

Reaching Out to Students of Theology in Slovakia

Milos Klas
July 2015



Barbara Grabner, Dr. Monika Zavis, Milos Klas, Dorota Simekova

Without doubt, the people most be prepared to listen to Divine Principle lectures are Christian theologians and Catholic priests. Unfortunately, in most countries our movement still has great difficulty in capturing their attention. Therefore, we appreciate that in Slovakia, we are in a very fortunate position -- the Evangelical Theological Faculty of the Comenius University in the Slovak capital, Bratislava, gave us the opportunity on three occasions to explain our faith.

That opportunity did not come out of left field but developed through many years of patient work. Gradually, since 1990, we have established good relations with some theologians, mainly from Protestant denominations. Some of them attended interfaith conferences that we held in the early 1990s after the end of communism.

In March 2002, FFWPU representative Milos Klas sent a letter to hundreds of priests and theologians in Slovakia introducing Rev. Moon's interfaith initiatives and inviting them to find out more about our founder. The response was exceedingly modest.

A few years later, the early MEPI pilgrimages inspired us; as a result, UPF and the WFWP organized a series of events titled "The Children of Abraham" in 2008. On several occasions, we asked representatives of Judaism, Christianity and Islam to present their views and traditions. A highlight in this context was the Palestinian Evening, which attracted much attention and an overflow crowd of guests.

In recent years, our interfaith gatherings have focused on the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week. Some religious leaders keep friendly contact with us, and occasionally open the doors of their facilities for meetings. A recent highlight took place in December 2014, when UPF Slovakia commemorated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the end of communism with a panel discussion on "Religious Freedom in Eastern Europe after 1989: Has persecution changed its target?" The presentations focused on cases of religious persecution before and after 1989. Among the audience were the heads of the Old Catholic Church, the New Apostolic Church, Hare Krishna, Falun Gong, as well as of other religious bodies.

A few years ago, WFWP representative Dorota Simekova, with Milos Klas, visited the famous scholar Dr. Peter Gazik. Professor Gazik is one of a very few supporters of interfaith dialogue in this predominantly Catholic nation. His conviction is that the best way to overcome prejudice and conflicts is to study other faiths deeply.

His lectures are quite popular and he has a good reputation. Professor Gazik had invited his younger colleague, Dr. Monika Zavis, to the meeting.

Afterward, he asked her to stay in touch with us. Dr. Zavis teaches at the Department of Contextual Theology, which offers classes about the world's religions -- the perfect setting for interfaith communication!



Mr. Milos Klas giving a Divine Principle lecture to theology students

In March 2015, she invited us to speak to her students for the third time. In our first two visits, we explained the basics of the Divine Principle and the blessing. This year, we introduced the founder of our religion to the class. To present the teachings and life course of Rev. Moon to any audience is a challenge. The challenge is even greater if the listeners are students of theology! Thanks to the autobiography and other rich material being available, we were confident to present True Father in the most professional and dignified manner. For the PowerPoint presentation, we took pains to select pictures and facts that appeal to non-members. Searching for photographs, we considered what is most suitable for a Christian audience. How would they view a new messianic figure? Whether covering blessing events or life in the early church, not all pictures were suitable.

Dorota Simekova and I (his wife) supported our FFWPU lecturer, Milos Klas. In the classroom, twenty-five young people faced us with friendly but reserved spirits. They had heard some basics by docent Dr. Monika Zavis. After a while, the presentation and Father's manifold aspects and activities seemed to captivate the audience.

To remove any doubt about True Father's mission, they heard an outline of the Parallels of History. Milos Klas emphasized that the Second Coming should have happened between 1917 and 1930 -- and that it had.

One student wanted to know how Jesus and Rev. Moon cooperated and how they differed from each other. He did not refute our explanation. We had ninety minutes, which passed all too quickly. At the end, Dr. Zavis expressed joy and deep satisfaction. She said that looking around she could see that "The students had been truly listening and not just sitting there passively."

At the end, every student received the Slovak autobiography, which we had given the title, "In Search of the Lost Peace." Pictures of our lecture later appeared on the faculty website.

Our older sister Dorota keeps friendly contact with Dr. Zavis during the year. In addition, she and other members occasionally visit the Department of Religious Studies, which is part of the Philosophical Faculty of Comenius University. Our members bring literature there, such as the book *World Scripture*, and *Exposition of the Divine Principle*, as well as some brochures. Some staff members are more open than others; our main purpose is to keep in touch with each other and make our resources available to them. Based on our experiences over the last three years, we recommend that members everywhere approach teachers and students of religious history. They are more open to or even obliged to study new religious movements. Many theological faculties have a department of religious studies or offer related courses. I hope opportunities of this kind arise in countries around the world.