

UPF France holds Forum on Family and Religion on International Day of Families

Jacques Marion
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Paris, France—UPF France used the occasion of International Day of Families to hold its first Forum on Family and Religion.

The first of a series of three, the forum held on May 14, 2016, at the Catholic center Accueil Barouillère had the theme “The Family and the Transmission of Values.” It was organized jointly with the French chapter of Women’s Federation for World Peace (WFWP), an affiliated organization, and the international NGO Circle of Reflection of Nations.

Because family relationships are a cornerstone of religious traditions, leaders from various faiths were present both as speakers and as audience.

The focus of this first forum was the parent-child relationship and its central role in the family and society.

The speakers were Father Michel Anglarès, a Catholic theologian and a former professor at the Catholic Institute of Paris; Dr. Djelloul Seddiki, the director of the Al Ghazali Institute of the Grand Mosque of Paris, who supervises the training of imams; Mrs. Sonja Read from the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, another UPF-affiliated organization; Pastor Agnès von Kirchbach, a Protestant pastor from the Reformed Church of France; Mr. Jacques Marion, president of UPF France; and Mr. Olivier Robin, the leader of the Versailles Parish of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Representatives of religious communities also were in the audience, notably Imam Moussa Dramé, an Ambassador for Peace from the Ivory Coast, who had come to Paris to attend the event; Sheikh Abdelkader Achour, the imam of the Omar Mosque in Paris; and Mr. Dominique Calmels, director of communications for the Mormon Church in France, and his wife. In an 80-seat hall filled to capacity, the audience included Ambassadors for Peace, NGO leaders and other members of civil society.

The first session, which was moderated by UPF France Vice President Mr. Patrick Jouan, began with a brief introduction by Mr. Jacques Marion, who explained the plan to hold three forums this year, each exploring a different type of family love.

The first speaker, Father Anglarès, presented the Catholic view of the family. He emphasized the role of parents as co-creators with God and said that parents and children are both gifts of God to one another. If the Church made a sacrament of marriage, he said, it is because all forms of God’s love are contained in the family. He also spoke of the feminine and maternal aspect of divine love, and the need for investment and forgiveness in family relations.

Dr. Djelloul Seddiki explained the Islamic viewpoint on the family, referring to Koranic sources. Quoting notably Surahs 22, 31, and 17, he outlined God’s plan for the family, the benevolence that we owe to our parents, and the union of the masculine and feminine as the basis of existence. Benevolence that is to be applied toward all human beings, he said, should be all the more carefully and precisely applied within the family.

Mrs. Sonja Read, a master's student specializing in the nutrition of infants in developing nations, gave a heartfelt testimony on her growing up in a religious family and inheriting the religious tradition of her parents. Recalling some of the struggles that religious adolescents feel in an often faithless environment, she explained from her heart how she made the decision to maintain her faith, which now guides her life.



Mrs. Jennifer Lambert, a member of WFWP France, moderated the second session. WFWP France President Mrs. Brigitte Wada outlined briefly the goals and activities of her organization. She emphasized the vision of UPF Founders Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon for women's role in peacebuilding through their "logic of love," standing as equal partners to men.

Pastor Agnès von Kirchbach, who leads the Saint-Cloud Protestant community near Paris, caught the heart of the audience with practical lessons drawn from her fine analysis of biblical episodes: the failures of Adam and Eve, successes in the family of Abraham, the genealogy of Jesus, etc. She outlined some challenges to transmit values in current times, emphasizing the need for reciprocal listening between parents and children, putting words into deeds, and the need for prayer.

Mr. Jacques Marion then gave a Unificationist perspective on the parent-child relationship. Through lessons from early biblical figures, he drew attention to the significance of lineage and to inheriting the parental heart of God. He then spoke about the essential role of parental love as the foundation for being an educator and a leader in society. He outlined the need for religions to clarify the role of ancestors, "upstream" from the parent-child relationship, as well as the dynamic restoration of love beyond life and death.

The last speaker was Mr. Olivier Robin from the Mormon Church, who spoke personally about his family, giving practical details on how Mormons put a high priority on the family in daily life, spending one evening a week discussing and playing as a family, and how parents secure exclusive time with each child to develop their relationship.

The audience posed a wide variety of questions and comments to the speakers, also giving Imam Dramé and Imam Achour an opportunity to clarify Islam's view on providential figures like Abraham and on Muslim family traditions.

A final, very moving testimony was given by a young Christian, Mr. Antoine Payeur, introducing his book entitled *For Me, Living Is Christ*. He was one of the founders in 2013 of the youth movement Night Watchmen, which has organized vigils in front of the French Parliament and in other cities in protest against laws that violate traditional family values. After he came to realize that the breakdown of the parent-child relationship deeply hurt young people, he said, he decided to place his life as an educator at the service of fragile youth.

The meeting ended with the awarding of an Ambassador for Peace certificate to Mrs. Marie de Cesare, an artist and leader of the NGO Long Métrage.

The second of the three Family and Religion Forums will be held in September 2016, examining the topic of brotherhood (the love between siblings and also friends), with the third forum, in November, focusing on conjugal love.