

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Appalling Netflix Smear of New Religions

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Netflix smear follows playbook of anti-cult movement to make all new religious movements look bad

NETFLIX In one of the episodes of *How to Become a Cult Leader* on Netflix, the [Unification Church](#) is featured.

CITIZEN JONES. And Netflix and Los Angeles-based production company Citizen Jones should be thanked for stating what millions around the

world already know - that [Father Moon](#) is "a legendary spiritual leader whose global appeal and staying power set a standard few have been able to match."

And that "Over six decades, Reverend [Sun Myung Moon](#) built his [Unification Church](#) [...] into a mass movement that's still influential today, more than a decade after the leader's death."

In one of the opening scenes of this Netflix smear, sociologist David Taylor says, "Of all the new religions that emerged in the 70s, you'd have to consider the [Unification Church](#) as being the most successful. They've proven they can sustain themselves."

And actor Peter Dinklage, hired as narrator, admits, "You can even say he [[Father Moon](#)] went mainstream."



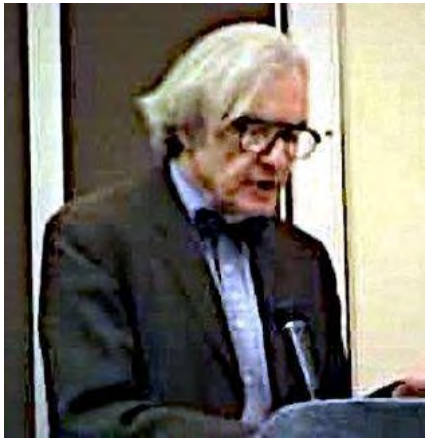
The headquarters of Netflix in Los Gatos, California (2008)

But shockingly, the rest of the content - 99 % - is sheer propaganda for the anti-cult movement, to such an extent that the whole product may easily be considered as a piece of pure advocacy journalism, known to intentionally adopt a non-objective viewpoint - that of the anti-cult movement.

To endorse such advocacy journalism or campaigning journalism, Citizen Jones, the producers of the Netflix smear, certainly appear to possess very little insight into what [Father](#) and [Mother Moon](#)'s movement is all about. It seems that Citizen Jones may well have been served the bulk of the content by the anti-cult movement. All the so-called "experts" interviewed are part of it or associated with it in some way, and their statements are not questioned critically at all. This is not objective journalism. It is amazing that Netflix, the world's leading streaming entertainment service, have sunk to such depths as to present hostile anti-religious propaganda as a "documentary".

Just look at the experts quoted extensively in the program.

Diane Benscoter (67) was a member of the [Unification Church](#) for five years, before she got kidnapped and was held in forced confinement by professional deprogrammers. Then she herself joined the criminal activities of the deprogrammers and got involved in kidnapping adherents of new religious movements. She was arrested for kidnapping, and was so shocked that she gave up her anti-cult activism for close to 20 years.



Robert Jay Lifton in March 2000

78 years old Janja Lalich used to be a far-left extremist and was for about ten years a member of a radical paramilitary Marxist-Leninist group, the Democratic Workers Party in California. She became a high-ranking lieutenant, and only later it dawned on her that the party was run as a personality cult under the charismatic leadership of Marlene Dixon, a professor of sociology suffering from alcoholism. Dixon was an admirer of controversial Robert Jay Lifton (1926-), American psychiatrist and author, known for his theory of thought reform or brainwashing.

Rachel Bernstein describes herself as a "cult intervention specialist", another expression for a deprogrammer or activist within the anti-cult movement. On her website there is a link to ICSA, a controversial anti-cult organization that used to be associated with Cult Awareness Network, an organization founded by Ted Patrick, the "father" of deprogramming, who was sentenced to many years in prison for kidnapping and forcible detention of followers of new religious movements.

Lisa Kohn was never a member of the [Unification Church](#). Still she calls herself a "cult survivor". She was introduced to the church as a ten-year old by her mother and attended some camps for kids. Her mother married again, and Lisa lived with her father. She describes life there, "I lived with my dad a life of sex, drugs, and squalor. [...] I did do a hell of a lot of cocaine, including with my dad and the judge who had a lot of amazing cocaine, got into abusive relationships."

It seems like she not a "cult survivor", but a "drugs and abuse survivor".

Kimiaki Nishida is a social psychologist at Rissho University in Tokyo and chair-person of a Japanese anti-cult movement.

Lola Blanc, whose real name is Kandice Melonakos, was through her mother as a child connected to a Mormon splinter group.

David Taylor, a sociology professor, is known for his research into a UFO sect in the 1970s.

Teddy Hose was for some years as a child associated with the [Unification Church](#) through his parents, who were members in the 1970s.

The basic message this appalling Netflix smear conveys, is spelt out in one of the last sentences the narrator reads, "Just remember, in this world you're either the predator or the prey."



Demonstration for the rights of the Uyghurs in Berlin, Germany 19th Jan. 2020

Such a cynical point of view is of course exactly what the anti-cult movement has preached for decades when trying to scare relatives of members of new religious movements to pay tens of thousands of dollars to have those members be indoctrinated by the anti-cultists to abandon their faith. The Chinese Communist Party has learnt the techniques and arguments of the anti-cult movement, and applies them on a large scale to the current indoctrination of millions of Uyghurs in so-called re-education camps.

Throughout the Netflix smear produced by Citizen Jones, the derogatory terms "cult" and "Moonies" are used.

The narrator admits, "the [Unification Church](#)'s status as a cult is in dispute."

Italian sociologist of religion Massimo Introvigne, head of CESNUR, Center for Studies on New Religions, and by many considered the world's foremost expert on new religious movements, explains,



"'Cult' is just a label used to discriminate against groups that powerful lobbies, for whatever reasons, do not like." (Quoted from the article [The Abe Assassination. The Word 'Cult' Is A Tool for Discrimination](#), published by [Bitter Winter](#), a magazine on religious liberty and human rights, 2nd Sept. 2022.)

Another derogatory word used is "Moonies". It is deliberately utilized by leftwing and anti-religious activists to make fun of and belittle the [Unification Church](#), now called the [Family Federation](#), and its members.



The large international news agency Reuters produced a handbook for its journalists, where it says: "'Moonie' is a pejorative term for members of the [Unification Church](#). We should not use it in copy and avoid it when possible in direct quotations."

The mud-slinging doesn't stop there. The Netflix smear lumps the [Unification Church](#) together with groups that it is totally unrelated to. The wrongdoings of some extreme groups - all called "cults" - are used indiscriminately to create stereotypes and paint a black picture of all new religious movements. This is a standard strategy and part of the playbook of the anti-cult movement.



Lyndon LaRouche

It is extreme to lump the [Unification Church](#) together with groups like the one led by Lyndon LaRouche (1922-2019), a Marxist theoretician and member of the Socialist Labor Party, who tried to become American president, but remained a fringe political figure spreading conspiracies.

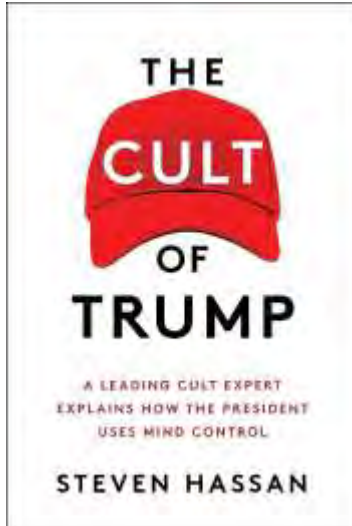
It is likewise unreasonable to compare the [Unification Church](#) to the drug rehabilitation program that became a religious movement led by Charles Dederich (1913-1997), a reformed alcoholic.

The extreme anti-cult message that "you're either the predator or the prey", colours the whole Netflix smear. The mass weddings that the [Family Federation](#) is so famous for, are in the eyes of Netflix reduced to "a demonstration of his [[Father Moon](#)'s] influence and his [[Father Moon](#)'s] power." Above-mentioned Teddy Hose claims, "It's all performance, mass weddings, show of strength. It's all PR."

That is a ridiculous claim when you consider that getting God's blessing on your marriage is most holy and precious for members of the [Family Federation](#). It's the most important sacrament in the movement founded by [Father](#) and [Mother Moon](#), just like marriage is an important sacrament for many Christians.

One of the extreme assertions that the Netflix smear endorses, is, in the words of "cult intervention specialist" Rachel Bernstein, "One of the distinguishing markers of a cult is rampant deception from start to finish." Lola Blanc puts it like this, "If these groups were advertising what they're really about, what the ideology really is, nobody would join."

Those are perfect claims to keep the anti-cultists in business. They assert to be the ones who can tell you - at a steep price - what the [Family Federation](#) is all about. And the more religious movements you can include under the "cult" umbrella, the more business.



The most extreme example of this line of reasoning may well be self-proclaimed "cult expert" Steven Hassan, who in his book "The Cult of Trump" advocates that those who voted for Trump - the former US president's cult of followers - ought to be deprogrammed. Of course by "experts" of the same ilk that Hassan, who are all part of the anti-cult movement. That would allow such an extreme movement to set the agenda, like it does in communist China and its war on religion. One easily gets the feeling that Hassan regards himself as a savior or Messiah, come to save people who cannot think for themselves.

And he and the anti-cult movement hold on to outdated notions like "mind control" and "brainwashing". Most scholars of religion reject such concepts as pseudoscience. Dr. Massimo Introvigne, mentioned above, says,



Dr. Massimo Introvigne April 2023

"The Abe assassination is now used for reviving the dead horse of brainwashing and of theories claiming that bad 'cults', unlike good 'religions', recruit members and donors through mental manipulation. Just as it happened during the European witch hunts and the Japanese persecution of Christians for which Abe apologized, accusations of black magic - of which brainwashing is only the secularized version - and of operating an 'evil cult' lead to dehumanize, discriminate and persecute those so accused.

Today, they come for the [Unification Church](#). Tomorrow, they may come for any religion that has among its enemies, lobbies powerful enough to persuade the media it is a 'cult'." (Quoted from [The Abe Assassination. The Word 'Cult' Is A Tool for Discrimination](#), an article by Dr. Massimo Introvigne, published by [Bitter Winter](#), a magazine on religious liberty and human rights, 2nd Sept. 2022.)

It is disappointing that a person like Peter Dinklage, regarded as a role model for people with dwarfism, lends his voice to such a vicious attack on a religious minority.

The production is described by the producers as a "darkly satirical crime docuseries".

Imagine Muslims or Jews being depicted as sinister and criminal. Anyone doing that, would be called islamophobic or antisemitic. There would be an uproar.



The Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) says in its Code of Ethics,

"The public is entitled to as much information as possible to judge the reliability and motivations of sources."

Clearly, the source of much of the content in the Netflix smear is the anti-cult movement, without that being made clear to the viewer.



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In a Nutshell

The Unification Church

Name: Unification Church

Founded: 1954 in Seoul, South Korea

Founder: Sun Myung Moon (1920-2012)

Faith: The Unification Principles, a series of revelations Father Moon received from 1935 to 1944.

See: [Brief about the teachings](#). See: [In a nutshell](#)

Goal: A Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, a harmonious world family, where everyone can experience peace, security, freedom and love.

Distribution: Largest in South Korea and Japan, but widespread throughout the free, democratic world. Representatives to 120 countries already in 1975

Europe: First representative here in 1965.

Discontinued: 1997. The Family Federation for World Peace and Unification took over many of the tasks of the Unifications Church.

Frequently asked questions: See: [Faq](#)

History:

The Unification Church was founded by Sun Myung Moon (1920-2012) and a handful of followers in 1954 in Seoul as the "Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity".

It was established based on Sun Myung Moon's vision of creating a big global family under God, where all people become like brothers and sisters in a world of freedom, peace, happiness and love.

The Unification Church was dissolved 43 years later, in 1997. The Family Federation for World Peace and Unification took over many of the Unification Church's functions.

Father Moon first turned to the Christian world, which he believed should have a central role in the work to realize such a vision. Large parts of Christian teachings coincide with his own message. At that time, he explained what he was teaching, by frequent use of Bible quotations. Many Christians then also began to follow Father Moon.



The Unification Church logo



Sun Myung Moon with early followers in 1954

The movement began to be called the "Unification Church", which is far easier to say than the original long name. Sun Myung Moon himself also began to use this name, although he

never intended to establish any church.

Those who opposed him, eventually began to call the movement a sect. However, a narrow-minded, introverted sect that believes it has a monopoly on the truth, is about as far from his vision as you can get.

Because the leaders of the Christian world in Korea were not open to his message and did not cooperate with him, he decided to create his own organization.

The Unification Church was the first of several organizations that came into being



as the movement grew and became what we call the Unification Movement, of which the Unification Church was the central part.



Korean peninsula. License: CC ASA 3.0 Unp



First meeting place in Seoul

However, the Unification Church was discontinued in 1997. Then **Father Moon** declared that it had served its purpose. He claimed that the age of the different religions was over, and that we therefore no longer needed a

movement that had been founded for the unification of world christianity.

The required foundation had been laid for a much larger and universal movement more in line with his original **vision**. Therefore, from the end of the 90s, he started to set up many peace organizations. The **Family Federation for World Peace and Unification** took over many of the tasks of the Unification Church. In many countries, e.g. in the USA and Japan, people continued, often for purely practical reasons, to use the name Unification Church long after 1997.

The **Family Federation** sees the family as the key to world peace. If there is harmony in the family, there can also be harmony in society and the world in general.

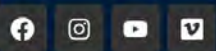
So the name, and also the times we live in, have changed, but the goal is still the same: to create a big global family under **God**, where all people become like brothers and sisters in a world of freedom, peace, happiness and love.

[More about the Unification Church](#)



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Rev. Sun Myung Moon – Father Moon (1920 – 2012)

In a nutshell

- **Name:** Sun Myung Moon. In Korean 문선명 (Moon Seon-myeong – the family name always comes first in Korean). Written in Chinese characters, the name is 文鮮明. He was born as 문용명 (Moon Yong-myeong), but changed his name in 1953. Many call him Father Moon.
- **Born:** 25th February 1920 (6th day of the first month according to the Oriental lunar calendar) in Sangsa, a hamlet in Chongju (town status since 1994) of North Pyeongan province in Korea, now North Korea).
- **Married:** 11th April 1960 to **Hak Ja Han**. Together they realize the ideal of **True Parents**. They had 14 children together. This was his second

Sun Myung Moon founded several organizations, including the **Unification Church in 1954** in Seoul, South Korea, with his wife **Hak Ja Han**, the **Family Federation for World Peace and Unification** in 1996 in Washington DC, and the **Universal Peace Federation** in 2005 in New York.

He and his wife are also known for arranging so-called “**Blessing Ceremonies**” since 1960, the year they themselves **got married**. The ceremonies are often called **mass marriages** or mass weddings.

Father Moon is also known for founding several newspapers, including **The Washington Times**, in 1982.

Sun Myung Moon was a skilled orator, and his speeches have been published in collections of over 600 volumes, mainly in Korean, but extracts from the speeches have been translated and published in a wide range of languages.

His original religious teachings are called the **Unification Principles** (Wolli – 원리 – in Korean – translated as Divine Principle in English. The Korean word wolli actually means principle or principles.)

Sun Myung Moon was far more than a religious leader. He thus founded and supported dozens of organizations to promote international understanding and create lasting peace in the world.

He was an outspoken opponent of totalitarian atheistic communism and founded several organizations that developed a systematic ideological critique of communist ideology.



North Korea. Public domain image. Cropped

Timeline

1920: Born after World War I into a Korea suffering and struggling under Japanese occupation.

1935: Easter 1935, he had a mystical life-changing **encounter with Jesus Christ**, who commissioned him to a great mission and taught him personally.

1940s: In his student years, he found crystal clear answers to the mysteries of religion and life’s big questions.

He was tortured for his involvement in the underground Korean independence movement.

1945: After World War II and Korean independence, he began to share his profound insights with key persons and movements **God** led him to. Met with misunderstanding in South Korea. He walked to North Korea and built his own movement there. Soon arrested and tortured by the Communist regime. In 1948, sentenced to 5 years in a concentration camp.

1950s: Miraculously **saved from certain death** by UN forces. Came as a penniless refugee to the South.

The rapid growth of his

his second marriage. First married on 28th April 1945 to Seon-Gil Choi, but divorced on 8th January 1957. A son was born to her in 1946.

- **Died:** 2nd Sept. (European time) 2012 (3rd Sept. Korean time) in Gapyeong, South Korea, aged 92.
- **Autobiography:** "A Peace-Loving Global Citizen"
- **Teachings:** **Unificationism.** See also **Brief about the Teachings** and the **Unification Principles.**
- **Education:** Graduated in September 1943 from the electrical engineering department at Waseda College of Engineering in Tokyo, Japan, affiliated with Waseda University, one of Japan's top universities.

systematic ideological critique of communist ideology.

Sun Myung Moon also strongly believed in culture and sport as peace-making activities and invested in football clubs, symphony orchestras, and ballet. Already in 1962, he formed a dance troupe for children, The Little Angels, which eventually became outstanding ambassadors for Korean culture.

Father Moon invested large sums in establishing a car factory in North Korea. He saw the ocean's resources as the key to fighting hunger and malnutrition and invested in fish farming, and also developed fish products rich in high-quality protein.

Sun Myung Moon organized a long series of interfaith conferences to promote cooperation between religions and also proposed the creation of an Interfaith Council at the United Nations.

He was, in addition, an ardent advocate of the construction of a tunnel under the Bering Strait to unite the nations of the world by means of an international highway.

Ever since it became clear that the messianic task could not be completed through Jesus because of his untimely death, **God** began to prepare the world again, as he had done before the birth of Jesus. As the **Unification Principles** (Divine Principle) shows there are striking points of similarity between the 2,000-year period before Jesus and the last 2,000 years.

God's preparations for the **Kingdom of Heaven** intensified in the last centuries before the coming of Jesus. Buddha, Confucius, Zoroaster, and others laid spiritual foundations in their respective parts of the world. Major reforms were carried out within Judaism. Greek and Roman civilizations created major changes here in Europe.

In the same way, the last centuries from the Renaissance and the Reformation have been a time characterized by great upheavals. The purpose of all these changes has been to create the conditions for an ideal world without war, suffering, and injustice.

The prerequisite for **God's** and humankind's longing for a harmonious world to become reality is that someone shows us the way to **true love**, true marriages, and true families. That is why **God** has also prepared the world for **True Parents**.

The Messiah comes to realize the ideal that **True Parents** represent, namely a man and a woman who has achieved the standard that men and women, fathers and mothers, should have, according to **God's** original plan.

movement after the Korean War in 1953 was **officially registered** in Seoul in 1954.

Against all odds, with a handful of followers, he built what, within 25 years, became a global movement.

1960s: **Holy Marriage to Hak Ja Han** in 1960. Began holding larger and larger **Marriage Blessing** events, first for his followers and then for people of all faiths and nations.

1970s: Preached throughout the USA. His rallies filled big stadiums; the largest in Washington attracted 300.000. In South Korea, he gathered 1.2 million in 1975. Established schools, newspapers, a hospital, humanitarian aid organizations, shipbuilding facilities, and businesses. Started annual conferences for hundreds of eminent scientists, media people, and academics. **Blessed the marriage** of several thousand couples.

1980s: More newspapers were established, including The Washington Times. Organized large interreligious conferences. Formed organizations are exposing weaknesses of atheistic materialism. Predicted the imminent collapse of Communism in 1985. **Large weddings** are held for 15,000 couples.

1990s: Personal meetings with top leaders of the Communist world – President Mikhail Gorbachev in Moscow and Chairman Kim Il-sung in Pyongyang. Seven years later, he built a car factory in North Korea. Launched global educational, interfaith, and peace initiatives: **Family Federation for World Peace and Unification**, and Women's Federation for World Peace. Millions of couples receive **marriage blessing**.

Published *World Scripture – A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts*.

2000s:

Major efforts for peace in the Middle East. Launched the Universal Peace Federation.

120-nation speaking tour at the age of 85. Received many honorary doctorates.

Autobiography *As a Peace-Loving Global Citizen* published 2009. Became a

bestseller in South Korea.

2010s: Died at the age of 92 in 2012. Dr. **Hak Ja Han Moon** continued to expand the activities throughout the world. Large religious groups with millions of followers started to embrace the teachings.

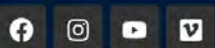
Sunhak Peace Prize was established to support individuals and organizations excelling in work for peace and environmental protection. **Large weddings** for thousands of couples every year.

2020: World Summit 2020, with thousands of VIPs, including many heads of state, held in Seoul.

Launch of global peace networks connecting parliamentarians, religious leaders, media experts, scientists, students, academics, and entrepreneurs. Continuing efforts for Korea's reunification.



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