificationists began speaking of the end of American exceptionalism. Coalitions with African-American ministers and Black Muslim leaders resulted in some members, who had backed Republican candidates in the past, turning toward the Democrats.

The right-wing tendency experienced an unexpected resurgence with the ascendancy of Hyung Jin (Sean) Moon and his brother, Kook Jin (Justin) Moon. With Hyung Jin's support, Kook Jin began to promote in the U.S. the "Freedom Society," an adamantly libertarian ideology opposed to left-liberalism. Among its proposals were:

- Government spending should account for less than 10% of GDP.
- Government should not be involved in retirement plans or healthcare.
- Education should be entirely privatized.
- The gay marriage issue should be resolved by ending government involvement in marriage altogether.
- Virtually all restrictions on gun ownership should be removed.

In Asia, Kook Jin also undertook an educational offensive known as "Strong Korea," in which he urged both South Korea and Japan to strengthen militarily to be capable of defending themselves without the help of the U.S. These initiatives were given official support by Hyung Jin when he was International President of the FFWPU/UC.

Preston, meanwhile, split entirely from the FFWPU/UC and UPF. He began running his Global Peace

rallies and conferences independently, under the new Global Peace Foundation, using funds from UCI, which he continued to control. Preston liquidated several properties owned by the *Washington Times*. He then sold the Washington Times corporation together with its remaining headquarters building to the church, thus divesting himself completely of the movement's conservative flagship.



The 1985 PWPA international congress on "The Fall of the Soviet Empire" in Geneva, Switzerland

Unification Political Theology Today

Since Rev. Moon's ascension in 2012 and the emergence of schisms centering on Preston and Sean, the underlying tensions in Unification political theology have come into sharper focus. The mainstream movement led by Mrs. Hak Ja Han Moon (True Mother) emphasizes the peace orientation but also continues to support the conservative voice of the *Washington Times*.

Mother Moon has emphasized North-South unification in Korea, which she hopes can be realized by 2020. She has also expressed great concern about global warming and other environmental issues, and hinted at disapproval

of the "America First" ideology of President Trump. She has devoted considerable attention to women's issues such as education of girls in Islamic countries[4] and human trafficking.

Hyung Jin and Kook Jin, on the other hand, in their Sanctuary Church faction, espouse a strongly right-wing libertarian viewpoint. They have also embraced conspiracy theories about 9/11, the Illuminati, world banking cabals, and the doomsday prophecies of a Messianic rabbi. In 2016, Hyung Jin and Kook Jin became enthusiastic supporters of the candidacy of Donald Trump. Lately, however, Sean has begun to worry publicly that Trump has given in to pressure from the "globalists" who he alleges want to surrender American sovereignty to international organizations and the so-called worldwide banking conspiracy.

Preston, meanwhile, has continued to promote the Global Peace message. While his catchphrase of "One Family Under God" may lack specifics, it provides a sharp contrast to Sean's embrace of Trump's "America First" policy.

Conclusion

The Unification Movement's expression of its political theology initially focused on achieving Victory Over Communism but simultaneously developed various programs aimed at the longer term goals of ecumenism, peace and one world. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the latter tendency came to the fore, but also resulted in a certain bifurcation. The right-wing tendency experienced a brief resurgence during the period of Sean's ascendancy.

Today, the overall movement has become less overtly political than it was during its heyday, with the exception of the Sanctuary Church faction, which is strongly right-wing libertarian in orientation. The Family Federation and the Global Peace movement (Preston's group) remain on the "head-wing" path, but political opinions of individual members have become increasingly diverse. This can be interpreted either as a sign of the movement's maturation or of its loss of cohesion.

In any case, with anti-communism no longer a central feature, and Rev. Moon no longer on the scene, the future of Unification political theology will remain in flux for the foreseeable future.

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Photo at top: Rev. Moon signs the first prototype edition of *The Washington Times* in March 1982; it began publication in May 1982.

Notes:

[1] The term "Victory Over Communism" was associated with extreme right-wing causes in the U.S.;

thus the founders of FLF chose a less militant-sounding name.

[2] These difficulties were exacerbated by media reports of "Moonies" being brainwashed by Rev. Moon and other public relations problems.

[3] In his autobiography, Rev. Moon stated, "I implored President George H.W. Bush through direct correspondence to avoid war in the Arab world, and instead work to realize Saddam Hussein's retreat through diplomatic means." (p. 238)

[4] For example, Mrs. Moon presented the Sunhak Peace Prize this year to Sakena Yacoobi for her work supporting the education of girls in Afghanistan.