

Summary of The Life and Legacy of Sun Myung Moon and the Unification Movements in Scholarly Perspective Conference

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The Life and Legacy of Sun Myung Moon and the Unification Movements in Scholarly Perspective Conference 29 – 30 May, 2017 at the Faculty of Comparative Study of Religion and Humanism, Antwerp, Belgium

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Introduction

An academic conference on the Unification movement took place from May 29-30, 2017, at the Faculty of Comparative Study of Religion and Humanism in Antwerp, Belgium. Participating as speakers were several renowned scholars of new religious movements, who have previously written books on the Unification movement, including George Chryssides, Eileen Barker, and Massimo Introvigne, to name just a few. Other independent scholars such as Regis Dericquebourg, Donald Westbrook and Jongsuk Kim also participated as speakers. For the program and the full list of speakers, go to: www.cesnur.org/2017/moon-program.htm This conference, and hopefully more such as these, presents a long overdue opportunity for unbiased scholars to observe and provide an accurate factual, theological and sociological accounting of the Unification movement and the conflicting explanations of Reverend Moon's teachings. This is especially compelling given the contentious circumstances during the final years of Reverend Moon's life and following his death.

In addition to the various new-religion scholars (with no institutional association with Unification Movement-related organizations), three individuals associated with the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) and HSA-UWC, Dan Fefferman, Michael Mickler, and Andrew Wilson, spoke and presented PowerPoint illustrations. Representing Hyung Jin Sean Moon's Sanctuary Church were Richard Panzer and Kerry Williams. Mark Bramwell and Youngjun Kim presented on behalf of the Family Peace Association.

Mark Bramwell's presentation video: vimeo.com/221588011

Youngjun Kim's respondent presentation video: vimeo.com/221629911

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CONFERENCE Transparency

The conference offered a remarkably transparent opportunity for academic outsiders to observe the contentious dynamics amongst the various schismatic sectors of the Unification movement, and the serious historical, factual and theological issues.

For example, FFWPU presented an explanation and justification for Reverend Moon's wife and FFWPU head, Mrs. Hak Ja Han Moon's the "Only Begotten Daughter" doctrine, "gender neutrality", "matriarchy", "Heavenly Parents", and FFWPU's revisions to, in Andrew Wilson's words, Reverend Moon's "motley collection" of speeches and "half-finished project". Various audience members repeatedly raised questions about these topics and took issue with Wilson's characterization of the holy scriptures. Some cited Reverend Moon's statements concerning the "Eight Great Textbooks" such as "[t]he words of Reverend Moon, the Cheon Seong Gyeong, nobody can touch this." (April, 2004). They also sought explanations for FFWPU's theological abandonment of Reverend Moon's teachings about family structure, gender roles, sexuality, and the specious factual bases for FFWPU's accounts of historical events. Mickler, Wilson, and Fefferman challenged concepts that believers of the teachings of Reverend Moon would consider to be basic. It is illustrative that Mickler commented about the Unification Theological Seminary's decision not to post public statements about the Unification movement's long-standing opposition to gay marriage.

At the end of the conference one scholar remarked that this conference had been one of the best ever in the field of studies of new religious movements and expressed the wish for further conferences of the same kind. Another scholar wrote: "We enjoyed those two days tremendously. It was truly religion in the making".

Sourcing

Various presentations and audience comments pointed out the lack of reliable sourcing in the Unification movement claiming that Sean Moon, Mrs. Moon, the FFWPU, Seung Hwa Publishing, and the “History Committee” altered and deleted from the Eight Great Texts and refused the membership access to the historical audio and video archive of Reverend Moon’s words. They also called into question FFWPU’s institutional integrity regarding their factual explanations for the schism, and the accuracy of translations from Korean to English.

More recently, and consistent with the concerns about censorship, according to Peter Zoehrer (FFWPU Europe’s PR representative), PhDs Michael Mickler and Andrew Wilson, as well as Dan Fefferman oppose access to the video recording of their conference presentations. See Mickler’s words in Peter Zoehrer’s Summary Report and Reflections: “There was an announcement that permission will be sought from all presenters for the use of video footage and there was agreement among us (Zoehrer, Mickler, Wilson, and Fefferman) that we will not grant permission from our sessions.”

See links above to The Family Peace Association presentations. To the extent that permission is granted by others and if it is not available already, Family Peace Association will post additional presentations.

The gender issue

Multiple presentations addressed the gender issue. As noted above, Mickler’s “gender neutrality” proposition was a significant flashpoint. Mark Bramwell on behalf of the Family Peace Association pointed out that this theory is at profound odds with Reverend Moon’s teachings about “gender complementarity” and the unique and distinct familial roles of men and women. Gender complementarity is a fundamental concept of the Divine Principle. Likewise, Bramwell noted that “patrilineal responsibility” and not Mickler’s “patriarchy” is a key element to realizing the ideal family.

Dismantling of Rev. Moon’s texts and creation of new scriptures

There was significant discourse from various speakers and audience members concerning FFWPU’s central canon as well as the explanation for the differences theologically and historically. FFWPU has replaced the Founder’s original Eight Great Textbooks with three new books. Dr. Jungsuk Kim’s presentation was rich with substantive evidence of this phenomenon.

Negation of the Founder’s lineage

There was also significant discourse from various speakers and audience members concerning the centrality of the Moon lineage versus the FFWPU’s claim of the Han lineage as the genesis of the divine lineage. Likewise, there was contentious debate about the FFWPU’s Cheon Il Guk Constitution and its post-mortem characterization of Reverend Moon’s movement as a hierarchical religious institution headed by a “Supreme Council” that supplants the centrality of the family and the seminal significance of lineage in Reverend Moon’s teachings.

Importance of the Korean language

As noted above, several speakers addressed the importance of scholars having a sophisticated command of Korean and its ambiguities, or the sourcing to individuals with such competencies. They maintained that scholarly accountings require these skills in order to gain an accurate understanding of the teachings of Reverend Moon as well as the historical record during the final years of his life and following his death.

A movement and not a church

Much was noted about the institutionalization of charisma. Dr. Barker’s keynote “kaleidoscopic view” of the movement is noteworthy as she underscored the movement-like characteristics of Reverend Moon’s various global activities.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF SOME OF THE KEY PRESENTATIONS

The presentation papers will be published by the organizers in August. Since most of the papers are not currently available, we can only give some brief comments on some of the presentations.

Eileen Barker looked at the Unification movement from various perspectives – as a millenarian, utopian, spiritualist, charismatic, messianic, political, and economic movement. Barker concluded that the Unification movement has now become a schismatic movement. She is now writing a new book as a follow-up to her book *The Making of a Moonie*, published some years ago. She noted that it is a challenge to write the new book as the Unification movement is currently undergoing constant change,

like a moving target.

Massimo Introvigne gave an informed overview, based on his in-depth studies, of the dynamics of the schisms in the Unification movement, with particular attention to the emergence of the Family Peace Association. In his presentation, Introvigne focused on the history of Reverend Moon and the roles of the True Children, in particular giving an overview of the history and work of Dr. Hyun Jin Preston Moon, referring participants to Hyun Jin Preston Moon's book *Korean Dream* and Preston Moon's work for peace on the Korean peninsula and around the world. He concluded with an analysis of the future prospects for overcoming the divisions in the movement.

Andrew Wilson's presentation focused on the new theology of FFWPU professed by Mrs. Moon, the Only Begotten Daughter doctrine. He also characterized Reverend Moon's Eight Great Textbooks as a "motley collection" and a "half-finished project" that needed polishing, maintaining that the Eight Great Textbooks was only one of many series of books that Reverend Moon had introduced as canon over the years. Wilson expressed the FFWPU theological view that Reverend Moon could well indeed have been born from a fallen lineage, while Mrs. Moon was born sinless.

Michael Mickler portrayed the struggle in the movement as a "battle of the sexes" and stated that the essential conflict in the Unification movement was one between male (patriarchal model) and female (matriarchal model). Mickler proposed a "gender neutral" model of leadership in which male and female give up what he sees as "gender-based entitlements". Some expressed their disapproval for his criticism of Reverend Moon's leadership and cultural background and asked him to reconcile this view with Reverend Moon's consistent teachings about the distinct nature and roles of men and women, and challenged him for casting gender roles from a political perspective and not the Unification movement's most essential purpose of realizing God-centered love.

Mickler ironically bemoaned a "lack of a stable canon in the Unification movement", omitting any reference to Reverend Moon's multiple statements that the unaltered Eight Great Textbooks is the ultimate testament to his teachings. Nor did he provide any explanation for the numerous claims that FFWPU cannibalized the Eight Great Texts during the final days of Reverend Moon's life.

He also claimed that Mrs. Moon is being demonized by her two sons, but failed to distinguish between Dr. Hyun Jin Preston Moon and his younger brother Sean, until urged to do so by members of the audience. Family Peace Association representatives emphatically pointed out the numerous instances when FFWPU, for more than seven years, has been distorting and mischaracterizing Dr. Preston Moon.

In closing, Mickler remarked on the "absence of arbitration structures in the Unification movement" while minimizing the fact that it is FFWPU that is contentiously litigating worldwide and opposing all other conciliatory approaches such as facilitated mediation or even incremental engagement of the principals. He, likewise, had no explanation for FFWPU's numerous factual omissions and distortions.

In the Q&A session a participant asked Mickler if he speaks Korean, to which Mickler replied "No", followed by the question whether he believes Rev. Moon to be the messiah, to which Mickler replied, "Yes". He was finally asked, "Then do you believe that Rev. Moon was born with original sin?" to which Mickler replied "Yes."

Dan Fefferman offered an overview of the past ideological developments in the Unification movement, such as VOC and CAUSA, as well as an overview of political campaigns that the Unification movement has conducted in the past. Fefferman also offered an outline of the very general statements that Divine Principle makes concerning the future ideal political system. At the same time, he portrayed Dr. Hyun Jin Preston Moon as a non-religious, non-spiritual person and GPF as a secular organization. He spoke of a power struggle between Reverend Kwak and Bo Hi Pak. Fefferman claims that FFWPU is currently revising its conservative political stance, and not unlike Mickler's statements, remarked that the FFWPU is drifting away from the original teachings and intentions of the Founder.

Richard Panzer claimed that Reverend Moon's youngest son, Hyung Jin Sean Moon, is the successor of Reverend Moon and gave an overview of actions taken by FFWPU against Sean Moon. Panzer then listed the Sanctuary Church's grievances against Mrs. Moon and the FFWPU. Panzer's grievances list led to questions and comments by the audience pointing out that during the period that Sean was the international president of FFWPU (2008-2015), Sean led the FFWPU in a character assassination campaign against his eldest brother, Dr. Preston Moon, and that Sean used the same tactics of editing and deleting historical records and misrepresenting facts to Reverend and Mrs. Moon and to the FFWPU membership.

Dr. Jongsuk Kim expressed concern that the content in Panzer's presentation regarding the process of editing and deleting texts from Reverend Moon's 615 volumes was identical to the content from his first book "Split of the Unification Movement". Dr. Kim stated that the content was used without permission and without any reference to its source. Dr. Kim asked Panzer if he had ever seen the content of Kim's

presentation in its original form and Panzer replied that he had not, later explaining that a Dr. Sangyul Lee prepared the content for him.

Kerry Williams' presentation was on the topic of Rev. Moon's "Heavenly Father" vs. the FFWPU's new "Heavenly Parents", bringing into question the FFWPU's decision to change the designation of God.

The presentations of both the FFWPU and Sanctuary Church shared the common practice of deifying humans and both take a sectarian view of Reverend Moon's teachings and works. FFWPU deifies Mrs. Moon as the unique and infallible "Only Begotten Daughter", and Sanctuary Church deifies Reverend Moon as a projection of God and of a different substance to other human beings. Family Peace Association, on the other hand, teaches that the messianic mission, undertaken by Jesus and Reverend Moon, occurs within the human context and that neither Jesus nor the True Parents are infallible or super-human; to advance God's ideal every person must fulfil his or her respective portion of responsibility as stated in the unaltered Eight Great Textbooks. Also, Family Peace Association opposes a sectarian approach and stresses that the way to create world peace is to substantiate Reverend Moon's words beyond religious identity and to take a non-sectarian, partner-based approach with like-minded people, instead of the sectarian approach of both FFWPU and Sanctuary Church.

Jong Suk Kim's presentation explained Mrs. Moon's actions to dismantle Reverend Moon's charisma and to replace Reverend Moon's teachings with her new "Only Begotten Daughter" religion. Dr. Kim concluded that the current FFWPU is a "new and different religion" to that which the founder led.

He detailed the changes enacted by the Family Federation at Mrs. Moon's direction—changing the object of worship from Heavenly Father to Heavenly Parents, editing and deleting Rev. Moon's holy scriptures, changing the Family Pledge, denying the founder's lineage, claiming that she restored Rev. Moon, elevating of her status to Only Begotten Daughter in spite of Divine Principle, and inverting gender roles. His presentation was based on his book "A Study of Canonization in the Unification Movement", which is published in Korean and will "soon" be available in English.

Mark Bramwell's presentation on "The Family Pledge and the Family Peace Association" outlined Reverend Moon's inspirational vision of the family and its position as the penultimate building block for a world of peace. He noted that Reverend Moon referred to the Family Pledge as "the greatest of all prayers" and "the blueprint for the building of God's kingdom of peace and unity", representing the "absolute standard and constitution for the establishment of God's Kingdom" (Peace Message 14). He also remarked that the Family Pledge has an even greater significance than the Nicene Creed of Christianity, as it is universal and not limited to any one denomination. Bramwell focused on a number of key concepts in the Family Pledge, such as Family, God's Lineage, the Three Great Kingships, the Four Great Realms of Heart, the World of Freedom, Peace, Unity and Happiness, the Four Position Foundation, and Ownership.

Mark Bramwell pointed out that the Pledge makes no mention of institutions, organizations, a "supreme council" or submission to a church hierarchy. Blessed families, relating directly to God, are the new center in the new age of universal spirituality and unconditional love. Bramwell pointed to the accomplishments of the True Family, in particular the establishment of the "Three Great Kingships" as declared by Reverend Moon at Hyun Jin Preston Moon's inauguration ceremony in 1998. He also emphasized that the core of any family is the man-woman couple united in love in "gender complementarity", producing true equality and equal value; the Family Pledge is not based on patriarchy but on "patrilineal responsibility"; these have the purpose of realizing the ideal of family and the ultimate purpose of existence: love.

Dan Fefferman remarked on an internet forum that Mark Bramwell's analysis of the Family Pledge was "admirable".

Youngjun Kim's "Response" speech referred to the crucial role of the Second Generation, as part of the legacy of Sun Myung Moon, for the future of the movement. He raised the issue of sourcing and disinformation and the vital requirement of Korean language literacy for understanding the theology and the history of the movement. Kim declared that while the term "gender neutrality" to support the theory of the "Only Begotten Daughter" is trendy and well received in feminist circles, it is unacceptable for FFWPU to promote this within the framework of Divine Principle. God's expectations for Adam were different to His expectations for Eve.

Kim noted that FFWPU has been changing the theology and doctrine set in place by Reverend Moon. Mrs. Moon is not only claiming a deified status, but after her husband died, the FFWPU claims that her lineage is superior to that of her husband, that his lineage was purified through hers, and that she was born sinless. There is indeed no greater honor in front of God, said Kim, than to set the precedent for all women as "True Mother", yet the FFWPU has reinvented Mrs. Moon as the "Only Begotten Daughter".

Non-affiliated presenters:

Eileen Barker, London School of Economics (Keynote speech: “The Unification Church: A Kaleidoscope History”)

Alexa Blonner, University of Sydney (“The New God of Unificationism: Precedents and Parallels”)

George Chryssides, University of Birmingham (“The Welsh Connection – Pastor Joshua McCabe’s Role in the Unification Church’s Early History”)

Donald Westbrook, University of California, Los Angeles (“Post-Charismatic Outcomes of New Religions: Themes from Unificationism, Mormonism and Scientology”)

Regis Derequebourg, Faculty of Comparative Study of Religion and Humanism, Antwerp; Group of Sociology of Religion and Secularism, Paris (“The Prophetism of Sun Myung Moon and the Means- End Rationality”)

Massimo Introvigne, Managing director of CESNUR, Turin (“The Dynamics of the Schisms and the Birth of the Family Peace Association”)

Jongsuk Kim, Institute of Korean Messianic Movements, former professor at Sun Moon University (“FPA and the Controversy on the Unification Movement Scriptures”)

Willy Fautre, Human Rights Without Frontiers, Brussels (“Kidnapping and Deprivation of Freedom for the Purpose of De-conversion in Japan”)

Tony van Loon, FVG, Antwerp (Introduction to conference)

Other non-affiliated scholars:

Bernadette Rigal-Cellard, Professor of North American Studies and Religions and Societies (conference organizer)

Rev. Chris Vonck, rector of Faculty of Comparative Study of Religion and Humanism (FVG), Antwerp and Lydia Vonck

Jean-Francois Mayer, Institut Religioscope, Fribourg, Switzerland

FFWPU presenters:

Andrew Wilson, UTS (“Theological Developments in the Unification Movement since the Death of Rev. Moon”)

Michael Mickler, UTS (“Gender Politics in the Post-Sun Myung Moon Unification Movement”) Dan Fefferman, Board of Trustees of UTS (“Unification Political Theology: Past, Present, Future”)

Sanctuary Church presenters:

Richard Panzer (“Reverend Moon’s Theology of the Three Generations Kingship”)

Kerry Williams (“Only One God: The Debate on God as ‘Heavenly Father’ vs. God as ‘Heavenly Parents’ in the Contemporary Unification Movement”)

Family Peace Association presenters:

Mark Bramwell, Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences (“The Family Pledge and the Family Peace Association”)

Youngjun Kim, FPA International Vice-President (Respondent)

Note: Two presenters, James A. Beverley, Tyndale Seminary, Toronto (who was to present on Sanctuary Church), and Gerhard Besier (Sigmund Neumann Institute, Berlin) were both unable to attend.