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"Returning Resurrection" In the Apocalypse of Peter John Olivi: Unificationist Theology in the 13th Century?

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When I applied for a job at Unification Theological Seminary, Unificationist John Sonneborn was assigned the task of introducing me to *Divine Principle*, Rev. Moon's teachings, so that I would at least have an acquaintance with the confessional point of view of the students to whom I would be teaching Church History. When we got to the part about the migration of messiahship from person to person, from Jesus, the Messiah (Christ) of the First Advent, to—as Unificationists believe—Rev. Sun Myung Moon, “Lord of the Second Advent,” I brightened. “Oh!” I said, “That is similar to the idea of Peter John Olivi (ca. 1248-1298), on whose *Apocalypse* commentary I have been working all these years. He believed that St. Francis was the second advent of Christ, in spirit.” Mr. Sonneborn was astonished and delighted, and I got the job.

Everyone has heard of Francis of Assisi, but who was this Peter John Olivi, and why did he think St. Francis was the “Lord of the Second Advent?” How could it have come about that a devout Christian could believe that some person other than the crucified and resurrected Jesus of Nazareth could have been the Second Coming of Christ?

St. Francis: Olivi's Inspiration

Olivi was born about 20 years after Francis (1181/82-1226) had died, and twelve years later in 1260, the pre-teen Olivi became a member of the Order of Friars Minor [O.F.M.], the religious Order that St. Francis had founded in 1209. Awestruck by Francis's holiness and sainthood, Olivi devoutly followed Francis as Francis had followed Christ.

Giovanni di Pietro di Bernadone, nicknamed “Francesco” by his father, grew up living the good life of a rich man's son. The youthful Francis poetized in the Courtly Love tradition, sallied forth to war, lost and was captured, got sick, was released, and had dreams in which he was called home to Assisi. At prayer in the dilapidated Church of San Damiano, Francis was confronted by Christ on the cross, who spoke to him in a vision and said, “Build up my church!” Taking the visionary voice literally, Francis started replacing the fallen stones of the old church. Begging with the poor at (old) St. Peter's Church in Rome, Francis was moved towards a life of evangelical poverty. Back home in Assisi, he shocked everyone at church by commencing his ministry in evangelical poverty when he stripped himself naked in the presence of the bishop and gave his pile of clothes back to his father.

Francis and his followers were officially approved as a religious society by Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) in 1210. In addition to the Order of Friars Minor, Francis also founded the Order of Poor Clares (for women), and, later, the Order of Brothers and Sisters of Penance (also called “the Third Order”) for ordinary people. Devoting himself to “Lady Poverty,” Francis aimed at living life as close as possible to Christ's life of poverty and holiness. He experienced many miracles and guided the rapid expansion of the O.F.M.

In 1219, Francis, the missionary, walked through the battle lines of the Fifth Crusade to an audience with Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil (1180-1238) and preached the gospel to him. To

demonstrate the truth of his message, Francis proposed a “trial by fire” between himself and the Sultan’s mullahs, an opportunity that the mullahs declined. In 1229, al-Kamil and Emperor Frederic II peacefully negotiated the only treaty between the Muslims and Crusader Christians: Jerusalem and Bethlehem were ceded to the European Christians with a right of safe passage to the holy sites. Among Francis’s other memorable acts, he instituted in 1223 the first “living” Nativity Scene at Christmas.

The most significant of Francis’s many miracles was the stigmata. At prayer on Mt. Alverna in 1224, *il poverello* (“the little poor man”) experienced a vision of Christ-crucified in the form of a burning seraph, and received in his bodily flesh the wounds of Christ.^[1] Two years later, 3 October, 1226, Francis died.

The spiritual power generated by Francis’s life of “evangelical perfection” revolutionized 13th-century Christendom. Today, he is venerated widely as the patron of animals and the environment, and (with Catherine of Siena) he is honored as the national patron of Italy. No other saint since the first century has been more influential—among both Catholics and Protestants, as well as among non-believers—than Francis of Assisi. Francis left no deeper mark on the soul of anyone during his own century than the impression he made on Peter John Olivi.

Olivi, the Bible Teacher

Thomas Aquinas, O.P. (1225-1274), *doctor angelicus*, and Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, O.F.M. (ca. 1221-1274), *doctor seraphicus*, are acknowledged to have been the two greatest Christian theological minds of the 13th century. Now we must add a third: *Petrus Iohannis Olivi* (Peter, [son of] John Olivi), O.F.M., *doctor eschatologicus*, born in Sérignan, near Narbonne, Languedoc; educated in the schools of his Order at Béziers, Montpellier, and in the Franciscan *studium generale* at the University of Paris. What Thomas was to philosophical theology, and Bonaventure was to symbolic theology, Olivi was to eschatological theology—the doctrine of “Last Things.”

Olivi grew up pondering not only the miracles of St. Francis but also the thought of Joachim of Fiore (1135-1202), a prophetic spirit who would prove to be widely influential even into our own time. At Paris, Olivi engaged in the usual course of studies prescribed by the 13th-century Scholastic curriculum, focused especially on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard; he also “majored” in biblical studies, and, as well, became Bonaventure’s “graduate assistant” tasked with the study of Averroistic Aristotelian philosophy as it was being taught at Paris. This cosmology and moral system, at odds with the Judeo-Christian tradition, was condemned in 1270 and 1277, partly as a result of Olivi’s investigation and Bonaventure’s influence.

Olivi contributed substantially to a committee that assisted Pope Nicholas III (1277-1280) in defining “evangelical poverty,” stated officially in the papal encyclical “*Exiit qui seminat*” (August 24, 1279). Over the next 20 years, Olivi wrote and lectured faithfully on various Franciscan subjects, yet was forced to engage in a tedious self-defense against his critics. He wrote a commentary on Lombard’s *Sentences* and works on philosophical and theological issues. In 1294, Olivi defended the right of Pope Celestine V to abdicate the papal office.

Above all, while teaching in Franciscan *studia* in Florence, Montpellier, and Narbonne, Olivi lectured and commented on most of the books of the Bible. Olivi’s brilliant career as a Bible teacher and commentator is one clear disproof of the Protestant slur that medieval theologians “knew nothing” about the Bible. Towards the end of his life, in 1297, Olivi finished his commentary on the Book of Revelation. Titled the *Lectura super Apocalypsim (LSA)*, it was his grand statement of eschatology, a *summa* on “the Last Things.”

Friar Peter died on 14 March, 1298, in Narbonne, a beloved teacher among Franciscans of many types, including Franciscan Spirituals, Beguines and Beghards, and especially lay people. By some he was called “St. Peter,” and miracles occurred at his grave—until it was destroyed by the Conventual O.F.M. and the Inquisition. On February 8, 1318, Pope John XXII formally anathematized Olivi and condemned his commentaries on Revelation and Matthew as heretical. From 1300 to 1328, copies of Olivi’s books were confiscated and burned. His followers were

persecuted, and many were burned at the stake, refusing to the death to give up copies of Olivi's writings. Olivi's writings would remain on the list of prohibited books until 1477, when Sixtus IV (1471-1484), himself a Franciscan and "the first Renaissance Pope," lifted the ban, encouraging readers to "pluck the roses and leave the thorns." Olivi's life and work began to come to light again in the 1880s, and since that time, scholarship on Olivi has flowered. The remainder of this essay is premised on a critical edition of the *LSA* published in 2014.[\[2\]](#)

Olivi's Apocalypse

Practicing what he called "superabundant" hermeneutics (an all-inclusive interpretation of scripture), Olivi allowed for the complex truth of multiple meanings of the biblical text. His reading of the Book of Revelation drew together traditional insights, especially from Augustine, Gregory the Great, Richard of St.-Victor, and Bonaventure among others, and blended these with the novel interpretations of Joachim of Fiore.

Especially, Olivi applied Joachim's principle of *concordia*: the threefold parallel of persons and events in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and Church History with secular history. While his hermeneutic was more subjectively ideological than historically objective—contrary to both Joachim's and Olivi's fervent perceptions of *concordia*—Olivi could nonetheless reinforce his own theological agenda by reference to specific historical details and to Joachim's construct of the three ages of history: the Age of the Father, the Age of the Son, and the Age of the Holy Spirit.

Equally important was Olivi's understanding of the seven stages (*status*) of the church: (1) Christ and the apostles, opposed by unbelieving Jews; (2) martyrs, opposed by pagans; (3) great teachers, opposed by heretics; (4) eremites and secular clergy, opposed by the worldly and by Islam; (5) communal monasticism and condescension to the masses, opposed by bad Christians; (6) restoration of evangelical perfection in Francis (the "second coming of Christ"), opposed by the two antichrists, the "mystical" and the "public"; (7) the spiritual church, opposed by ultimate eschatological evil (Gog and Magog). Olivi found this pattern of sevenfold stages and times reinforced abundantly by the seven visions, seven churches of Asia, seven trumpets, seven bowls, seven hills of Rome, and other sevens throughout John's Apocalypse.

Olivi then deduced numerous fascinating implications and conclusions on the basis of his new approach: Among them, his infamous condemnation of the Church of Rome as the "whore of Babylon," the carnal church, and his prediction of a coming heretical Pope. All this oldness of the old church, said Olivi, would be replaced by the newness of a new, spiritual church, the New Bride of Christ. Moreover, "all Israel" would be saved when the "144,000 followers of the Lamb," the elect, eschatological Jews at the "end of days" prophesied in Book of Revelation, would rally against militant Islam to defend the Christian West. Though these ideas, too, were integral parts of Olivi's eschatology, we must leave them aside to maintain our focus on Olivi's highly inventive Franciscatology.

St. Francis, the "Second Coming of Christ, in Spirit"

According to Olivi, Francis of Assisi was the "second coming of Christ in spirit," the "middle" coming between Christ's first coming "in flesh" and his final coming "in judgment." The Prophets had foretold Christ's trinity of comings, but only dimly. They were like people standing at a distance from a mountain with three peaks; they could not see the details. Olivi, however, as a reader of the Book of Revelation in the sixth stage of the church, is like someone standing on the middle peak of that three-peak mountain: From that vantage point, he could see all three peaks clearly and the valleys in-between. Born at the end of the fifth stage of the church, Francis in his life and *Rule*, perfectly resembled the first peak—the coming of Christ in flesh. Olivi, standing on the middle peak of evangelical perfection as restored in Francis in the sixth stage—the coming of Christ in spirit, could therefore see beyond the valley ahead to the third peak, the seventh stage—the Third World Age in which the spiritual church would flourish. The seventh stage would start, Olivi thought—he was writing in 1297—in about three years, and would last

probably 700 years. At the end of that time, Christ would come again in judgment.[3] Olivi neatly summarized his idea in a few sentences:

The root of these visions [in the Book of Revelation] clearly demonstrates that their beginning was from the incarnate, the suffering, and the resurrected Christ. But the seventh and final members of these visions, and the seventh and final vision of the Apocalypse, clearly demonstrate that the end of the visions is, simply, life eternal to be revealed at the end of the world. According to this, a perfect participation in that life is to be enjoyed in this life a little while before the end of the world. Now, the sixth member of these visions and the sixth vision of the Apocalypse make clear that in the sixth time of the church the unique perfection of the life and wisdom of Christ is to be revealed, and that the oldness of the former time is thus to be universally driven out, so that something of a new age or new church will then be seen to be formed in place of the old things already cast off, just as in the first advent of Christ, a new church was formed in place of the old, rejected synagogue. And this is why a triple advent of Christ is presented in these visions: the first, namely, in flesh capable of suffering, redeeming the world and founding the church; the second, in the spirit of the evangelical life, reforming and perfecting the church that had already been founded at the first; the third, in judgment, glorifying the elect and bringing all things to completion.[4]

Francis was for Olivi the pivot point: Christ having come again in Francis, the evangelical life and saving death of Christ were thereby recapitulated, the perfection of the gospel—especially evangelical poverty—restored, and the new revelation perfectly sealed through Francis’s “crucifixion” by way of the seraphic vision on Mount Alverna. Olivi explained throughout the *LSA* that Francis’s life, teaching, example, death and devotion to evangelical poverty, like that of Christ and the apostles, was “verily and properly that evangelical rule which Christ himself kept and enjoined upon the apostles and caused to be composed in their Gospels.” The *Rule of the Friars Minor*, written by Francis to guide the life and evangelical ministry of Franciscans, required that the perfect follower of Christ would live the life of a poor person, practicing the *usus pauper*—being truly and voluntarily poor, holding no possessions, either individually or communally. This rule had been confirmed by Popes and theologians and the Church; could be proved from the texts of scripture; and had been attested by “the undoubtable testimony of the most blessed Francis, by way of ineffable holiness, and confirmed by innumerable miracles of God.” The crowning evidence had been “the most glorious stigmata impressed on Francis by Christ,” by which “it is clear that Francis was to be the angel of the opening of the sixth seal, *having the sign of the living God* (Rev 7:2), the sign, namely, of the wounds of Christ crucified and also the sign of Francis’s total transformation and configuration of himself to Christ and into Christ.”[5]

According to Olivi’s eschatologic, if Francis’s life were in perfect concord with the life of Christ, then Francis himself, too, would have to rise again. Olivi followed his logic of a “Christiform” life through to his prediction that the Francis-Christ would be resurrected.

If the angel of Revelation 7:2, who “ascends from the rising of the sun,” is Francis, “the renewer and supreme observer—after Christ and his mother—of the evangelical life and rule,” then “Christ in Francis” will cause the “sun of the world” to rise up to that morning in which Christ himself in his first advent rose up. The “rising of the sun” points to the “solar day” of the sixth and seventh stages of the church, or of the third general stage of the world.

In proof of this possibility, Olivi not only cited scripture texts but also related the oral tradition among Franciscans, reaching back through Conrad of Offida to Friar Leo. Leo had been a close associate of Francis, one of his secretaries, his “confessor,” and, indeed, the sole witness of Francis in his seraphic vision when he received the stigmata. According to Conrad, and before him according to Leo, the pressure of the “Babylonian temptation” (the opposition to the restoration of the gospel that would come against the Franciscan Movement from the “carnal church”) would make the resurrection of Francis a providential necessity. The *Rule* of the O.F.M. would “be crucified, as if in the very likeness of Christ,” but it would rise again glorious. The gospel of Christ cannot ultimately be overcome by the forces of the antichrists, bad philosophy, faithless theology, greedy officials in positions of power within the Church, and enemies attacking from the outside. Olivi thus reached a conclusion regarding the future of Francis’s faithful followers:

Just as in life and in the stigmata of the cross Francis was singularly made like Christ, so also he might be made like Christ in a resurrection necessary then to confirm and prepare Francis's disciples, just as Christ's resurrection was necessary to confirm the apostles and shape them for the foundation and government of the future church.

The death and resurrection and continuing life of Francis would be duplicated, like Christ in his apostles, through Francis's *returning resurrection*^[6] in the Spiritual Church.

Therefore, Olivi drew the corollary, that the angel of Rev. 7:2 also refers to "the host of the disciples of Francis" who were "similarly to ascend from the sunrise." Their rising is Francis's returning resurrection because the saint's "example and merit and powerful rule from heaven assists them in such a singular way that whatever good is accomplished through them may be ascribed rather to him than to them."^[7]

Writing his commentary on the Book of Revelation partly to comfort beleaguered Franciscans and their friends being persecuted by the "mystical antichrist" (including Church officials informed by anti-Christian philosophy) and the "great" or "political antichrist" (militant Islam and its allied armies), Olivi rightly asked the question: When shall we expect Francis's resurrection to take place? In answer to his own question, and unlike many latter-day readers of the Book of Revelation, Olivi resisted the urge to set dates for God's predicted activity. Instead, he honored "the degree of dignity" among the resurrections of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and Francis: Jesus rose in three days, Mary was taken up to heaven after forty days,^[8] Francis "will be raised after the whole time of his Order, even up to its own crucifixion, when it is made one with the cross of Christ, even as was prefigured in the stigmata of Francis." When that happens, Francis "will ascend" in and through the Spiritual Church after its tribulation, and he will reign as "a universal pontiff of New Jerusalem" or "like a new leader" (*novus dux*^[9]) of the world.

"He ascends, moreover, not by measured footsteps"—that is, not by business-as-usual politics and money and military might—"but because complete freedom is given to him to renew the Christian religion and to preach the Word, because the Lord of hosts is already beginning to rule over the entire earth."^[10] Olivi concluded this passage, saying in summary: Francis, "having the seal of the living God" (Rev. 7:2), had been impressed both internally and externally by the stigmata, and now through a *concordia* of the time of the church-historical stage, evangelical profession, and messianic office, he and his followers have been made—and were being made—"like Christ and sealed with his likeness."^[11]

The risen Francis-Christ would, therefore, like the risen Jesus Christ before him, rule both the church and the world through his elect Order. Like a Pope or an Emperor or both, the risen Francis, a spiritual pontiff, would cause "all Israel" (Rom. 11:25-26) and the "whole world" to turn to the messiah during the seventh stage of the church, the Third World Age of the Holy Spirit. This glorious reunion of God's ancient people, the Jews, with the followers of Jesus Christ, the Christians, would result in a third, new thing: the New Bride of the Messiah, the Spiritual Church, the eschatological church of praise and joy, of contemplation and "peace that surpasses understanding." Just as the synagogue of Old Testament times had been replaced by congregations of Christians, so, now, the established Church—so often unfaithful, too often persecuting others—would be replaced by something new and better. The "Church of Peter" would give way to a "Church of John." In the Endtime, the perfected Order of Friars Minor, emergent as the perfected Spiritual Church, would enjoy the assistance of yet a second Order—the "Order of St. Elijah" (my phrase, not Olivi's), *i.e.*, eschatological Jews, the 144,000 "followers of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:4-8), whose job it would be to protect the elect against predatory Islam.

In another summary paragraph, Olivi revisited his consummate Franciscatology to encapsulate his vision of Francis's future returning resurrection through his spiritual heirs. This statement, less specific in some ways than his other more detailed passages, is, however, even clearer in terms of Olivi's grasp of the spiritual nature of those future events:

Because, indeed, these things and those that follow are made clearly known in Francis's future works and disciples, it is to be understood that from the time of the public opposition and condemnation of the evangelical life and rule to take place under the mystical antichrist and to be more fully consummated under the great antichrist, Christ and his servant Francis and the angelical band of his disciples will spiritually descend against the errors and evils of the world and against the whole throng of demons and depraved humans. He will descend from heaven unwavering and strong and fearless like a lion, as much on the attack as to suffer attack, both by way of his most profound humiliation and through humble recognition of his origin from God and through his merciful condescension to those beneath him. [\[12\]](#)

The “Returning Resurrection” of Jesus, Francis, and Sun Myung Moon

Olivi's reliance on the historical accuracy of Joachim's hermeneutical tool, *concordia*, was probably misplaced, as Olivi's detractors in the early 14th century gleefully pointed out (and Modern students of history and hermeneutics would eagerly agree). We must remember, however, that theology is not an exact science. We can appreciate with complete historical objectivity the impact of Joachim's and Olivi's ideas on the European and world-wide change in human culture over the next 700 years. After the Bible, no book contributed more powerfully and directly to the seismic events that we call “the Reformation.” Olivi had foreseen the theological Fall of Rome, the end of top-down religious hierarchy and the emergence of free and democratic, joy-filled “Praise Churches,” more than 200 years before Martin Luther nailed his 95 *Theses* to the church-house door.

In some sense, the emergence in Korea of the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity—along with the myriad other Free-Church, Charismatic, Messianic, Pentecostal, Holiness, and New-Age groups around the world in our time—was made possible by Peter John Olivi. According to the Fourth Gospel, Jesus did, after all, promise his own returning resurrection—a perpetual coming-again, as it has turned out, under the auspices of his alter ego, the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit. And his returning resurrection gradually changed ecclesiastical religion into charismatic, experiential spirituality.

The Rev. Sun Myung Moon (1920-2012) taught his followers that Jesus' “second coming” would be more a spiritual event than a physical return of the man Jesus, flying from heaven to earth “on the clouds.” Moon, university-educated as an electrical engineer and child of the 20th century, thought in Modern terms, not in terms of the pre-scientific three-story worldview of antiquity. According to Unificationist theology, messiahship is dynamic rather than essentialist, more an “office” or a “title” than an effect of substantial incarnation of a person of Godhead in a human body and soul. Moon's Asian understanding was more a Buddhist reflection on messiahship than a fourth-century Euro-Christian definition of Christ as “Light from Light, very God of very God, begotten not made” (Nicene Creed). In church-historical language, the Unificationist doctrine of messiahship is closer to Jewish-Christian ideas of adoptionism: the idea that Jesus *became* the messiah when the Holy Spirit descended on him at his baptism.

In terms of 20th-century pan-ecumenical dialogue among the world's religions, original Unificationist Christology owes as much to some styles of Buddhist thought as it does to the history of Christian doctrine. Rev. Moon's concept of messiahship was like his concept of Buddhahood, and like the Buddhist concept of “the soul.” The soul is “a fire that has burned its way to here,” specifically different from Hindu notions of reincarnation. The office of messiahship is a state of consciousness passing along from one enlightened teacher to another. Transmission of Buddhahood is not a reincarnation of souls, but, rather a shifting of Elijah's mantle to Elisha's shoulders. Unificationists do not think of Rev. Moon as the reincarnation of Jesus but, rather, as the one to whom furtherance of the mission of Jesus came in the course of providential time.

Realization of messiahship depends on the merits of the person who in this or that time achieves messianic status and becomes deserving of the title. Accordingly, most Unificationists confess

their belief that Rev. Moon was “the Lord of the Second Advent,” the second coming of Christ in spirit.

In company with the Barrytown Seminary faculty at dinner with Rev. and Mrs. Moon at their home in Tarrytown, New York, I once asked Rev. Moon directly: “Are you the Lord of the Second Advent?” He jovially replied:

Dr. Lewis, *you* may be the Lord of the Second Advent. More than 60 of us have been running a race to see who will be the Lord of the Second Advent. Whoever fulfills the conditions of Heaven will be the Lord of the Second Advent.

Clearly, this progressive Christology of messiahhood is unusual in the history of Christian thought, but not unknown. In addition to Olivi’s 13th-century novelty, we are accustomed to similar notions expressed about other individuals: Mother Ann Lee, foundress of the Shakers, was confessed by her followers to be “the Second Coming of Christ according to the Female Line.”^[13] Muhammad was a messianic figure among the Arab tribes whom he tried to unify in the faith of the One God, Allah. Mohandas Gandhi was a political messiah in India, who led his people to liberation from the colonial imperialism of the British Empire. Martin Luther King, Jr., was a messiah of peace between Black and White, who led not only his own people but all of America to equal rights under the law. Nelson Mandela was a messiah who, similarly, led his whole nation away from apartheid and towards the possibility of mutual forgiveness through truth and reconciliation.

All of these “messiahs,” each in his or her own way, were worthy expressions of the good news of Jesus about the coming of the Reign of God. If Olivi were the first to conceive the possibility that some human other than Jesus could be the “second” coming of Christ, then Sun Myung Moon may freely be seen as similar to these others, a Korean messiah bent upon healing families, abolishing racism, and reuniting a divided Korea by overcoming the idolatrous communism of the North.

Questions for Unificationists

What, then, of Moon’s own returning resurrection? Analogous to the Spiritual Church that Olivi foresaw following in the seraphic spirit and stigmata of Francis, how ought Unificationists to go forward? Rev. Moon taught that he was completing the unfinished work of Jesus by perfecting “physical salvation” on the foundation of the “spiritual salvation” that Jesus had accomplished. By “physical salvation,” Moon meant blessed families and happy children, moral politics and equitable economics, and the other issues of ordinary life which, when they are resolved, will be a further answer to Jesus’ prayer: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

For Jesus and his apostles, and Francis and his Franciscans (Olivi included), voluntary, evangelical poverty was to be the spiritual *sine qua non* as the identifying mark of true discipleship and obedience to the will of God. Ought not Moon’s “physical salvation,” therefore, be a terrestrial effect of spiritual power that actually benefits others? A sell-out to Mammon under the guise of “physical salvation” would not be a returning resurrection of either Jesus or Francis. Could anyone who amassed great wealth—or inherited it—and spent it on themselves and their whims, even under the sacred canopy of religion, be thought to embody the spiritual advent of Jesus or Francis or Moon?

Ought Rev. Moon’s returning resurrection be a theological intensification of his memory? Within the diverse range of Unificationist opinion, at least one Moon heir (but not all) and a significant number of Korean Church members subscribe to a version of messiahship that resembles fourth-century Christian orthodoxy more than it does either the adoptionism of first-century Jewish Christianity or original *Divine Principle* quasi-Buddhist theory. Hyung-Jin Moon, heir apparent to Moon’s theological legacy, is a graduate of Harvard Divinity School who must have made good grades in his History of Christian Doctrine class. Rev. Moon the younger advocates a view that he acknowledges to be “new and revolutionary” within the Unificationist

framework, justifying his novelty as “progressive revelation.” He perceives—dogmatically correctly—that Christ (the Messiah), as the uncreated Logos and “only-begotten Son of the Father,” was not a creature, but, rather, “God from God, begotten not made.” Hyung-Jin considers this distinction to be “Huge! Beyond-the-universe huge!” and is compelled by his own theologic to apply the concept to the “True Parents.”[\[14\]](#)

To the extent that the Moon narrative is a rewind of the Christian story, the post-Moon Movement may retrace certain historical steps consistent with the development of Early Christianity, which was a three-century-long deification process that turned the man, Jesus, into the Second Person of Godhead. Now, in Unificationism, is one of the Laws of Church History to prove to be that spiritual ontogeny recapitulates ecclesiastical phylogeny?

Anything is possible, but thoughtful Unificationists must ask themselves some questions: Are not the cultural circumstances that prevail now entirely different from the matrix that produced the fourth-century Constantinian synthesis, including the totalitarian Euro-Christian belief in a divine man strong enough to hold the Roman-Byzantine Empire together? Where is an equivalent to the Easter Event that proved so compelling to the ancient world? Is anyone claiming that Rev. Moon’s tomb is empty? Olivi speculated about the resurrection of Francis, but the deification process went no further than apparitions in typical, medieval fashion of another of God’s saints, though of measurably of lesser dignity than those of the Blessed Virgin. Will Moon’s returning resurrection as “God” or the “Son of God” outshine Fatima or Lourdes? Is speculative theological imitation of the doctrines of one religion by another enough to authenticate drastic claims without the support of equally compelling attestations?

On another occasion at table with Rev. Moon, I asked him: “You have discussed these matters with Jesus himself: Please tell me what actually happened on Easter Sunday Morning!” Once again, he greeted me with an enormously friendly smile and a generous laugh, and said: “Use your theological imagination, Dr. Lewis! What do you think I do?”

In what manner, then, might one expect Moon’s returning resurrection to take place? Might it be through a genetic dynasty by way of one or some of Rev. and Mrs. Moon’s 14 natural children, of whom 10 are living at present?[\[15\]](#) Might it be through a spiritual dynasty of some sub-set of Blessed marriages, couples paired by Moon himself? Might it be through an ecclesiastical dynasty of the organized Unification Church? Or might it be through a spiritual dynasty—or, more precisely, a spiritualist dynasty—of select individuals whose inner experiences of the “ascended” Moon by way of dreams, visitations, and spiritualist communications (channeling) from “True Father” qualify the elect individuals to special leadership of the Unification Movement? All of these means seem possible; all have precedents in the history of the Great Church as well as in the Unification Church.

At present, the most likely means through which Rev. Moon might enjoy a successful returning resurrection seems to be through Unificationist spiritualism. In this, the Unificationist experience offers another parallel with a potent detail of Franciscan history: *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*[\[16\]](#) came about partly as the result of spiritualist experiences among devout Spiritual Franciscans of the fourteenth century. The “risen” Francis seemed still to be spiritually present, communicating, and actively guiding his Order—just as Olivi had predicted. This, in turn, parallels the Early Christian experience: Whereas the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are more traditionally and orally “historical,” the Fourth Gospel seems to enshrine living words spoken by the risen Lord Jesus to his charismatic church.

Among Unificationists, inner experience and spiritualist transaction between heaven and earth have been the rule rather than the exception since the beginning of Moon’s ministry. This profoundly religious aspect of Unificationism has gone largely unreported by American and European observers of the Movement. The prurience of the superficial mass media has been focused on the money, scandal, and alien cultural aspects of the Moon family and their followers. More thoughtful commentators, too often sociologists of religion, have been eager to talk about “new religions;” and so, encumbered by a professional hazard of being committed to describing external form in disregard of internal intention, they have often missed the real deal at the heart of the Unification Church. The characteristic spiritual and depth-psychological aspects of Moon’s own spirituality and that of his followers have been typically ignored. Decades of

ecumenical relations have taught us, to the contrary, not to judge other people's religion by our own constructs but in terms consistent with their own self-awareness.^[17]

Moon's own shamanic communion with the "spirit world" was at the core of his religious experience, and underlies the foundation of *Divine Principle*, his systematic theological system. The early years of the Movement in Korea was a time rich in passionate religious experience of many kinds, including spiritualistic manifestations. Life at the Barrytown Seminary during its best years was infused by a considerable range of various devout practices; dreams about the "True Parents" were considered to be revelatory; successful fund raisers kept diaries of accounts of their spiritual experiences on the front lines selling flowers. At the heart of the Moon family itself, when Heung Jin Moon, Rev. and Mrs. Moon's second son, was killed in an automobile accident in 1983, a spiritualist transaction relieved the grieving father: A Zimbabwean member of the Unification Church, Cleophas Kundioni, channeled the young man's spirit for a period of time so effectively that Rev. Moon was persuaded of the authenticity of the transaction. This success, however, led to bizarre behavior on the part Cleophas, and ultimately to his defection from the Movement.

A widely influential, and permanently lasting, instance of spiritualist communication in the Unification Movement is that of Young Soon Kim, who channeled lengthy, complex messages from Sang Hung Lee, a philosophically minded intellectual who, before his death at age 84 in 1997, had authored substantial works on Unification thought and political theory. In 1998, Young Soon Kim published a volume in the name of Sang Hung Lee describing life in the spirit world, and a second volume that Kim received from Lee in 1999 on the subject of Lucifer's activities. In quite a different style of spiritualist communication, Hyo Nam Kim, a Korean shamaness, also known by her honorific as Dae Mo Nim, "Great Mother," has conducted a spiritualist ministry throughout the Unificationist Church, and she currently presides at Cheong Pyeong Heaven and Earth Training Center at Gapyeong, Korea, where she channels the spirit of the mother of Hak Ja Han (Mrs. Moon) and is one of Mrs. Moon's closest advisors.^[18]

In the United States, Ron Pappalardo, a professional medium, author of a popular account of his resolution through spiritualism of his son's suicide,^[19] is currently warmly received by Unificationists who report that "True Father" is now blessing them through Pappalardo's spiritualist ministry.^[20] Other Unificationist mediums are similarly at work in other countries. Unificationist spiritualism—a unique blend of East and West, just as one would expect it to be—seems to offer one likely way forward to the continued vitality of the Unification Church.

Questions for Everyone

Is there not implicit here a new approach to an old problem in theology? Christians wedded to the iconic idea of the return of Christ "on the clouds" can be prompted by Olivi's and Moon's constructs of the "Lord of the Second Advent" to confront the issue of Christianity's seemingly everlasting wait for the "return" of Christ. The Church, conceived of symbolically as "the Bride of Christ," has already endured considerable embarrassment, left standing at the altar for going on 2,000 years, stood-up by a dilatory Bridegroom late for his own wedding. Equally embarrassing are all the "best men" who periodically rush to the front of the church to shout, "He's coming! He's coming!" only once again to disappoint everyone when this or that moment of eschatological "rapture" passes quietly by, and we are *all* "left behind."

Perhaps, instead of speaking of the "second advent," Christians (including Unificationists) should speak of the "next" advent of the Messiah. Olivi, who speculated about a physical resurrection and return of Francis in the mode traditionally conceived, finally surpassed even that temptation to contemplate, instead, the possibility that "Christ and his servant Francis and the angelical band of his disciples will spiritually descend against the errors and evils of the world and against the whole throng of demons and depraved humans."

Similarly, Unificationists have built into their system the concept of a "returning resurrection," by which they mean a spiritual event entailing a transaction between the spirit world and us here on our phenomenal plane: The spiritual energies of those who have gone before continue to work forward through those of us still on earth. An earthly future is open to those who are willing to

indemnify the failures of the past in earnest collaboration with our ancestors to achieve progress towards the future of “the House of Jacob for 10,000 years”—the Reign of God that is gradually embracing us all, the whole world, all people equally, and the entire cosmos.

Jesus foresaw his own “next” advent in terms of a human figure, “the Son of Man,” to whom he referred in the third person, that is to say, not equating him with himself. The risen Jesus enjoyed his first returning resurrection in the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). A new burst of spiritual energy broke upon the second-century church in the persons of Montanus, Maximilla, and Priscilla. And over the centuries, miracles, signs, and wonders have never been lacking. Every canonized saint—and even more uncanonized ones—have been the proof of the returning resurrection of Christ in every generation. In the thirteenth century, Jesus enjoyed his “next advent” in a returning resurrection through Francis of Assisi. Olivi acknowledged Francis as Christ’s “next advent” and foresaw Francis’s own returning resurrection in the future O.F.M. Since then there have been many other “nexts.” The accomplishments of the Prophet Muhammad, Mother Ann, Bapu the Mahatma, MLK Jr., and Madiba have been mentioned. Was Olivi, also, possibly, a prophet of Pope Francis? It remains to be seen whether the new Pope will turn out to be only a pretty face on papal business-as-usual or whether he will prove to be the true spiritual heir of Francis and of Christ, equal in his love to all men and all women. [21]

Many questions remain: In whom will Rev. Moon enjoy his Buddha-like “next advent,” his returning resurrection? How many next advents shall there be? Will Jesus eventually enjoy a “final” advent in triumph over Gog and Magog? (as Olivi believed). Will he bring all his Saints and Buddhas, Prophets and Messiahs, Angelic Popes and True Children with him when he comes with finality? How far in the future do we imagine the cosmic eschaton to be? Is it millions or “billions and billions” (Carl Sagan) of light-years away? Certainly more than Olivi’s 700 short earth-years. The important question for us, now, is not “How long?” or “When?” but “Who’s next?”

Notes

[1] Francis’s stigmata can be understood in a variety of ways: as a “biblical” miracle, a saint’s legend, a psychological event with a physical manifestation, an oft-reworked and inflated oral tradition. The chamois skins with which his bloody wounds were bound are still on display in the Church of St. Francis in Assisi, where he lies buried. “Modern” researchers, earnestly desiring to demythologize the stigmata event and peel it back to its objective history, are forced by the evidence to admit that Francis did experience the seraphic vision and to acknowledge the appearance in his body of wounds resembling those of the Crucified—whatever interpretation one may wish to impose on the facts. See Jacques Dalarun, Michael F. Cusato, and Carla Salvati, *The Stigmata of Francis of Assisi: New Studies, New Perspectives* (St. Bonaventure, New York: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2006).

[2] *Petrus Iohannis Olivi: Lectura super Apocalypsim*, Warren Lewis, ed. (St. Bonaventure, New York: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2014).

[3] Olivi made clear his doctrine of the “three advents of Christ” in an add-on to the appendix of the Prologue of the LSA Prol 263-265. See also LSA Prol 140, 164-167, 184; 2:78; 3:14, 42; 6:81, 81 n. 65; 7:8-11, 9 nn. 115, 116; 10:6 nn. 7, 8; 10:10 n. 10; 10:12 n. 12; 10:20 n. 24; 22:5 n. 9, 22:6, 19 n. 61.

[4] LSA 164-166.

[5] LSA 7:81.

[6] Olivi did not use the phrase “returning resurrection.” The idea that he expressed at this point in the LSA, however, seems to translate perfectly into this technical phrase of Unificationist theology.

[7] LSA 7:9-13.

[8] Without specifically naming Elizabeth of Schönau, O.S.B. (1126-1165), Olivi referred to her visionary revelation of the Assumption of Mary 40 days after her death.

[9] “Novus dux” translates into Italian as “*il duce*” (think: Mussolini) and into German as “*der Führer*” (think: Hitler). The dream—or nightmare—of universal political leadership has preoccupied the European mind since the days of the Roman Caesars, and it was re-enforced by Joachim’s vision of a Third World Age (a Third Reich). Olivi would preempt that pesky outcome by proclaiming the risen Francis as Pope and Emperor—the little poor man of Assisi, the lover of Lady Poverty, the humble, Christ-like stigmatite.

[10] Olivi cited these words from Joachim’s book, *The Concordia of the Old and New Testament* 4:31.

[11] *LSA* 7:14-17.

[12] *LSA* 10:13

[13] Warren Lewis, “What to do after the Messiah has come again and gone: Shaker ‘Premillennial’ Eschatology and its Spiritual Aftereffects,” in *The Coming Kingdom: Essays in American Millennialism & Eschatology*, M. Darroll Bryant and Donald W. Dayton, eds. (Barrytown, New York: International Religious Foundation, 1983), pp. 71-109.

[14] Hyung Jin Moon, “The Messianic Identity,” *Today’s World* 33/1 (January-February 2012): 13-15. See Michael L. Mickler, “The Post-Sun Myung Moon Unification Church,” in Eileen Barker, ed., *Revisionism and Diversification in New Religious Movements* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2013), p. 53.

[15] I explored the troubled option of spiritual succession predicated on genetic connections in “[An Open Letter to My Dear Unificationist Friends.](#)” *Journal of Unification Studies* XIV (2013): 51-70.

[16] The “little flowers” refer not to the sentimentally sweet notion of Francis prevalent at least in America; rather, “fioretti” is a literary allusion to a gathering of stories into a “bouquet” of the Saint’s legends, “improved and expanded” through an intensification of the miraculous element in the historical narrative and the addition of spiritualist exchanges between Francis *post-mortem* and his followers, along with other, similar accounts having to do with the spiritual guidance of the Order after the earthly life of Francis had ended.

[17] See Warren Lewis, “Hero with the Thousand-and-First Face,” address delivered at the 1977 American Academy of Religion, in *A Time for Consideration*, M. Darroll Bryant and Herbert Richardson, eds. (Toronto & New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1978), pp. 275-89. This was an early attempt to understand Moon as he understood himself, in terms of his Korean shamanic background.

[18] Unificationist spiritualism of the transactions between Lee and Kim and of Dae Mo Nim are described in some detail by Michael Mickler, Unificationist historian.
<http://www.tparents.org/Library/Unification/Books/40Years/40-7-07.htm>

[19] Ron Pappalardo, *Reconciled by the Light: The After-death Letters from a Teen Suicide – a True Story* (Philadelphia: Mason Crest, 2014); see selections at a Unificationist website:
<http://www.tparents.org/Library/Unification/Books/ReconciledLight>

[20] See Unificationists’ testimonies regarding Pappalardo’s mediumship:
<http://www.reconciledbythelight.com/pasadenaws.htm>

[21] If Pope Francis’s choice of his papal name is more than mere symbolism, then he may realize his expressed hope of achieving the Christianity that St. Francis achieved: “An idea of poverty against the luxury, pride, vanity of the civil and ecclesiastical powers of the time. He changed history.... How I would like a poor Church, and for the poor.” (*Catholic News Service*; see *The New York Times*, March 16, 2013).