

WITNESSING THROUGH THE INTERNET & SOCIAL MEDIA



Rev. Wolfgang Schawaller testifies about his cyber ministry through Facebook & Twitter

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Rev. Wolfgang Schawaller has joined the Unification Church in 1974 in Germany. Just one year later, in 1975 he was sent by True Father to his first Mission country. He was active as a missionary in fourteen countries, such as India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russia and the Philippines. He was blessed with Brigitte in 1982. They have four children together and live in Vienna, Austria. During the recent years Wolfgang has explored new ways of witnessing through the internet and he discovered the incredible potential of social media in the proclamation of True Parents Words. Peter Zoehrer has interviewed Rev. Schawaller in the FFWPU - HQ in Vienna, so he can share his new passion and his extraordinary and timely message to the wider Unification community in Europe and beyond.

PZ: Rev. Wolfgang Schawaller, when did you start to work with social media?

WS: When the Iraq war started about 12 years ago, I sent a letter to George W. Bush in which I expressed my support for him; I also sent a letter to the White House. Ultimately, my letter reached about 200 heads of states and I received

positive responses from many countries. Also the German socialist government under Schröder responded to my letter. Because of my support for G.W. Bush, this letter made many, many rounds

PZ: This was an open letter, right?

WS: Yes an open letter, and this letter I sent here in Vienna to the US Embassy and also they responded. This is how this whole thing started. And then I wrote four more letters to the White House. Altogether, five letters were written in support of G.W. Bush but my intention was to introduce Rev. Moon, TF, to the American government. In two of my letters I mentioned Rev. Moon and his proposal for an inter-religious body at the UN. I strongly indicated this in my letter. My fourth letter was a long, long letter and it had a great impact because I mentioned to GW Bush that he should respect SMM as the Lord of the Second Advent and that SMM invested his whole life for the sake of America. I mentioned this as an introduction, and in the end I said: „I hope while you are in office you will not reject SMM as the Lord of the Second Advent. Please support him because he did many great things for the sake of America.“ Michael S. from the US embassy wrote to inform me that all my letters had been forwarded to the White House, to president G.W. Bush. I still have many of these responses and archived have them for history.

PZ: That’s quite amazing. You have also created several media outlets. You have created a blog, as well as several FB groups. You have joined some FB groups and you have also created a Twitter account. I have checked your Twitter and to my surprise, I found that you have already 17 000 followers. As I understand, your blog was the first medium you started. Can you tell us why and when you started the blog?

WS: This was my own website, called „The Unification Church & I“. I posted everything about myself, about my mission countries, about my mission experience and I always testified about True Father. One thing I wanted to mention is that I was sent out by TF as a missionary in 1975 and our mission was to witness to the Lord of the Second Advent, True Parents. My whole life was to witness. Just to witness. So I started my website to witness just for TF. This is my life. My life is dedicated to witnessing. I realized that witnessing is not just approaching people on the street anymore, but we can also reach them through the internet. With this specific experience I had in 2002 with George Bush, I thought that there is a big chance to witness through the internet.

I realized, that the Christians really used the net in a very successful way. I learned this from them and I understood, that we as members of the Unification Church are not using the Internet for witnessing so much at all. I thought: „Wow, there is a big market out there to propagate True Parent’s vision for world peace and their teaching to the world!“ With that technology you can reach the entire world. However, with only one website you are still quite limited. But with Facebook and Twitter you can reach all the world. This is exactly what Christians are doing. They

just repeat, repeat and publish again and again. This is what I learned. I have also learned something else: I have about three to four hundred prepared speeches and articles which I continuously repeat. Many people don't read it the first time, but maybe the second or third time they see my group or Twitter account, and maybe they think: 'oh, this is Wolfgang Schawaller again. What is he writing today?' So, I learned the importance of repetition. Christians have understood this. They repeat and repeat things all the time.

PZ: Very good. So, how many followers do you have on Facebook?

WS: On Facebook the number of my friends has now reached the limit of 5000. I have had to de-friend church members in order to have more room for the Christians. They have nothing to do with our church. But I can see that many ,like' my stuff and when I read their profile, I can often see that they are Christians from America or from somewhere else. They click my posts, even when I post about TPs. Often, I am totally surprised about this. They put a like on True Parents words, True Parents teaching. I am totally surprised. They are not church members.

PZ: Do you get many 'likes' for True Parents words?

WS: Yes, all the time! I am following two types of groups with which I work. I have about eighty Christian groups with a total of over one million members. I regularly post them one mail per day. I cannot send two different posts, because if I do that, they (FB admin) will lock my account for two, three weeks or even for one month. I have already experience with that, because FB has locked my account several times for a month. Now I have found a good way: I have to post little but regularly. Since I do that, I don't get blocked anymore. But if I send too much - say if I am posting for three hours on FB continuously, they lock me again. So I understand that it is best to post for thirty minutes and to repeat this after another five hours. So, by now I know how Facebook works. I am following about eighty Christian groups (over one million people) and I get so many good responses. Plus I continue to request membership of new Christian groups. If they accept me, I post something about my cyber ministry and that I support SMM, the Lord of the Second Advent. „Please join my ministry!“ I write, and many people indeed join! And then I have another outreach project; after the American election, I joined about forty pro-Trump groups with a total membership of about one million. I also send about one post per day in support of Donald Trump, and they love it. On the Trump groups, I am known as Rev. Wolfgang Schawaller, a German. They also send me friend requests. After I accept their request, I send them the same message, asking them to join my ministry to support the Lord of the Second Advent. So they know me very well. I am well known among the pro-Trump groups and the Christian groups. Now I am free to say whatever I want.

May I say something about what happened three to four years ago? At that time, I got blocked many times. Repeatedly, my account was hacked. This was hard, hard work. In spite of this I thought I must set the goal of 100, 300, 400, 700 and 1200

followers on Twitter. Many times in that period people reacted in a very hostile way, and some tried to hack my account. I had to change my password regularly so I could prevent these hostile attacks. During this time I received severe cyber-persecution. I was called many bad names, such as 'devil', etc. ... „what you are teaching is satanic“... „what is this group about?“ „SMM is the false messiah“, etc. It was so painful. But then some very interesting phenomena happened. From the point when I gained 12 000 followers on Twitter, all this extreme hostility and persecution has suddenly stopped. Now I can say I am not persecuted anymore.

PZ: Interesting! What was your method to increase the number of your Twitter followers?

WS: There is one rule on Twitter - the number of your followers has to correspond to the number of those you are following. So in order to increase my membership on Twitter, I had to de-friend some passive followers, so others could follow me. Twitter is very effective. It is amazing, what you can do with just 140 letters. For example Donald Trump really used this 140 letters in his election campaign. Just 140 digits. It is said that Trump won because he communicated through Twitter and Facebook very effectively. More so than Obama or Clinton.

PZ: When did you start with Twitter?

WS: I started three and a half years ago. Remember, it was you Peter, who has coached me by showing me on how to open an account and how promote my blog-articles on Twitter.

PZ: That's not so long ago, considering that you have already 17 000 followers by now.

WS: Yes, In the beginning I focused mainly on Twitter. But now I do more Facebook. The reason is this: You can communicate more content on Facebook. You can publish articles. You can also publish pictures. You can add many more things than on Twitter. And also I can find more Christian groups. On Twitter you can find everybody and everybody can find you. For example the US-State Department and even the CIA follows me. Now I use Twitter just to gain strength. With 17000 followers you have a real base for people to take you seriously. My title as a Reverend also helps. True Father told us, when he sent us out as National Messiahs in 1996 that we can use the title Reverend. Through this you can have more impact. Now they respect me much more, than if I just call myself Wolfgang Schawaller. This really works.

PZ: This would indeed be a suggestion to be considered. Now my next question is regarding the impact of your work. What could you change so far? Could you change hostile attitudes towards our True Parents or to our

movement? Could you build some bridges to our Christian brothers and sisters?

WS: Yes I could do this with Christian groups. For a year, I have been writing many things about Jesus. I showed my respect for Jesus and for Christians. I couldn't just hit Christians. I posted many things that TF said about Jesus, and this made a great impact. Now they do not just see me as a follower of Rev. Moon, but they see me also as a fellow-Christian. It was very important for me to relate to them in a good way, so that they do not see me as being hostile to Christians. Many asked me the question: „who is Rev. Moon? I have never heard about him.“ I told them that Rev. Moon is the Second Advent who came to establish a true family, etc. I gave them some DP content. Other people asked me whether we have centers in Africa, or in the Philippines. They expressed interest in meeting members of our church, and I gave them some addresses so they could find our church in their country and meet our representatives.

PZ: Let's go back to the topic of persecution. You got some serious attacks. How did you deal with this? Did you sometimes have the feeling that you wanted to give up?

WS: Yes, many times! Sometimes I asked myself why I was doing this and making myself a target of attacks and hate-speech. Even if I do not see people, I feel a lot of spiritual vibration from what they write. Sometimes I ask myself if it is really worth all the effort; but then I remember that this is a good cause and I feel that God wants me to do this modern style of witnessing about True Parents on the Internet. Because the Christians did it with Jesus and we should do the same for True Parents. Sometimes this is not easy but then what helped me to keep going, was the knowledge that Father was always persecuted, rejected and in spite of that painful reality he started everyday anew and he always kept going. This is also what motivated me to continue even if sometimes I felt doubt. I just feel I cannot stop this internet ministry. I started this many years ago and invested a lot. If I stop now, all my foundation would be gone forever.

PZ: I understand. My other question to you is about your motivation. To do all that you have done cannot simply just derive from a passing mood nor can it be the result from the whim of a moment. In order to invest so much time and energy into this project as you have done throughout the years, you must be driven by a very deep and profound motivation. What is it, that pushes you to do this cyber ministry? What is your motivation? What is your goal?

WS: This is an interesting question. You know, some people share on Facebook that they don't watch the news anymore, since it is too depressing. It's just not worth for them to read all this terrible news about negativity, famine, war, killing and terrorism, etc. To be honest, when I hear all this bad news, I get very depressed too. Knowing today's world situation is very depressing. But this is where I felt I got

my strength to continue and not to say goodbye to everybody. I felt that - even if nobody else is doing anything to help the situation - at least I had to do something. The solution is True Parents. We can solve all problems if we have True Parents. If the nations where there is war could accept True Parents, things would become very different. We could eliminate all problems. It may sound strange, but all the difficulties gave me the strength to continue my work.

PZ: Could you once again describe your goal for your cyber ministry?

WS: My goal is simply to testify about True Parents. This is what I have started and this is what I want to do until the end with my cyber ministry. Just to propagate True Parents, for there is a big potential to propagate True Parents' teaching to the entire world. This is my goal! And I can see it is possible. I think the internet age is the fourth type of revolution. There was the steam, the electrical, the atomic, and finally the internet revolution. Through the internet you can do so many things. Sometimes you could see president Obama or Trump holding a press conference. If you have a smartphone, you don't even need to be at home. You can get all the news on your smartphone. The internet age has all these amazing advantages. Of course it is also being misused in a big way. But we should know that it's primary purpose is this: it is a tool God can use to change this world. With the internet we can let the world know about our movement, about True Parents, about our teaching. I think if all could do this... Let me say one thing: Sometimes I see that UC members are trying to convert our own church members on Facebook. They spend lot's of time arguing with each other... But why? They are already converted! We need to convert Christians, you know! Sometimes I would like to tell them to not try to convert Church members, but go to Christian groups and do exactly what I do. This is my appeal! Just join a Christian group on Facebook. Write something and then you have give and take with these Christians. In this way, you can easily bring Father's teaching to the Christian groups. You can tell them exactly the same as you did, when you were going to witness on the streets. We talked about Father's vision, about the Principle, about world peace. There are so many things we can talk about. We can do tremendous things by using the internet.

PZ: You mentioned Christian groups. Witnessing to them is obviously very important. But how do you approach for example Muslims? Do you have experience with Muslims?

WS: Definitely! Peter, I have worked in several Islamic countries in my life: India, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. So I have a lot of experience in working with Muslims. They are not church members. They are nice, decent and really beautiful people. They like their faith, they like Mohammed, they like their traditional way of life. But I could learn a lot from them. How they worship God. They pray five times a day, they give alms to the poor. They fast during Ramadan. When I was in Kabul, Afghanistan, I watched, how the Muslims lived their life of faith. Truly beautiful, wonderful! In Kabul I went to a cinema and suddenly the movie stopped in the

middle. They took their little carpet, went out of the cinema and prayed. After ten minutes they came back in again and just continued to watch their movie. Exactly the same thing I witnessed in India. These experiences made a great impact on me. I saw how religious Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus practiced their faith. I was always impressed by the sincerity with which they practice their religion. Talking about Islam; I was also a missionary in the middle east - in Yemen, and in Jordan. They were very moderate. They were not extremist. I would have a problem with Islamists such as IS and other militants. It is a big problem if they propagate killing in the name of Mohammed. I was in a Muslim group where I posted many good things about Father; about the time when he was in Egypt and spoke to Muslim leaders, or when he met the Grand Mufti of Syria. After a while I realized that in this group there were also many radicals, like IS and al-Qaeda. One time I posted a report that the IS has killed Christians in the Middle East. They were shocked and denied that this was true; for them it was just propaganda and fake news. Then I realized that the people in the Middle East are only getting information filtered by the official state media. The truth is not reaching the ordinary citizens. Then I got attacked, and at one point they even threatened me. They said if I continue posting, they would find me and kill me. That was scary! I got really frightened. After this first death-threat I started to feel really uneasy. Consequently I signed off from this group. But basically those who represent the true Islam are really peaceful, nice and wonderful people. I have absolutely nothing against them. I do have a problem with those extremists who kill innocent people.

PZ: What do you think about the initiative to establish a CIG-MEDIA Department for our European movement?

WS: Although it is new to me, I find this a very good idea. I think this should be discussed in on a broader scale. I worked for several years with the media in the Middle East Times and I have some experience with the running of a newspaper. With my cyber-net ministry I drew from my previous media experience. For example, how to get your point across with very short sentences. There I learned how to post things from a media perspective. Because of my experience I really feel we should start sending monthly press-releases to out the media. This has to be done on a regular basis. Maybe they will not read it four or five times. But sooner or later they will get interested in what this is all about. They will get interested in what we, in the movement of Rev. Moon are doing here in Europe. They will get to know our projects through this and then they will also change their way of thinking about us.

PZ: Thank you very much! Now I still have one other important question. Probably you realize that not many of our members are using Twitter or even Facebook. There seems to be some invisible barrier for our members in using these great tools. Not only the older generation, but also the younger generation is using social media only in a very limited way. And certainly not so much for witnessing. So, why do you think we have this barrier? And if

there is a defined barrier, how can we overcome this? This is my last question to you.

WS: I think we should go back to the Divine Principle. We should remember how the world was changed through the industrial revolution. Today, I see the internet. I think God invented the internet to propagate True Father's words. I remember, Peter, that once True Father said that the reason this century has developed so rapidly is because of technology - airplanes, you name it. One time, Father said that big airplanes were built so that he, the messiah could travel all over the world. This is what he said! I will never forget this. I go further and say that the internet was invented for the Lord of the Second Advent! Damian Anderson, who truly is the internet pioneer in our movement, started some platforms on the internet about fifteen years ago. Father told him: „You develop the internet to propagate my words to the world!“ At this time we were the only a number of church members who heard this. But Father said this and I will always remember this. He said that through the internet you can propagate my words, Gods words to the world!“ And these two things I always remember. We have to realize that this is very important for us today! This is the modern twenty-first century witnessing! Traditional witnessing on the street is fine. We should also do this. But we should really explore the internet to the maximum. I think if people cannot understand this obvious, simple truth, they should meet me (laughing).

PZ: They should meet you? Okay, this is an offer by Rev. Wolfgang Schawaller to everyone who is reading this interview! Thank you, Wolfgang, for sharing your story and giving this excellent and timely message to all of us!