

Summary Report & Reflections



'The Life and Legacy of SMM and the Unification Movements in Scholarly Perspective'

Faculty of Comparative Study of Religion and Humanism (FVG)
Antwerp, Belgium
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Organized by:

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This is a summary-report and a reflection on the recent conference in Antwerp, Belgium. The text is a compilation of impressions and reflections by Dr. Andrew Wilson, Dr. Mike Mickler, Dan Fefferman, Hugo Veracx, Peter Zoehrer and Catriona Valenta. The number of participants (including scholars & organizers) was around 40: 15 persons belonging to Sanctuary Church, 8 participants from the Preston (H1) group, 8 from FFWPU and 9 neutral (ex-members, scholars, etc.). The conference was devoted almost exclusively to examining the background and development of the schisms that have emerged in the Unification Movement since the death of the founder.

DAY ONE

The first day was consistent with the conference theme of the „*Life and legacy of Sun Myung Moon and Unification Movements*“ in a scholarly perspective. **Dr. Eileen Barker** led off with an excellent keynote address titled "*The Unification Church: A Kaleidoscopic History.*" She looked at the UM as a religious movement, a spiritual movement, a charismatic movement, a messianic movement, a millenarian movement, a utopian movement, a political movement, a financial-business movement, a criminal movement, a sectarian movement, a denominationalizing movement, and a schismatic movement. It was a good introduction to the conference as a whole.

Alexa Blonner followed with a very excellent presentation on the UM's antecedents in Neo-Confucian thought and also the ways in which the UM went beyond that heritage. **George Chryssides**, a well-known British scholar who published "*The Advent of SMM*" (1991) spoke next on some of the Christian antecedents of the UM in the person of Pastor Joshua McCabe from the Wales-based Apostolic Church who was sent to study the UM in 1955 and who suggested the name DP to Miss Kim. His presentation was based on material he published previously and some in attendance questioned its relevance to the conference.

Then followed the **three FFWPU** presentations by **Dr. Andrew Wilson**, **Dr. Mike Mickler** and **Dan Fefferman**. Each of them followed the conference format by adhering to the "scholarly perspective" norm. Andrew addressed theological developments in the UM over the past five years, Mike looked at gender-based conflicts and Dan addressed the evolution of the UM's orientation toward politics. The scholarly perspective broke down somewhat in some of the attack-style questions from **Sanctuary Church** and **Family Peace Association** (H1) supporters present, but these were pretty effectively handled in the responses of our FFWPU scholars. This ended the first day and the conference appeared to be on track.

DAY TWO

The second day was an entirely different story. Sanctuary Church had the floor first and it was unfortunate that James Beverly, a Canadian scholar scheduled to speak in that session was unable to attend due to health reasons. He was to speak on *“A Not so Divine Conflict: Tensions between True Mother and Hyung Jin Moon.”* Had he done, so, it would have provided a helpful counter to the entirely polemical attacks of **Richard Panzer** and **Kerry Williams** (both SC). Because Beverly did not speak, Panzer and Williams went on for 45 minutes or so each and there was little or no time for questions or rebuttal. In this respect, the moderator did not do an effective job. They may be good scholars, but it was quite obvious that moderation was not one of their strong points...

The conference got somewhat back on track in the second morning session which featured an insightful presentation by **Donald Westbrook**, a young UCLA scholar on the post-charismatic outcomes of new religions, using examples from Mormonism and Scientology to look at the UM. A French scholar **Dr. Régis Dericquebourg** introduced Max Weber’s ideas on means-ends rationality and suggested that the UM provided a way out of modernity’s “iron cage.”

The main afternoon session of the second day focused on **Hyun Jin Moon’s “Family Peace Association”** and continued the polemic pitch of the Sanctuary session, probably more impassioned since there was more Q&A. **Dr. Massimo Introvigne** gave an introduction to Hyun Jin’s group which was helpful in providing an overview but **Jong Suk Kim** (defending the Preston group. He flew in from Korea just for this Colloquium), who has self-published a couple of works on **UM “Splits”** and **Mark Bramwell**, a British member who teaches language in Germany, went into mostly attack mode against FFWPU. **Young Joon Kim**, a leader of Hyun Jin Moon’s group was then invited as a “respondent” to their presentations but used the opportunity to attack FFWPU and Sanctuary which led to Dr. Wilson’s insistence that he be allowed to respond.

The final paper by **Willy Fautre** of **Human Rights without Frontiers** focused on his efforts to end **deprogramming of Unificationists in Japan**. Their organization, teaming up with **Dan Fefferman** (ICRF) and **Peter Zoehrer’s FOREF group**, have actually succeeded in ending deprogramming, especially centered around the **Toru Goto** case. All this was reported at the conference, which brought the event to a most satisfying ending.

REFLECTIONS

M.M.: The conference was something of a wake-up call to us and, I think, to the conference organizers. There was an underlying assumption that issues of SMM’s legacy and competing Unification “Movements” could be dealt with “in scholarly perspective.” That may have been the case if the conference had been limited to

scholars of religion. As it was, the moderators were ill equipped to handle the religious fanaticism of presenters and commentators who refused to adhere to any limitation of their statements. The scholars present also made few if any comments after the movement presenters either because the atmosphere was too charged or because they were content to be flies on the wall. Neither Sanctuary nor World Peace Association had genuine interest in dialogue as commonly understood. Their intent was to tear down True Mother and FFWPU.

P.Z.: The organizers are scholars and they surely had no ulterior motives. Some of them attended the CESNUR conference in Korea last year. So they discussed and decided to organize a similar conference in Europe. They are aware that almost all religions have suffered a schismatic split after the death of the founder. Therefore they are now fascinated that they can study such a schism in one of the new religions, whose founder passed away only a few years ago. A historic phenomenon is unfolding right in front of their eyes. Therefore it is understandable that Eileen Barker told Mike, while scribbling away: „this has been my best conferences ever! “ Sorry, but I cannot share her enthusiasm.

H.V.: The colloquium began with respect worthy scholarly contributions, including contributions by **Eileen Barker, Alexa Blonner and George Chrystides**. In the afternoon of the first day, representatives of the FFWPU came to the floor. Even though they defended the views of FFWPU, their contributions aspired a certain objectivity and fairness towards the other schismatic groups and as such they remained faithful to the stipulated provision of a 'scholarly' approach. The reactions of their schismatic counterparts, on the other hand, were very aggressive and disgraceful. A series of accusations and allegations followed aiming at putting in discredit Hak Ja Han Moon and the FFWPU at all cost. As a result, however the "scientific mind" was subverted. But still the representatives of the FFWPU continued to retain their dignity with a respectful attitude toward their opponents.

C.V.: Additional challenges to productive dialogue are:

- Rev Moon has made many contradictory statements; it is child's play to find quotes to support pretty much whatever point of view you chose to take.
- TP's language is Korean. SC has delighted in publishing quotes of TF supposedly strongly rebuking his wife, or of TM's 'heretical' remarks. One very simple example serves to illustrate this:

True Mother's statement—'I walked this path alone', has SC members gleefully rubbing their hands.

But if translated: **'I walked this lonely path'**? Very different!

A.W.: By and large, we kept to an attitude of simply presenting our side without attacking them, and calling for reconciliation. They, on the other hand, were in full attack mode. I think the scholars could see that. But I think that even for them, we were more like lab rats on display so they could gather field data about this most interesting schism that is taking place before their eyes. It reminded me of the way

things were back in 1976 when we first began to invite scholars to UTS and they could observe and study us as the "phenomenon" of a new religion. Not surprisingly, they spent most of their time outside of the sessions speaking with the members from the schismatic groups, to get to know them better.

H.V.: The second day, the Sanctuary church and FPA gave their presentations. The presentations of the Sanctuary Church and FPA lacked, however, to a large extent that "scholarly" mind. Their goal seemed rather to be aimed at discrediting Dr. Hak Ja Han, FFWPU and the previous speakers. In the short reactions that Dr. Wilson, of the FFWPU, was allowed to give he always started with praising the points he could agree upon in the proposed papers. Such a reaction demonstrates a spirit in continuous search for dialogue and reconciliation, completely in line of the spirit of the founder, the late Rev. Sun Myung Moon. Too bad that the same spirit was not inherited by everyone.

However, the views differ greatly. Reconciliation and reunification do not seem to be yet in sight. **On the one hand, the adherents of the SC and FPA seem to call for a status quo:** God has revealed Himself through Rev. Sun Myung Moon and there it stops. Nothing can be added nor changed. God is being silenced. There is little or no place for new revelations, especially not through Dr. Hak Ja Han, the wife of Rev. Moon. No spiritual authority can be granted to her. Any addition or change made by Dr. Hak Ja Han is seen as a violation and loss of the "Life Legacy" of Rev. Moon.

P.Z.: At the beginning of the conference no one could anticipate what would actually happen there. Not even I could foresee this, even though I have attended a number of such annual conferences before. This one was definitely unique. Strong emotions erupted like volcanos and sometimes one forgot that this was supposed to be an academic symposium. One could easily see, that the scholars who moderated the proceedings were totally unprepared for the explosive nature of this meeting. They were obviously overwhelmed and one cannot blame them for their inadequate job in time management (keeping a fair balance of allocating equal question and response time to the different stakeholders). Especially the SC representatives used this weakness to the utter limits... Since they outnumbered the FFWPU as well as the Preston group, they also used this advantage during the break times by virtually monopolizing the scholars and projecting their own narrative to them. Now I realize, that there should have been many more representatives of FFWPU there.

M.M.: Given this reality, we need to be quite careful about giving SC and WPA platforms to legitimize themselves. There also was an agreement between Andrew, Dan and myself that FFWPU may need to be more forthright about stating its position and rebutting false narratives propagated by the schismatic groups. We also need to be less naïve about how conferences such as this are organized. For example, the entire proceedings were filmed but we're not clear who was behind that. Footage might be used especially by SC for purposes of propaganda. There was an announcement that permission will be sought from all presenters for the use of video

footage and there was agreement among us that we will not grant permission from our sessions.

H.V.: Dr. Hak Ja Han, on the other hand, has a clear vision for the future, a vision, one must admit, completely in line with that of her husband. The goal is the continuation of the building of God's Kingdom. She believes in her primary role and responsibility in building it. She remains together with her husband in the position of the "True Parents". Be it so that her husband is in the spiritual world and that she is still here alive on earth still they are 'one'. God can still continue revealing himself with only one difference: now He/She reveals Him/Herself through a yin channel.

A.W.: Unfortunately, the participants from the schismatic groups, **Sanctuary Church** (papers by **Richard Panzer and Kerry Williams** and supporters including Hamish Robertson and his wife), and **Preston's group (Mark Bramwell, Yongsuk Kim and Youngjun Kim)** did not by and large write scholarly papers but engaged in constant attacks against True Mother and against us. The result was more a slugfest than an academic conference.

P.Z.: The Sanctuaricians had no shame for largely inflating their numbers. In one statement they explained, that they had many more members in Korea and Japan, than in Europe and the USA. Approximately 10 000 (!) was mentioned by Richard Panzer. **My question is: why they were only able to collect no more than 1000 signatures supporting a petition in a trade-marking dispute over the name „Cheon Il Guk“?**

C.V.: Although the conference was to examine the Unification movement from a 'scholarly perspective', some of the lecture content and many comments made during the question time were anything but scholarly. There were inappropriate outbursts, for example one from a SC member who put the blame of an imminent nuclear war squarely at the feet of 'the Han mother'.

The behavior of the FPA members is at least more respectful and one can almost feel a certain sympathy for Hyun Jin. There was some agreement, also in the ranks of the FFWPU, that he had probably been shoddily and unfairly treated by his younger brother. However their relative lack of combativeness may in part be due to pending legal action.

A.W.: On the first day, when we presented and the other groups challenged us in their statements, we held our own well and I was satisfied with the result. However, on the second day when the two schismatic groups presented, the moderators did not give us time to respond. This we found to be rather unfair. I insisted on asking one question to the Preston people which went well; and with Dr. Mickler's support they had to answer us. **Bramwell** had lectured on the *Family Pledge and the Three Kingships*, and I asked him whether the Three Kingships included Mother as Queen; he allowed that it did. Then I said: shouldn't a filial son like Preston help his mother, defend her against defamatory statement by Sean's (H2) group and work with her to recognize where she makes mistakes?

C.V.: Beyond all the theological and intellectual arguments, I did have one burning question for each of the breakaway groups.

For SC-even if much of what TM has done is questionable, even if she really has 'failed' and Hyung Jin is the rightful heir-please tell me how one can be attracted to or support a group where there is so much antagonistic and poisonous rhetoric and behavior?

And for FPA-even if there has been corruption and mismanagement and Hyun is the rightful heir-please tell me how it is justifiable to misappropriate a whole foundation and large amounts of money, against the wishes the founder?

A.W.: During the conference the scholars did not ask any of us a single question or to any of the Unificationists from the other sects. They simply watched and observed, **Dr. Eileen Barker** in particular. She was fascinated by what was going on, and told Mike it was "*the greatest conference I've ever attended.*" But from my viewpoint, I felt a bit used.

P.Z.: Our three American scholars who gave their presentations on behalf of FFWPU, have done a really good job in representing TM & our church. They tried hard to be objective and apply academic standards. On the other hand, both Sanctuary Church as well as Preston's followers used this meeting mercilessly for their apologetic agendas, not really considering that ultimately this emotional performance would do a disservice to their cause. Thus, a lot of „dirty laundry“ was washed on the second day in Antwerp.

The procedures of these conferences are such, that the written statements of the presenters will be printed. The organizers have set the submission deadline by the end of July. The submitted papers will also go online (at least on the CESNUR website and the blogs of the two universities). Then it will be all out there. Like this the term "washing the dirty laundry in public" is taking a whole new dimension. The question is: what will be next? **In reality, none of the groups will have sustainable benefit from such a unfavorable public exposure.** That is also what I conveyed during the break to Richard Panzer (SC). He was thoughtfully silent, neither denying nor approving my assertion.

H.V.: Can this colloquium be called a success?

It depends who you ask. The **academics** present could see the dynamics of the schisms at work in a lively way... The **SC** and **FPA** will probably tag this colloquium as a success as they were able to clearly articulate their motives for their parting.

However, the **FFWPU scholars** may feel deceived. In comparison to their opponents, they were given little chance to answer the allegations towards them. But on the other hand, they may preen themselves on how much they have honored the spirit of the founder. **A "scholarly" attitude with respect and understanding for their contenders, searching for openings for dialogue and reconciliation. In that sense, the greatest success is on their side.**

Some Images

Prof. Vonck - our host



Dr. Andrew Wilson



Dr. Introvigne



Dr. R. Panzer



Q & A Session



Our delegation - sharing over dinner

