

The Unification Movement: A Profile

Vienna University invites Unification Movement to present its Teaching & Projects

Vienna, Austria, 26. May 2014



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Special Event

The Unification Movement: A Profile

WHERE: University of Vienna
Seminar room 5, 1st Floor
Schenkenstraße 8-10, 1010 Vienna

WHEN: 26 May 2014, 18:30-20:00

MODERATION:
Hans Gerald Hödl (University of Vienna)
Lukas Pokorny (Stockholm University)

LANGUAGE: English

Below invitation was recently sent out by the *Department of Religious Studies* and the Interdisciplinary Research Platform '*Religion and Transformation in Contemporary European Society*' from the University of Vienna:

Founded in 1954 by Mun Sŏn-myŏng (1920–2012), within a few decades the South Korea based Unification Movement (UM) has become a global religious organization, spanning five continents and enthusiastically engaging in peace promotion and interfaith dialogue.

Notably, the UM has also been part and parcel of recent Austrian religious history, from its long-lasting court struggle for formal recognition as an association in the 1970s and early 1980s, to the role it has been ascribed by the media throughout the decades as

the epitome of a 'dangerous cult'— a public stigma in recent years largely transferred to Scientology—and its strident call for reform of Austrian religious law.

Peter Zöhrer, the national leader of FFWPU (Family Federation for World Peace and Unification; i.e. the religious core organization) Austria, will introduce the history and the main doctrinal tenets of the UM, also providing first-hand insights into the group's current affairs. The event will conclude with a Q&A, providing the opportunity to engage in discussion with a major representative of the UM in an academic setting.

The seminar has been jointly organized by the Department of Religious Studies and the Interdisciplinary Research Platform '*Religion and Transformation in Contemporary European Society*', both at the University of Vienna. *(End of introduction text on the official website of Vienna University)*

(Report by Elisabeth Cook & D. Zoehrer)

As a representative of the Austrian Unification Movement, Rev. Peter Zoehrer was invited to present a profile of the Unification Movement in front of students of the study of religion at the University of Vienna. The lecture room was filled to its last seat with some 40-50 students, so-called "sect experts" and local Unification Church members.

In his presentation Rev. Zoehrer introduced himself and gave his testimony of how he joined the Unification Church. He went through the most essential points of the Divine Principle such as the four position foundation, the three great blessings and spiritual growth as well as important aspects of the Fall, the Trinity, the history of restoration, eschatology and the providential parallels. After explaining the meaning and value

of the Holy Blessing marriage ceremony, underlined by pictures of the recent Blessing in which his daughter and youngest son attended with their spouses, Rev. Zoehrer showed slides that elucidate the True Father's most important initiatives, including the providential organizations such as FFWPU, UPF and WFWPU (with ECOSOC status at the UN) and the Middle East Peace Initiative (MEPI).

A Q&A-session followed after the presentation and questions were asked about True Parents' family, the role of women, homosexuality, the providential significance of Korea, the CIGconstitution and others. Mr. Zoehrer's answers were short, but authentic, and after the event many students took a folder, that contained a timeline of the Unification Movement and a selection of quotations by True Father, as well as True Father's autobiography for further research. The professors who had organized the event expressed that the feedback of the participating students was very positive and there was not even a single negative reaction to the presentation.

Prof. Pokorny was especially pleased to hear part of Rev. Zoehrer's testimony during the introduction. This gave him the idea of launching an additional research project on "conversion narratives" (testimonies) of members of the Unification Movement. He wants to start with interviews already this June.

Our national leader himself said that he could sense tremendous spiritual help and he feels very grateful for all the prayers and support of the brothers and sisters to make such a successful historical event possible.

Dr. Lukas Pokorny, is an expert on New Religious Movements in East Asia (currently at the University of Stockholm) and he has done research on our movement for several years. He has visited Unification Church sites and institutions in South Korea and Japan and has frequently visited Vienna's church center. He has done profound research on the Austrian Unification Movement's history and present situation through extensive examinations of our local church archives and many personal interviews with members. The results of his research have been published in the *Vienna Journal of East Asian Studies* and a new scientific journal titled *Religion in Austria*.

