

The Universal Peace Federation: Moon Front or Respected NGO?

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ABSTRACT: Donald Trump’s participation (via video) in a 2021 event called “Think Tank 2022 Rally of Hope” organized in Seoul by the Universal Peace Federation (UPF), which was founded by Reverend Sun Myung Moon and his wife, led to media reactions in several countries denouncing the UPF as a “Moon front” and a pro-Trump organization. Based on a study of the history and evolution of the UPF, the paper argues that the 2021 media reactions were based on accounts of Reverend Moon’s political activities dating back to the Cold War era. In fact, Socialist and other left-wing politicians have also attended the activities of the UPF, which does not promote a specific political ideology. It is also not a proselytization tool for Mrs. Moon’s Unification Church, whose attitudes to world politics are different from the movement’s anti-Communist campaigns of the 1970s the media were familiar with.

KEYWORDS: Universal Peace Federation, UPF, Unification Movement, Unification Church, Sun Myung Moon, Hak Ja Han Moon.

Introduction

On September 12, 2021, an event called “Think Tank 2022 Rally of Hope” was organized in South Korea. Due to the COVID-19 situation, it was a virtual event, live-streamed throughout the world. Because of the different time zones, the morning of September 12 in South Korea corresponded to the late afternoon or evening of September 11 in different parts of the United States. One of the (virtual) speakers at the event, which focused on the situation of world peace and the possibility of a peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula, was former American President Donald J. Trump.

The organizer of the event in South Korea was the Universal Peace Federation (UPF), an entity founded by Reverend Sun Myung Moon (1920–2012) and his wife Hak Ja Han Moon. Trump was criticized in the United States as he did not attend the official commemoration of the victims of the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, as if he regarded the Korean event as more important. In fact, the Rally of Hope’s date was September 12, and the day had been picked up as the anniversary of the UPF foundation in 2005, although it was broadcasted in the U.S. on September 11. According to the UPF, Trump had recorded his speech in August, two weeks before the event.

Media criticism quickly became international. It escalated to a campaign putting together two groups not exactly popular with most media, Trump and his followers and “cults,” as the founders of the UPF were also the founders of the Unification Church, one of the main targets of the anti-cult movement.

In the UK, *The Independent* wrote that Trump had spoken at “an event linked to [a] controversial religious ‘cult’” (Woodward 2021). The word “cult” was also used in an article in *The Huffington Post*, which even gave voice to a political activist named Jim Stewartson, who insisted the UPF was connected with a “christofascist cult”—whatever this may mean (Papenfuss 2021). Other media outlets used the same language.

Kahina Sekkai wrote in the online edition of the French *Paris Match* under the title “Donald Trump Speaks at a Moon Cult Conference.” The Korean event was described as “a conference of the Unification Church, the official name of the Moon cult,” and Trump was criticized for having applauded the “work for peace” of both Reverend and Mrs. Moon. The article also mentioned that

two sons of Reverend Moon had formed a new pro-weapon congregation. Hyung Jin Sean Moon was at the Capitol the day of the insurrection, January 6, and his organization had even organized a transportation system to bring his devotees to the protest (Sekkai 2021).

The article, like the others we mentioned, is a textbook example of stereotypes, which when it comes to “cults” are more frequent in France than elsewhere. Everything is there: the ghost of the “secte Moon,” the use of the derogatory word “Moonie” for the members of the Unification Movement (a word banned by *The New York Times* and other leading English-speaking media as offensive), the confusion between the Unification Church led by Mrs. Moon (now operating in many countries as the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, FFWPU) and the Sanctuary Church in Newfoundland, Pennsylvania, led by Hyung Jin (Sean) Moon.

As in all religions, there have been schisms in the Unification Church both before and after the death of Reverend Moon in 2012. The Sanctuary Church’s political activities are certainly controversial. Whether they did anything illegal on January 6 is a different question: being near the Capitol on “the day of the insurrection” and participating in the attack are two different things, and as far as we know no member of Sean Moon’s group has been accused of any crime in connection with the protests. Be it as it may be, the Sanctuary Church is certainly not part of the movement led by Mrs. Moon. The two organizations are separated by harsh criticism and even court cases (Chryssides 2017). Using the activities of the Sanctuary Church to slander Mrs. Moon’s organization is just bad journalism.

Just as it is highly questionable to use the widespread political opposition to ex-President Trump as a weapon against the Unification movement.

However, the main problem of the article is that it calls a rally organized by the UPF “a conference of the Unification Church.” Is this correct? Are the Universal Peace Federation and the Unification Church, derogatorily called in France “la secte Moon,” one and the same? The purpose of this White Paper is to clarify the issue, which has broader implications going beyond the Unification Movement.

A Hermeneutics of Suspicion

In 1965, French philosopher Paul Ricœur (1913–2005) published *De l'Interprétation* (Ricœur 1965), translated into English in 1970 as *Freud and Philosophy* (Ricœur 1970). He coined there the expression “school of suspicion” (école du soupçon: Ricœur 1965, 40) and described a hermeneutics of suspicion created by three “masters of suspicion”: Karl Marx (1818–1883), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) (Ricœur 1965, 40). Because of the widespread influence of these three ideologists, many came to believe that beyond philosophy, culture, and the arts there are always “hidden” and unconfessed motivations connected to class (Marx), power (Nietzsche), or sexuality (Freud). Philosophers, poets, and artists can claim that their aim is to seek the truth or produce beauty, but in fact we may suspect that these claims are false and they are directly or indirectly producing propaganda for the social class they belong to, seeking power, or trying to satisfy their sexual desires.

Ricœur was a Protestant Christian. He believed that the hermeneutics of suspicion was primarily aimed at the “destruction of religion” (Ricœur 1965, 41), by reducing it to “something else” (autre chose) and accusing religionists of “dissimulation” (Ricœur 1965, 17). What many regard as the charitable works of religions, the “masters of suspicion” argued, in fact “dissimulate” “something else,” i.e., their leaders’ and members’ quest for hegemony, power, and sometimes illicit sex.

William Sargant (1907–1988), a leading British psychiatrist, was the scholar who tried to offer scientific evidence that religions’ charitable works disguised motivations of manipulation and power. The notion of “brainwashing” had been

originally coined by American propaganda to explain how the Soviets and the Chinese were able to “convert” jailed opponents and prisoners of war to Communism (Anthony 1996; Introvigne 2022). In his 1957 book *The Battle for the Mind*, Sargant used it to argue that while pretending to promote charity and work for peace all religions were subtly manipulating their devotees and recruiting new converts (Sargant 1957).

Sargant, who disliked organized religion (saving only ancient paganism), claimed that all religions dissimulated ulterior motives behind their charitable work: indeed, his main examples were Roman Catholicism and Methodism. Although influential in some psychiatric circles, not surprisingly Sargant’s work met with the strong opposition of religionists and a good part of the public opinion, which in the late 1950s was not prepared to accept that mainline Christian organizations were not sincere.

Sargant’s work was, however, brought to fruition in the United States by a clinical psychologist, Margaret Thaler Singer (1921–2003), who claimed that the hermeneutics of suspicion presented in *The Battle for the Mind* did not apply to all religious organizations but only to some she labeled as “cults.” Religions are sincere in their endeavors, Singer argued, including when they promote peace and charitable activities. “Cults” are manipulative groups, and their organizations allegedly promoting peace, culture, or charity are just “fronts” whose aim is to recruit new members for the “cultic” groups (Singer and Lalich 1995).

Singer’s preferred example of a “cult” whose cultural and public welfare organizations were in fact dishonest “fronts” was the Unification Church, and in fact she worked as an expert witness against that church in most court cases involving Reverend Moon’s organization.

Singer’s theories were debunked by scholars of new religious movements, who convincingly argued that the criteria she proposed for distinguishing between sincere religions and “cults” were vague, and dissimulated a judgement on beliefs (Introvigne 2022). Religions whose beliefs were not part of the mainline, or disapproved of by the anti-cult movement with which Singer was closely aligned, including the Unification Church, were labeled as “cults.” As one of Singer’s main critics, American sociologist David Bromley, wrote, when one group is labeled a “cult,” its “civic projects are deemed public relations stunts, and organizational affiliates are derisively labeled front groups” (Bromley 1998, 42).

Eventually, American courts of law realized that Singer's theory of "cults" was not accepted by most scholars of new religious movements as part of mainline science, and her testimony was excluded with the 1990 *Fishman* decision from cases involving new religions (United States District Court for the Northern District of California 1990). However, while defeated in American courts, Singer's ideas about manipulation by "cults" and charitable and peace organizations as "fronts" for the "cults" survived in Europe, and certainly remained popular in the media.

The Universal Peace Federation

Many new (and old) religious movements are "millennialist," meaning that they believe a totally different, transfigured world will soon replace our present one. The word "millennialism" comes from the idea of a peaceful kingdom that will last on earth for one thousand years found in the Christian Bible, but has been adapted to non-Christian contexts as well.

American scholar Catherine Wessinger distinguished between two different forms of millennialism. A "catastrophic" millennialism believes that God will force the Millennium on humans through punishments and disasters. A "progressive" millennialism teaches that the Millennium will come when a sufficient number of humans will cooperate with God, seeking a better world on earth and promoting peace with sincerity (Wessinger 1997).

Most new religions that originated in Eastern Asia believe in "progressive" millennialism (although some embrace the "catastrophic" variety). Scholars note that, even when they are Christian, they are influenced by local prophecies and ideas that the world will go through a "Great Transformation" (called in Korea *gabyeok*), and that humans should cooperate and prepare this transfiguration through their good work (Baker 2008, 120).

Many founders of new religions in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have also established organizations promoting world peace and global social development. For those East Asian new religions that have a Christian origin, this is not surprising. The Catholic Church and many Protestant denominations have created dozens of larger and smaller organizations promoting peace, justice, and social welfare. Most of them include members of different religions. One would

rarely hear that Caritas Internationalis, the mammoth organization created by the Catholic Church for social development and welfare, is a “front” for Roman Catholicism.

In East Asia, both Christian and non-Christian new religions, share the idea, which is rooted in the traditional local culture, that working for peace and for the well-being of all human beings (not only one’s co-religionists) is part of personal self-cultivation. It is also the best way of preparing the advent of a transformed world, what Wessinger calls “progressive millennialism.”

The Unification Church, as a Christian new religious movement founded in Korea, derives both from the history of Christianity and from local religious traditions the idea of promoting world peace through dialogue, culture, and social development. The case of the Unification Church and the UPF is not isolated. Almost all East Asian new religions have promoted world peace organizations. And almost all these organizations have been accused of being “fronts” for what their opponents call “cults.”

Reverend Moon and his wife were hardly unique among East Asian religious leaders in establishing organizations promoting peace and dialogue. They were Koreans, and the tragedy of the Korean War had been a fundamental component of their experience. Initially, the aim of some of the organizations they promoted was to alert the world about the danger of Communism. However, as the 20th century was coming to an end, Reverend Moon and his wife recognized the changed international context, and emphasized reconciliation rather than confrontation.

In 1982, Reverend Moon founded the *Washington Times* in Washington DC as a newspaper exposing Soviet-style Communism and balancing what he saw as the leftist leanings of the *Washington Post*. With the end of the Cold War, it has become somewhat less militant, and has opened its columns to op-eds by American activists and politicians of different persuasions, while maintaining an emphasis on traditional family values and religious liberty that continues to make it a conservative daily.

On April 16, 1990, Reverend and Mrs. Moon met Russian President Gorbachev, and Reverend Moon embraced Gorbachev in front of the photographers. In December 1991, they visited North Korea and met President Kim Il-sung (1912–1994). To fully understand the significance of this meeting,

one should remember that Reverend Moon had been imprisoned and tortured under Kim's regime between 1946 and 1950.

The meaning of the meetings with Gorbachev and Kim was not merely political. Reverend Moon's theology assumed that the Biblical pairs of Cain and Abel and Esau and Jacob were complementary, in the sense that both members of each pair had a role to play. Meeting Kim and Gorbachev symbolically represented the unification of the Cain and Abel sides, which ended with a reconciliation, interpreted as the reunion between Esau and Jacob. On the other hand, while theology supplied the deeper motivations of such meetings, the Moons also expected that they would advance the cause of world peace.

In a way, Reverend Moon believed that by returning in 1991 to the same place in North Korea where he had started his work in 1951, he could now conclude his mission and pass the torch to his wife. She would soon found the Women's Federation for World Peace, and proclaim the beginning of an "era of women's liberation" (see Introvigne 2000, 19).

However, this did not mean that women activities became the sole, nor the main, focus of the Moons' peace activities. Several other organizations continued to operate, and the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) was founded in 2005, followed among others by the International Association of Youth and Students for Peace, in 2017. The UPF inaugural tour started in 2005 and reached 120 cities around the world.

Large UPF conferences gathered former (and sometimes current) presidents and prime ministers of different countries, as well as religious and cultural leaders. These gatherings included the Continental Africa Peace Summit 2018, inaugurated in Dakar, Senegal on January 18, 2018; the South-East Europe Peace Summit, opened in Tirana, Albania, on October 26, 2019; the Asia Pacific Summit, which started in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on November 19, 2019; the Africa Continental Summit Niger 2019, whose opening ceremony was held in Niamey, Niger, on November 28, 2019; the World Summit 2019 in Seoul, South Korea, on February 7–9, 2019; the World Summit 2020, which also took place in Seoul on February 3–8, 2020. Regional meetings were also organized, including the recent Balkans Leadership Conference, organized in Tirana, Albania, on November 20–21, 2021, which led to the signature of a Memorandum of Cooperation between the UPF and the Podgorica Club, an

organization established in 2019 by former presidents of Southeast European countries.

The UPF is active through a number of specialized organizations, each of which holds its own events:

- The International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP)
- The International Summit Council for Peace (ISCP)
- The International Association of First Ladies for Peace (IAFLP)
- The Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD)
- The International Media Association for Peace (IMAP)
- The International Association of Academicians for Peace (IAAP)
- The International Association for Peace and Economic Development (IAED)

The International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP) was launched on February 15, 2016, at the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea. It gathers parliamentarians from all around the world, and organizes forums promoting peace and democracy, and fighting corruption. National meetings of IAPP members have been organized in such diverse locations as Manila, London, Rome and Asunción, and the association has emerged as one of the largest and most active branches of the UPF. In the United States, the inaugural meeting was hosted by then pro tempore President of the Senate, Orrin Hatch.

The Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD) has been launched on November 13, 2017, in Seoul, as a partner association of IAPP. More than 60,000 attended the event at the Seoul World Cup Stadium. The idea behind IAPD is that the aims pursued by the IAPP parliamentarians, and by UPF in general, also have a spiritual dimension, and that dialogue between religions is a necessary pre-condition for peace. Regional meetings have gathered representatives of most major religions.

The International Summit Council for Peace (ISCP) was launched on February 8, 2019, during the UPF 2019 World Summit in Seoul. Its purpose is to gather together current and former heads of state and government. At the inaugural meeting, former U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney and former U.S. Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich were the keynote speakers. Among those present were the former President of Paraguay, Luis Federico Franco Gómez, the former

President of Albania, Alfred Moisiu, the former President of Ghana, Jerry John Rawlings (1947–2020), and the current President of São Tomé and Príncipe, Evaristo Carvalho. A second assembly was organized on February 4, 2020, in Seoul.

The International Association of First Ladies for Peace (IAFLP) was launched on February 5, 2020, at the UPF World Summit 2020 in Seoul, in partnership with the Women’s Federation for World Peace. Among those who spoke at the inaugural event were Fionnuala Kenny, wife of the former prime minister of Ireland, Sujata Koirala, former deputy prime minister and foreign minister of Nepal, and the former first ladies of Nigeria, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, as well as the current first ladies of Nauru and Palau.

The UPF World Summit 2020 was also the opportunity to launch the International Media Association for Peace (IMAP), on February 2, 2020, the International Association of Academicians for Peace (IAAP) on February 5, 2020, and, at the same date, the International Association for Peace and Economic Development (IAED). They cater to three communities UPF identifies as equally important for its aims: journalists, academics, and business leaders.

There are several other initiatives and organizations that are also part of the UPF network. Some of them continue projects that Reverend Moon and his wife had started before the foundation of UPF in 2005. Moon and some of his co-workers had a long-lasting interest in soccer, and programs such as the “Peace Cup” and “Football for Peace” look at sport as a tool to promote international dialogue and friendship. Other projects pursue charitable and ecological endeavors, including cleaning and development projects around Lake Baikal and other areas in Russia. At the UK Parliament, a “UPF Young Achievers Award” has been organized since 2010 as an annual event, where the youth involved receive their awards from their own parliamentarians.

The “Peace Road” is an old visionary project by Reverend Moon, who dreamed about connecting Eurasia and America by land through a tunnel in Alaska, and Japan and Korea through another tunnel. Beyond these difficult projects, the World Peace Road Foundation’s idea of an “international highway” maintains that making the world more connected through tunnels, bridges, highways, and railways, is one of the ways of making it more peaceful. Parenthetically, these projects constantly insist on the equal dignity and rights of all women and men, and make accusations of “racism” sometimes directed by anti-cultists against the Unification Church leaders involved in the UPF ludicrous.

The Sunhak Peace Prize Foundation awards, normally every two years, \$1 million to laureates who contributed to the creation of peace for future generations. In its first edition, in 2015, the prize went to Kiribati's President and international environmental activist Anote Tong and Indian biologist Modadugu Bijai Gupta, whose research and activities are regarded as crucial for addressing the problem of world hunger.

The main engine making the UPF projects work is the impressive network of Ambassadors for Peace, more than 100,000 volunteers from 160 countries who work to promote the different UPF events and organizations. They come from all religions, and the vast majority of the Ambassadors of Peace are not part of the Unification Church.

A Case Study: The UPF World Summit 2020

To illustrate how the UPF and its network of organizations work in practice, an analysis of the UPF World Summit 2020 may offer an interesting case study. The event was held in Seoul on February 3–5, 2020, a few weeks before the COVID crisis made traveling and large gatherings impossible. Some participants, however, did cancel their participation at the last minute due to the epidemic, including President Macky Sall of Senegal, who sent a video and was awarded one of the Sunhak Peace Prizes. Some 6,000 delegates from 170 countries were nonetheless able to attend the inaugural ceremony. Some 2,500 participated in the following plenary sessions and breakouts, where more than 300 presented papers or responses (“World Summit 2020 Executive Summary 2020”, 14).

The event featured plenary sessions and sessions of the different organizations of the UPF network. Among the main speakers were the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon (who was also awarded a Sunhak Peace Prize), the President of Guatemala, Jimmy Morales, the former President of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan, the Prime Minister of Cambodia, Hun Sen, the Mexican scientist Mario J. Molina, who was a co-recipient of the 1995 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for his role in discovering the threat to the Earth's ozone layer from chlorofluorocarbon, the Vice President of the Philippines Maria Leonor Robredo, the Prime Minister of Niger, Brigi Rafini, the former President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso (and several former European Presidents and Prime Ministers), the Mayor of Seoul, Park Won-soon (1995–

2020), the Vice President of Myanmar, Henry Van Thio. Interestingly, North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un sent a large floral arrangement with his greetings. President and Mrs. Trump also sent a greeting message.

In analyzing the event, four comments are important for the purpose of this White Paper. First, there was no attempt to hide or downplay the fact that the UPF was founded by Reverend and Mrs. Moon, and the leading role Mrs. Moon still plays in it. On the contrary, the official program of the conference featured a banquet to introduce Mrs. Moon's autobiography (*Moon 2020*), all the material introducing the event insisted on the fact that the Moons were the founders of the UPF, and the Summit's official declaration

acknowledge[d] respectfully the leadership of Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon and her late husband, Rev. Sun Myung Moon [...], and their great vision of peace of one family under God, an idea they strove to achieve throughout their lives ("World Summit 2020 Peace Declaration," 16).

Indeed, many of the luminaries who spoke at the Summit mentioned and thanked Reverend and Mrs. Moon. Any claim that they were "misled" and participated in a "front" event of the Unification Church without knowing it is, thus, totally unfounded.

Second, except for the speeches of those UPF leaders who are also members of the Unification Church, some of them part of the Moon family, references to the theology of Reverend Moon and his wife were surprisingly scarce. Clearly, the event did not have among its purposes to advertise or promote the Unificationist theology, or proselytize for the Unification Church, which would have been both difficult and inappropriate considering how many leaders of different religions participated in the Summit, including Bishop Munib Younan, President of the Lutheran World Federation, as well as Orthodox bishops and distinguished Catholic priests and theologians.

Third, there was no intention to promote a particular political position or ideology. President Trump sent his greetings, but so did North Korea's Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un. Jimmy Morales from Guatemala and Newt Gingrich are conservative politicians, but Cambodia's Hun Sen and former Prime Minister of Portugal and President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso represent different incarnations of Socialism. None of them presented their respective ideologies at the Summit. They all understood the rules of the game, and presented papers on subjects of general interest such as the threats of climate

change and terrorism, interreligious dialogue, and the role and possible reform of the United Nations—the latter a theme on which UPF’s original contribution has been often acknowledged by scholars and politicians alike.

A conference with several hundred papers cannot avoid differences in quality, and an event on world peace always includes a certain dose of rhetoric and self-congratulation. The World Summit 2020 was no exception, yet many papers were valuable by both political and academic standards. For its richness of diverse perspectives and deep analysis of the issues in a good number of papers, the World Summit 2020 compared favorably to many other similar conferences, including those organized by the United Nations and other international bodies.

Fourth, the event introduced and emphasized in several sessions the theme of the peaceful unification of Korea. It was clear that the issue was in the minds and hearts of the organizers. It was also clear that the adjective “peaceful” was not included in vain, and that aggressive attitudes against North Korea were carefully avoided. Korean unification is a tricky theme. Most papers avoided rhetoric and proposed common sense approaches many could agree with.

Conclusion: Why Do They Do It?

The UPF is a huge network, and the Ambassadors for Peace come from very different nations, cultures, and religions. Those who have studied such organizations know that it is difficult, if not impossible, to gather a large number of diverse people under the flag of a common ideology.

Yet, if there is no full-blown ideology, there are certainly values proposed by the UPF. A basic idea is that world peace comes through dialogue, cooperation, service to others, and actions guided by morality. Obviously, the UPF is aware of the fact that in our pluralistic society very different ideas of morality coexist. The UPF tries to promote the general principle that morality has a spiritual dimension, and we are all part of “one human family under God.” This may in fact displease atheists, although dialogue with humanists and atheists is not excluded from the scope of UPF activities.

The formula “one human family under God” is part of Reverend Moon’s legacy, as is an emphasis on the family as the school where love and peace can be learned. However, the formula can be interpreted differently by Unificationists

and non-Unificationists. Members of the Unification Church conceive the “one family” as a community acknowledging Reverend and Mrs. Moon as the True Parents, with a messianic role for our era. On the other hand, acknowledging the messianic role of the Moons is not necessary to believe that we are all part of one human family and should behave as such. This is an ideal that may appeal to women and men of all faiths.

One should not confuse the motivations of those promoting certain charitable and peace activities with the nature and effects of those activities. To use again an example we mentioned previously, the Vatican executives and Catholic priests who launched and lead Caritas Internationalis were and are motivated by a Christian idea of responsibility toward the poor, whom they consider as daughters and sons of God who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ. We may also speculate that those Catholic bishops and priests who work today for Caritas hope that their good deeds would benefit the image of the Catholic Church, which has received its good share of negative publicity on other issues. On the other hand, the rules of Caritas Internationalis strictly stipulate that the delivery of humanitarian aid should not be used as a proselytization tool for converting non-Catholics to Catholicism, many who are not Catholics work with Caritas, and its activities are generally praised as highly effective.

Similarly, those Unificationists who lead UPF, work for UPF, and donate to UPF (for which contributions by private donors, both members and non-members of the Unification Movement, are important) are certainly motivated by Reverend and Mrs. Moon’s spiritual ideas. They do not hide it, as our analysis of the 2020 event demonstrated. They are also aware that the UPF events benefit the image of Mrs. Moon as a leader with valuable ideas about international issues, which can be appreciated also by many who do not share her theology. On the other hand, it is also true that most of the UPF volunteers and Ambassadors for Peace are not members of the Unification Church, and that the UPF is not intended nor used by its Unificationist members as a tool for proselytism.

Nor is UPF used to promote partisan political ideologies or parties. The expression “*reductio ad Hitlerum*” is widely used to indicate that to discredit certain movements or politicians their opponents try to associate them, rightly or wrongly, with Nazism. Today it may appear sometimes that there is also a “*reductio ad Trump*.” The former American President is so unpopular among many mainline media that it seems that to disqualify an organization it is enough

to associate it with Trump. This is what happened to UPF after the 2021 Rally of Hope. Attacks based on Trump's video participation in the event were either misinformed or malicious. Politicians of all political persuasions participated in this and other UPF events. And, whatever the opinion one may have of Trump, in a conference discussing the relationships between other countries and North Korea, inviting a former American President who had been very much involved in Korean issues should not have been surprising.

In the end, we are left with two irreconcilable narratives about UPF. One is that it is an NGO and think tank whose events are attended by prestigious leaders such as Ban Ki-moon and José Manuel Barroso, and which offers interesting position papers, lectures, and documents on international peace and development issues, including on the relations between North and South Korea. As many other similar organizations, it has been promoted and is led by religionists who do not hide their religious motivations. However, it includes many who do not share their religious beliefs, and is not used as a tool for proselytization. For purposes of converting others to Unificationist theology, the UPF would be a very ineffective tool. Those invited to the UPF activities are mostly political, religious and civil society leaders with well-established ideas and worldviews. They are as far away as possible from the ideal type of the “seeker” looking for a new religion.

This narrative is shared by two organizations unlikely to be engaged in the promotion of “fronts” for “cults”: the United Nations and the Vatican. Many new religious movements created charitable and peace-promoting organizations. If they are active enough, and no member state of the United Nations decides to oppose them, they can achieve a Special Consultative Status at the ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) of the U.N. As of January 7, 2022, there were 5,003 organizations with special consultative status at the ECOSOC. However, there were only 140 NGOs with general consultative status (ECOSOC 2022).

General consultative status is reserved, according to the ECOSOC, to “fairly large, established international NGOs with a broad geographical reach,” which have offered “substantive and sustained contributions” to the aims of the United Nations in “several fields.” In 2018, the UPF was granted general consultative status at the ECOSOC, a position that certainly is not allowed lightly and without a long and accurate observation and evaluation.

Leaders of NGOs and even of new religious movements routinely ask to be received in the Vatican, and have a photo opportunity with the Pope. If they have

sponsors the Vatican wants to accommodate, they are normally invited to participate in the general audiences, where the Pope meets collectively hundreds of people (and may take pictures with some of them).

Private audiences are an entirely different matter, and go through a very complicated process of screening. The Vatican is aware that some organizations may use meetings and pictures for publicity purposes. When a meeting is approved by the Vatican's Secretariat of State, and by the Pope himself, that it happened is publicized through the daily bulletin of the Holy See. The Holy See bulletin for July 1, 2019, duly reported that Pope Francis had met in a private audience "Dr. Thomas G. Walsh, President of the Universal Peace Federation" (Ufficio Stampa della Santa Sede 2019).

Both at the United Nations and in the Vatican, the UPF passed the highest level of screening tests. It would be unconceivable that the skilled U.N. and Vatican diplomats involved were not aware of the connection of the UPF with Reverend and Mrs. Moon. Yet, they concluded, in our opinion correctly, that the UPF was not a proselytizing or publicity arm of the Unification Church but a respected NGO that had proved its usefulness and quality throughout the years.

The second narrative, of which *Paris Match* offered an example, is that the UPF is not what it claims to be but is just a "front" for the "Moon cult" (secte Moon), which hides proselytizing and advertising aims under a façade of care for international issues and humanitarian aid.

This White Paper should have persuaded our readers that the second narrative is both unfair and factually false. It is unfair because similar peace and cultural activities by mainline religions do not receive the same criticism. It is taken for granted that their activities on behalf of peace, dialogue, and social welfare are promoted in good faith, out of a sincere desire for a better world, rather than for self-promotion or proselytization purposes. Only the activities of new religious movements are accused of dissimulating hidden motivations.

Thus, a vicious circle is created. If new religious movements only spend their time in missionary and religious activities, it is objected that this is typical of "cults," while "real" religions care for larger issues and help fellow human beings. If they engage in charitable, social, or cultural activities, it is argued that these are only "fronts" for proselytization and publicity.

The theory that the UPF organizes its activities for proselytization purposes on behalf of the Unification Church is also factually false, and open to empirical disconfirmation. To the best of our knowledge none of the presidents, prime ministers, Nobel Prize laureates, religious leaders, and other participants in the UPF activities converted to the Unification Church. Not only is this theoretically unlikely. It simply did not happen in practice. It would also be difficult to argue that, because of the UPF activities, those who accuse the Unification Church of being “a cult” became less aggressive, and indeed the contrary may well be true.

The conclusion seems to us unescapable. The UPF is an organization that has been founded by Reverend and Mrs. Moon and maintains members of the Unification Church among its leaders, but is supported by the volunteer work of tens of thousands who in their majority are not Unificationists. Its purpose is not to convert others to the Unification Church, nor to support any partisan political perspective, but to promote high-level discussions about issues connected with world peace, and support in different ways charitable and humanitarian initiatives.

The quality of its work has been recognized, inter alia by the United Nations and the Vatican. To regard the world leaders who participate in its conferences and the more than 100,000 Ambassadors for Peace as “puppets” of a “cult” is more than offensive. It is a ridiculous theory, the fruit of the very bigotry and prejudices international organizations and friends of peace and dialogue should work tirelessly to eliminate.

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Note: We have also consulted the collections of the magazine *UPF Today: Innovative Approaches to Peace*, and of the journal *Dialogue & Alliance: A Journal of the Universal Peace Federation*, as well as leaflets and flyers issued by the UPF. We also relied on interviews with UPF volunteers in New York, Paris, and Seoul; and some of us attended UPF events in various countries.