

The Universal Peace Federation (UPF): Origins, Development, and Challenges of the Unificationist “Abel United Nations”

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Abstract

The Universal Peace Federation or UPF is a United Nations-affiliated NGO established in 2005 by Mun Sŏn-myŏng (1920–2012), the founder of the South Korean Unification Movement. Mun deemed the UPF’s formation “the most revolutionary and wondrous event since God’s creation of humankind,” assigning the organisation a pivotal role in his millenarian project. This article continues the discussion in Pokorny and Zoehrer 2022 (which addressed the context, birth, and millenarian anatomy of the UPF), outlining the history of the UPF with a focus on its changing self-conception, leadership shifts, and global activities. It examines how the UPF has articulated and put into practice its millenarian founding ideal over the course of three stages of its development. Finally, it highlights major external and internal challenges, which not only informed the UPF’s identity-building and public perception but render the organisation systemically vulnerable.

Keywords: Unification Church, new religious movement, UPF, millenarianism, religion and politics



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[T]oday, I declare before all of humankind
 the creation of a new international organisation
 capable to exert the function of Abel-type UN
 and the renewal of the existing UN
 for the realisation of world peace,
 which is God's eternal ideal of creation.¹
 – Mun Sŏn-myŏng

Prelude

In the aftermath of the assassination of former Prime Minister of Japan (2006–2007 and 2012–2020) Abe Shinzō 安倍晋三 (1954–2022) on July 8, 2022, in Nara 奈良, public attention was drawn to a South Korean new religious movement chiefly known in Japan as elsewhere by its informal name “Unification Church” (Korean: *T'ongil Kyohoe* 통일교회/統一教會; Japanese: *Tōitsu Kyōkai* 統一協會). The church's formal name is “Family Federation for World Peace and Unification” (FFWPU; *Segye P'yŏnghwa T'ongil Kajŏng Yŏnhap* 세계평화통일가정연합/世界平和統一家庭聯合), which constitutes the religious nucleus of the wider Unification Movement (UM).² It maintains a worldwide membership comprising some 200,000 to 300,000 individuals with the vast majority residing in South Korea and Japan.³

Abe's assailant Yamagami Tetsuya 山上徹也 (b. 1980) reportedly told investigators that he resented the FFWPU because it had received enormous donations from his mother, apparently driving his family into bankruptcy. Having originally intended to target the present UM leader Han Hak-cha 한학자/韓鶴子 (b. 1943), the widow of the group's founder Mun Sŏn-myŏng 문선명/文鮮明 (1920–2012), Yamagami decided to attack Abe whom he suspected of having a close association to the FFWPU (Mainichi shinbun 2022).

While on good terms with several religious groups, including the Shintōist-nationalistic *Nippon Kaigi* 日本会議, Abe was anything but a believer of the FFWPU's teachings. His actual involvement with Unificationism did not apply to its “faith” dimension but rather to a common political cause he shared with the UM. The beginnings of Abe's involvement with the UM stretch back more than five decades. Already Abe's maternal grandfather Kishi Nobusuke 岸信介 (1896 – 1987), the

¹ Quoted from Mun's address at the inauguration of the UPF on September 12, 2005. Reprinted in MS 2009: 236. Original text: 본인은 오늘 하나님의 영원한 창조이상인 평화세계의 실현을위해 기존 UN의 갱신과 더불어 새로운 차원에서 아벨적 UN의 기능을 발휘할 수 있는 새로운 국제기구의 창설을 전 인류 앞에 선포하는바입니다.

² The UM comprises a range of organisations, businesses, and initiatives orbiting the FFWPU.

³ A recent emic estimate for the FFWPU's global membership is below 250,000 individuals (Famularo 2022).

architect of Japan's leading conservative party Jiyū-Minshutō 自由民主党 (Liberal Democratic Party; LDP) and former Prime Minister (1957–1960), had entered into rapport with the UM in the mid-1960s.

A common cause of the LDP and the UM was the reinforcement of a decidedly anti-communist political front. On January 13, 1968, Mun established the International Federation for Victory over Communism (IFVOC) *Kukche Sūnggong Yōnhap* 국제승공연합/國際勝共連合) in Seoul. Its Japanese branch, the *Kokusai Shōkyō Rengō* 國際勝共連合, was founded three months later.⁴ The IFVOC was a political initiative that aimed to defend South Korea, Japan, and other democratic nations against the infiltration and expansion of communist ideology.⁵

Having gained the endorsement of high-ranking conservative policy makers, IFVOC Japan supported the aims of the LDP and shared a common interest in promoting a pro-American foreign policy, a closer collaboration with South Korea, and an unreserved support of military alliances that may counter the growing assertiveness of the People's Republic of China. Leading LDP members, such as Ogawa Hanji 小川半次 (1909–1994), Chiba Saburō 千葉三郎 (1894–1979), and Genda Minoru 源田実 (1904–1989), were prominent advisors of IFVOC Japan.⁶ The businessman, philanthropist, and right-wing politician Sasakawa Ryōichi 笹川良一 (1899–1995), a close political ally of Kishi, served as the honorary chairman of IFVOC Japan. A piece of land in Tōkyō owned by Kishi became the site of the headquarters of the Japanese UM (Samuels 2001). Its controversial public image notwithstanding, the UM steadily evolved to become a key supporter of LDP politicians providing both funding and campaign workers over the past fifty years (cf.

⁴ IFVOC Japan's first president was Kuboki Osami 久保木修己 (1931–1998), who also served as the first president of the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity (HSAUWC; Korean: *Segye Kidokkyo T'ongil Silyōng Hyōphoe* 세계기독교통일신령협회/世界基督教統一神靈協會; Japanese: *Sekai Kirisutokyo Tōitsu Shinrei Kyōkai* 世界基督教統一神靈協會) in Japan (1964–1991), the FFWPU's predecessor founded by Mun in 1954. Notably, before joining the HSAUWC in 1962, Kuboki was the chief secretary of Niwano Nikkyō 庭野日敬 (1906–1999), the co-founder of the Nichirenist new religious movement Rishō Kōseikai 立正佼成会. The IFVOC website offers a concise chronology of its main activities: <https://www.ifvoc.org/history/> (accessed: September 23, 2022).

⁵ Starting in 1980, the activities of the IFVOC expanded into Latin America through CAUSA International. See <http://www.causafoundation.org/> (accessed: October 20, 2022).

⁶ Chiba was a businessman and politician specialising on security measures. Genda was a military aviator known for having co-planned the Japanese empire's attack on the United States naval base at Pearl Harbour, Hawai'i. He was an influential member of the Defence Division of the LDP's Policy Affairs Research Council. Both Chiba and Genda advocated for an amendment of the post-war constitution to allow for Japan's remilitarisation and autonomous self-defence.

Redl 1993; Samuels 2001). As of September 2022, a reported 146 out of 381 LDP members of parliament had dealings with the UM (Kyodo News 2022).⁷

The Japanese UM currently operates three politically active organisations as separate legal bodies: the IFVOC, the Federation for World Peace (*Sekai Heiwa Rengō* 世界平和連合), and the Universal Peace Federation (UPF; Japanese: *Tenchū Heiwa Rengō* 天宙平和連合; Korean: *Ch'ōnju P'yōnghwa Yōnhap* 천주평화연합/天宙平和聯合).⁸ Only relatively recently did Abe publicly endorse the efforts of the latter, which globally serves as the Unificationist flagship NGO. Inaugurated by Mun in New York on September 12, 2005, the UPF understands itself as “a global network of individuals and organizations dedicated to building a world of peace in which everyone can live in freedom, harmony, cooperation and prosperity.”⁹ A hallmark of the UPF is its “track two” diplomatic efforts, which enables informal and unofficial encounters between individual activists, representatives of civil society and religious communities, and politicians.

On the occasion of two recent events hosted by the UPF, Abe delivered congratulatory messages via video transmission on September 12, 2021, and via a written address on February 13, 2022 (Abe 2021; 2022). In his messages Abe sharply criticised the People’s Republic of China’s hegemonic ambitions in the Indo-Pacific region and stressed his full support for the military alliance between the USA, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. In its condolence message following Abe’s assassination, the UPF expressed its solidarity with Abe’s family and the Japanese people. Having lost an important friend, the UPF stated that it “wholeheartedly honors the legacy of Prime Minister Abe,” and that it is “more determined than ever to carry on our mission, working resolutely and steadfastly to bring an end to violence across our world.”¹⁰

Abe’s political accomplishments were solemnly recognised by several speakers who participated in the “World Summit” convened by the UPF at the Lotte World Hotel, in Seoul, Korea, from August 11 to 15, 2022 (UPF International 2022). The conference rallied around 300 political and religious leaders, academics, businesspeople, and heads of civil groups under the theme “Toward Peace on the

⁷ In the meantime, several media reports have indicated that the number of LDP lawmakers with ties to the UM could be considerably higher.

⁸ Established in 1991, the Federation for World Peace is one of the UPF’s predecessor organisations (see Pokorny and Zoehrer 2022).

⁹ <https://worldsummit.us/about/> (accessed: August 30, 2022).

¹⁰ <https://www.upf.org/article/420-in-memoriam/10258-in-memoriam-shinzo-abe> (accessed: August 30, 2022). Following Abe’s assassination, political activists claimed a large-scale collusion between Japanese lawmakers and the UM. In response to what Unificationists criticise as severe human rights violations by Japanese authorities, media, and private organisations, the Paris-based NGO Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience (CAP-LC) issued a formal statement to the UN Human Rights Committee in September 2022 (CAP-LC 2022). Earlier, on August 31, 2022, the current Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio 岸田文雄 (b. 1957) announced that he would reassess or demote officials with past ties to the UM (Iwamoto 2022).

Korean Peninsula: Toward a World Culture of Peace.”¹¹ This theme already encapsulates the key feature of the UPF’s dual normative orientation, which combines Korea-centric millenarianism with a global, UN-oriented agenda of peace-building (Pokorny and Zoehrer 2022). In fact, the UPF evolved to become a major outlet of the Unificationist millenarian drive and is deemed a key actor in realising a “divine unified Korea” (*sin t’ongil Han’guk* 신통일한국/神統一韓國 officially rendered into English as “Heavenly Unified Korea”) (Unification Thought Institute International 2022). In Unification thought, the peaceful reunification of the Koreas is considered a major building block in the fulfilment of the “providence of restoration” (*pokkwi sŏmni* 복귀섭리/復歸攝理) and the key to world peace.

One notable highlight at the World Summit was the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the passing of Mun. The UPF and the FFWPU invited international guests to commemorate Mun’s legacy with an exuberant festival. Following an epic musical performance glorifying his life and work, tributes were delivered by the spokesperson for the Cambodian People’s Party Suos Yara (b. 1973), former Prime Minister of Niger Brigi Rafini (b. 1953; p. 2011–2021), and former US Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo (b. 1963; p. 2018–2021). It is noteworthy that the organisers did not invite peace activists, religious dignitaries, or scholars, but high-ranking political figures to testify to Mun’s life achievement—interpreted either as a noble contribution to peace (Yara, Rafini) or as a righteous fight for freedom (Pompeo) (UPF USA 2022a). This choice underscores the Unificationist millenarian ambition—propelled by Mun’s messianic quest for global peace—to leave a lasting impact on immanent, worldly affairs. The UPF has been playing a key role in this quest.

The aim of this article is to outline the history of the UPF with a focus on its evolving self-understanding, leadership shifts, and global activities. It examines how the UPF has articulated and put into practice its millenarian founding ideal over the

¹¹ The UPF’s efforts to attract a wide range of leaders is one of its major hallmarks. A glimpse of this diversity is provided by the five major delegations invited to the World Summit: (1) a fact-finding delegation on the issue of peace on the Korean peninsula, including General Walter Sharp (b. 1952), Commander of UN Command, Combined Forces Command, and US Forces Korea (2008–2011); Harry Harris (b. 1956), US Ambassador to Korea (2018–2021); and Joseph DeTrani, Special Envoy for the Six-Party Talks with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (2003–2006); (2) a high-level delegation from Cambodia, headed by Sok Siphana (b. 1960), senior advisor to the Cambodian government and chairman of the Phnom Penh-based think tank Asian Vision Institute (founded in 1991); (3) representatives from the Community of Sahel-Saharan States; (4) religious dignitaries from Africa, headed by the “Prophet” Uzwi-Lezwe Radebe, the founder of the South Africa-based Revelation Church of God; (5) members of the American Clergy Leadership Conference (founded in 2000), a UM-led coalition of Christian ministers dedicated to upholding marriage and family values (UPF International 2022). Furthermore, as in previous UPF conferences, prominent members of the Trump administration, including former United States Vice President Mike Pence (b. 1959; p. 2017–2021) and televangelist Paula M. White-Cain (b. 1966), took part in person (Pokorny and Zoehrer 2022: 1–2).

course of three phases of its development: (1) the organisation's formation stage and global expansion as a peace movement (2005–2009); (2) followed by its concentration on interfaith outreach and national security (2009–2013); and (3) finally its solidification as the Unificationist flagship NGO promoting a broad range of peace-building efforts (since 2013). As will be shown, the question of whether and how to govern the UPF in line with Mun's (and his wife-cum-successor Han's) directions became the bone of contention in two crucial Unificationist schisms involving two of his sons, each of whom was at some point groomed as ultimate heir. Thus, the course of the UPF epitomises the broader UM's struggle for identity and its attempt to translate the founders' charismatic authority into a sustainable institutional framework.

Apart from three expert interviews conducted with the leading UPF representative Thomas G. Walsh, the reconstruction of the UPF's history is largely based on the following sources:

- (1) A series of addresses delivered by Mun in the years after the founding of the UPF and titled *Peace Messages* 평화메시지. These addresses are collected in the volume *P'yŏnghwa sin'gyŏng* 평화신경/平和神經 (2009; Divine Scripture of Peace).
- (2) Speeches and reports by UPF activists printed in *UPF Today* (est. 2007), the official publication organ of the UPF, and its predecessor *World & I* (2004–2007).¹² Originally appearing as a quarterly magazine and now annually, *UPF Today* features UPF's regional chapters' and international office's most relevant activities.¹³
- (3) Reports and testimonials printed in *Today's World* (1980–2013), the chief Unificationist English-language monthly magazine that served to inform and edify church members and associates.¹⁴

¹² *World & I* was initially the publication organ of the Interreligious and International Federation for World Peace, the UPF's immediate predecessor (see below). Glenn Strait served as the magazine's senior editor. An almost homonymous glossy monthly, *The World & I*, was published by the Washington Times between 1986 and 2004.

¹³ Different from the majority of Unificationist literature, *UPF Today* is originally published in English rather than being translated from Korean. Occasional editions appear in other languages, including the official United Nations languages, that is, Russian, French, Spanish, and Arabic.

¹⁴ Additional materials that reflect the focus of the UPF's activities and interests over time but have not been systematically considered in this article include *Dialogue & Alliance* (est. 1987) and the *International Journal on World Peace* (1983–2021). The former has served as the UPF's official interfaith journal from 2005 onwards and features articles by scholars, activists, and religious practitioners alike, whereas the latter was a more decidedly academic publication dedicated to peace studies that was sponsored by the UPF and its preceding organisation from 2000 until 2009.

Background and Founding Vision of the UPF

Religious NGOs and the United Nations

The formation of the UPF marked a clear shift in the Unificationist political strategy. During the Cold War, the UM's profile had a decisively anti-communist bent. Its offshoot CAUSA International offered seminars and conferences targeted at decision makers, journalists, and local leaders in the Americas and beyond (Omang 1983).¹⁵ In this period, Mun also founded several media outlets espousing conservative, pro-freedom policies, including *The Washington Times* (est. 1982) that is still in operation today. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Mun toned down his anti-communist rhetoric for the sake of diplomacy and began engaging with international political institutions, specifically the United Nations (UN).

This change in the UM's approach is symptomatic of an increased participation of religious associations in global public policymaking across a wide range of areas since the 1990s (Berger 2003; Baumgart-Ochse 2019: 7–8; cf. Marshall 2013; Kippenberg 2014). In line with a broader development in global governance, worldwide crises and conflicts have set the stage for a new opportunity-structure of transnational non-state actors. These actors included corporations, civil society organisations, social movements, as well as religious NGOs (Baumgart-Ochse 2019: 5).¹⁶

The engagement of religious actors with global policymaking is most saliently visible in the presence of religious NGOs in the UN. This trend contrasts with its early years, where participation was limited almost exclusively to secular players, such as UN organisations, governments, and non-religious NGOs. However, in the post-Cold War era, where international relations have been marked by a higher focus on values and norms rather than ideological blocs, the increasing numbers of faith-based NGOs active at the UN indicate a growing interest in influencing global public policy on issues such as justice and human rights, the adverse effects of globalisation, poverty, climate change, and interreligious strife (Haynes 2019). Hence, the simple binary opposites of “religious” and “secular” do not suffice to reflect the complexity of the relationship between one of the leading global institutions and religious groups (Lehmann 2016; Carrette and Miall 2017). Likewise, religious NGOs (including the UPF) do not represent interests limited to overtly “religious” concerns although their political and civil social engagement clearly carry their respective signatures.

¹⁵ Cf. <http://www.causafoundation.org/> (accessed: November 8, 2022).

¹⁶ Julia Berger has provided a useful and widely employed working definition of religious NGOs as “formal organizations whose identity and mission are self-consciously derived from the teachings of one or more religious or spiritual traditions and which operates on a non-profit, independent, voluntary basis to promote and realize collectively articulated ideas about the public good at the national or inter-national level” (Berger 2003: 16).

Founding and Purpose of the UPF

Mun merged his movement's decade-long NGO activities into a unified framework in 1999 under the name "Interreligious and International Federation for World Peace" (IIFWP) (Pokorny and Zoehrer 2022: 3–7). Six years later, on September 12, 2005, Mun inaugurated the UPF at the Lincoln Center in New York City, which effectively meant a rebranding and restructuring of the IIFWP. Mun's closest aide at the time, Kwak Chung-hwan 곽정환/郭錠煥 (b. 1936), had been the chair of IIFWP and continued to lead the UPF in this function until his breakaway from Mun in 2009 (cf. Balcomb 2009: 3).

According to its self-description, the UPF is "an international and interreligious network of individuals and organizations, including representatives from religion, government, civil society and the private sector [...] dedicated to achieving world peace" (UPF International 2021). The organisation had some seventy active chapters by 2011 (Walsh 2011b: 2) and presently maintains a global presence across 157 countries. Its international operations are co-ordinated by a secretariat based in Tarrytown, New York. At the height of its activities (2007 to 2009), the UPF's international secretariat employed about thirty staff members (Balcomb 2009: 3). As of 2022, UPF International has been reduced to about one third of its original size and engages ten full time and four part time staff members.¹⁷ The majority of its national chapters has a small staff, often only consisting of a secretary general supported by a group of volunteers (ibid.).

From the outset, the UPF pursued multiple purposes. A crucial pragmatic function was to ensure organisational cohesion of the proliferating number of Unificationist initiatives. Since Mun's millenarian project also embraced the areas of governance, media, academia, and civil society, he founded a plethora of NGOs, notably including the Professors' World Peace Academy, the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP), and the Youth Federation for World Peace. Together with the movement's diplomatic and interfaith activities, these endeavours were consolidated under the umbrella of UPF. In this way, the UPF was expected to streamline and manage the UM's work in a more economic and efficient manner.¹⁸

The UPF pursues two central objectives: a comprehensive renewal of the UN on the one hand, and the establishment of a millenarian era centring on the Korean peninsula on the other. Its chief public aim is to reform the UN and, ultimately, create the so-called "Abel UN" (*Abel Yuen* 아벨유엔) as its more potent alternative. In an address given repeatedly at multiple occasions, Mun reiterated his declaration of the founding of the UPF on September 12, 2005, in slightly altered wording:

¹⁷ Personal Interview with Thomas G. Walsh on March 18, 2022.

¹⁸ Personal Interview with Thomas G. Walsh on March 1, 2022.

The “Cosmic [=Universal] Peace Federation” holds the status of the Abel-type UN at the cosmic level, which is capable of demonstrating the renewal of the existing Cain-type UN at a new level as well as the functions of the kingdom of the ideal world of peace for the purpose of realising the ideal world of peace, [that is,] God’s eternal ideal of creation. All humankind shall indeed engrave this founding message deeply into their chests. It is the special blessing and warning of Heaven, which you should take and practise as a motto for living in the Era after the Coming of Heaven [*huch’ön sidae* 후천시대/後天時代] (T’ongilgyo 2009: 13 [Peace Message no. 1]).¹⁹

In the late 1990s, Mun decided to engage with the UN framework in order to reform what he deemed a dysfunctional and ineffective institution.²⁰ In his first address to the UN in August 2000, he made several suggestions in this respect: He called for the introduction of Parents’ Day as an annual UN day of commemoration, the creation of peace zones in conflict areas around the world, and the establishment of an interreligious council at the UN (Walsh 2007c: 16; Pokorny 2013b: 179–180).²¹ The latter was a core element of the UPF’s proposal to renew the UN. A globally recognised interreligious council was envisioned by Mun as the tool for translating the collective wisdom and insight of the world’s spiritual traditions into the secular sphere.

Its religious background and urgent pleas for restructuring the UN notwithstanding, the UPF endorses the general mission and goals of the UN, which it supports “particularly in the areas of interfaith dialogue, education for peace, and the strengthening of marriage and family” (UPF International 2021). In fact, already from its inception, the UPF has been well integrated into the UN system. The organisation’s immediate predecessor, the IIFWP, had already attained a “special consultative status” at the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) in 2004, a status which was subsequently transferred to the UPF (Balcomb 2008: 3).²² In 2018, the

¹⁹ 하나님의 영원한 창조이상인 평화이상세계의 실현을 위해 가인격인 기존 유엔의 갱신과 더불어 새로운 차원에서 평화이상세계왕국의 기능을 발휘할 수 있는 천주적 차원의 아벨격 유엔의 위상이 바로 ‘천주평화연합’입니다. 이 창설 메시지가말로 전인류가 가슴 깊이 아로새기고, 후천시대를 살아가는 좌우명으로 삼아 실천궁행하라고 주신 하늘의 특별 축복이자 경고입니다.

²⁰ The UN was of immense personal significance to Mun. On October 14, 1950, he was liberated by UN forces from the Hŭngnam labour camp (Moon 2011: 5; cf. Pokorny and Zoehrer 2022).

²¹ Indeed, in 2012, the General Assembly proclaimed June 1 as the “Global Day of Parents” to be observed annually throughout the world in honour of parents’ commitment towards their children (see <https://www.un.org/en/observances/parents-day>; accessed: September 28, 2022). The first Parents’ Day as a national day of celebration was officially introduced in 1973 in South Korea, where *ōbōinal* 어버이날 (Parents’ Day) is observed annually on May 8. With significant Unificationist lobbying, the United States followed suit in 1994. Unificationists celebrate “(True) Parents’ Day” or (*ch’am*) *pumo’ūi nal* (참)부모의 날, established on April 10, 1960 (see Kwak 1985: 95–97).

²² The first Unificationist organisation to gain entry into the UN system was the WFWP, which acquired a special consultative status at the ECOSOC in 1997.

UPF attained the “general consultative status” at the ECOSOC (United Nations Economic and Social Council 2021).²³ Moreover, the UPF is closely integrated within the network of religious NGOs established at the UN. Since 2006, the UPF has been a member of the NGO Committee on Spirituality, Values and Global Concerns (CSVGC),²⁴ a platform of UN-affiliated NGOs that promotes spirituality, compassion, inclusivity, the sanctity of life, seeking to integrate these values into the UN agenda. The UPF is a contributing member of the CSVGC’s working groups and executive council (Kagawa 2011a: 14–15). An important platform created for the involvement of religious players with the UN is the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), founded in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in 2005 (Haynes 2019: 167). Selected religious NGOs in pursuit of improved interfaith dialogue and cooperation may engage with the UNAOC, of which the UPF has been a partner since 2013. Furthermore, the UPF is engaged with the Committee of Religious NGOs at the United Nations (CRNGO) (cf. Lehmann 2019).

Its UN-oriented global outlook notwithstanding, the UPF’s second and ultimate aim is to build an organisational tool that could realise Mun’s Korea-centric millenarianism, which we have substantially discussed elsewhere (Pokorny and Zoehrer 2022). In short, present-day Unificationist millenarianism aims at a gradual salvational transformation of the cruel world humankind lives in since the Edenic Fall of their first ancestors Adam and Eve some 6,000 years ago, who thereby stalled God’s genuine “purpose of creation” (*ch’angjo mokchŏk* 창조목적/創造目的). Mun and Han are held to have been divinely commissioned to eventually actualise millenarian inevitability. The FFWPU in particular and the UM with the UPF at the vanguard in general serve as God’s instrument—wielded by the first blessed sinless couple (hence their honorary appellation “True Parents” or *ch’am pumonim* 참부모님) and His representatives on earth, Mun and Han—to make this happen. Their ministry is believed to enact divine providence culminating in the substantial manifestation of the Kingdom of Heaven (*ch’ŏn’guk* 천국/天國). Concluding providence, this “ideal world”

²³ The UN’s ECOSOC operates as the gatekeeper for NGO involvement at the UN. NGOs interested in registering with the ECOSOC and engaging institutionally with the UN are required to agree to core UN values, as codified in the United Nations Charter (1945) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) (Haynes 2019: 171). As of March 2021, 140 organisations worldwide were accredited with a *general* consultative status, indicating a large membership and regular, substantive contributions in accord with the ECOSOC’s concerns. 4,341 organisations have acquired the less influential *special* consultative status (United Nations Economic and Social Council 2021). In the last twenty years, the UN has increasingly supported a framework that embraces interreligious and intercultural dialogue. In 2019, a total of about 4,000 NGOs were registered with an ECOSOC consultative status, of which about nine per cent (or 339 NGOs) can be categorised as faith-based organisations, a fraction that has remained relatively stable since 2000 (Beinlich and Braungart 2019: 30). The majority—fifty-nine per cent—of all accredited religious NGOs identify as Christian (*ibid.*).

²⁴ See <http://csvgc-ny.org/> (accessed: October 15, 2022).

(*isang segye* 이상세계/理想世界) which Unificationists call *Ch'önilguk* 천일국/天一國 (i.e., an abbreviation for *ch'önju p'yöngghwa t'ongilguk* 천주평화통일국/宇宙平和統一國 or Kingdom of Cosmic Peace and Unity—a term coined by Mun in 2001) is envisaged “as a place devoid of sin and vice and characterised by piousness, true love, and peace. Humankind will be united in God and True Parents, following the ‘heavenly way’ (*ch'öndo* 천도[天道]) under the guidance of Mun and Han. Everyone will ‘enjoy a reign of tranquillity whilst rejoicing in true love in peace and happiness’” (Pokorny 2014: 136).

As this article will demonstrate, the ambiguity and tensions built into the UPF’s objectives, structure, and methods led to varying interpretations among its stakeholders, eventually leading to open conflict and drastic changes of management.

A Historical Outline of the UPF

UPF as a “Post-religious” Peace Movement: The Kwak/Hyön-jin Period (2005–2009)

Declaring the Heavenly Mission of the Abel(-type) UN

The incipient phase of the UPF put the UM’s mobilising skill at display. Between 2005 and 2009, the octogenarian Mun delivered his “Peace Messages” in the course of several speaking tours all around the globe. He was aided by his wife, a number of children and grandchildren, as well as UPF “Ambassadors for Peace” (*p'yöngghwa taesa* 평화대사/平和大使) who took turns reading Mun’s addresses (Pokorny and Zoehrer 2022).²⁵ In 2006, four world speaking tours were conducted in the name of UPF by Mun and his entourage also involving a delegation of 120 US pastors. In over 300 cities Mun and his delegates delivered the founder’s message, addressing faith and family with a view to global “kingdom-building” (i.e., the materialisation of Mun’s millenarian vision carried into effect by the Unificationist missionary machinery).

The inauguration of the UPF and its expected role to guide humankind into a new millenarian era was a central recurring theme of Mun’s public addresses during this phase. In Mun’s understanding, the UPF not only represented the culmination of

²⁵ Launched in 2001 and arising from Mun’s proposal to deploy interreligious ambassadors within the UN, the Ambassadors for Peace programme reportedly comprises more than 100,000 individuals today (see <http://www.upf.org.ua/en/about-us/ambassadors-for-peace.html>; accessed: October 15, 2022), who have been recognised for their peacemaking achievements. Emically, they are meant to serve as promoters and guardians of peace vitally assisting the Unificationist kingdom-building project.

his own lifelong ministry but of God's cosmic struggle to finally realise His ideal of creation (*ch'angjo isang* 창조이상/創造理想):

Now, the "Universal [literally, Cosmic] Peace Federation" [...] is God's victory, the fruit of True Parents' blood, sweat and tears, and your hope and desire. It will complete the mission of the Abel-type kingdom representing *Ch'õnilguk* in front of the existing Cain-type UN. Therefore, please bear in mind that you, the leaders of the world, have been given a heavenly mandate, which is the mission to accomplish God's ideal world of creation (T'ongilgyo 2009: 103 [Peace Message no. 7]).²⁶

The UPF claims that, in contrast to the "deficient existing UN," its origins are not found in humanistic discourse but in divine providence. According to Mun, his organisation is the vehicle by which humankind will be soon entering the millennium or *Ch'õnilguk*:

Starting off from the aim and purpose of God's ideal creation, the emergence of the Cosmic Peace Federation could have never resulted from the wisdom of any human. It is the highest and greatest blessing that heaven has bestowed upon humankind, which embarks on a new millennium (T'ongilgyo 2009: 122 [Peace Message no. 8]).²⁷

Allegedly hailing from a divine origin, the UPF is endowed with the promise of ultimate success. On Mun's behalf, a reported 120 Ambassadors for Peace delivered the following message during a worldwide speaking tour in 120 nations between October 22 and December 20, 2006:

Historically, peace movements always reached their limits and ended in failure because they have unfolded centring only on imperfect humans. It is for this reason that the United Nations (UN), which departed while embracing the splendid dream of realising world peace, is now facing its inherent limitations and is no longer giving hope to humankind. In short, the time has not yet come when Heaven can directly operate and guide history (T'ongilgyo 2009: 142–143 [Peace Message no. 9]).²⁸

²⁶ 이제 [...] '천주평화연합'은 하나님의 승리요, 참부모님의 피와 땀과 눈물의 결실이며, 여러분의 희망이자 소망입니다. 개인적인 기존 UN 앞에 천일국을 대표하는 아벨적 왕국의 사명을 다하게 될 것입니다. 따라서 하나님의 창조이상세계 실천향을 이루어야 할 사명이 바로 세계적 지도자이신 여러분에게 내린 천명임을 명심하시기 바랍니다.

²⁷ 이런 하나님의 창조이상적 목적과 취지를 갖고 출발한 천주평화연합의 출현은 결코 어떤 한 인간의 지혜에서 비롯된 결과가 아닙니다. 하늘이 새천년을 맞은 인류에게 주신 최고 최대의 축복입니다.

²⁸ 불완전한 인간만을 중심삼고 전개하는 평화운동은 역사적으로 언제나 그 한계에 부딪쳐 좌절되고 말았던 것입니다. 세계평화실현의 화려한 꿈을 안고 출발했던 국제연합(UN)이 오늘날 그 태생적인 한계점에 부딪쳐 인류에게 더 이상 소망을 주지 못하고 있는 것도, 바로 이런 이유 때문입니다. 한마디로 하늘이 직접 운행하여 역사를 섭리하실 수 있는 때를 맞이하지 못했다는 것입니다.

Because the “Cain UN” (*Kain Yuen* 가인유엔) is considered only a shadow of what it was meant to be, the time has come for the UPF, the “Abel UN,” to establish lasting peace on earth rooted in the providential plan of the creator. Hence, in Mun’s vision, the UPF is the glorious herald proclaiming “a new civilisation of cosmic peace” (*ch’ōnju p’yōnghwa sinmunmyōng* 천주평화신문명/天宙平和新文明) and the long-awaited era in which humanity is thoroughly transformed (T’ongilgyo 2009: 281 [Peace Message no. 15]).

International Leadership Conferences

The person who was to translate Mun’s salvific vision of the UPF into a concrete and actionable plan was Kwak Chung-hwan. Kwak co-ordinated the continuation of the UM’s global political and interfaith initiatives of the 1980s and 1990s, and converged them under the umbrella of UPF. A landmark moment for the UPF under Kwak’s leadership was the launching of the International Leadership Conference (ILC) in 2007. The first ILCs consisted of a series of seminars that were held once per month in a major city. These two- to three-day seminars were characterised by a broad spectrum of themes, including intercultural dialogue, skill-building for peacemakers and mediators, an introduction to Unificationist core beliefs,²⁹ and discussions on how to attain the UN Millennium Development Goals (Balcomb 2008: 6, 30). To this day, ILCs are regularly held and have evolved to become a hallmark of the UPF’s international activities.

The earliest ILC was held under the umbrella of the “Assembly 2007,” a two-week symposium held in New York City in September of that year. In his main address, Kwak listed three core strategic initiatives of the UPF: first, the Middle East Peace Initiative (MEPI); second, the Northeast Asia Peace Initiative, with a strong focus on security politics in the Pacific Rim region and prospects of a reunified Korean peninsula; and third, the renewal of the UN by taking the lead in achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals (Kwak 2007; cf. Moon Hyun Jin 2007). Constituting the UPF’s annual meeting, the Assembly 2007 gathered more than 1,000 Peace Ambassadors, along with delegates and observers from around the globe. Setting the tone for all following ILCs, the assembly included a section of briefings to showcase the various peace-building projects currently run by the UPF—some of them already in the making, others more hypothetical. Among these projects were regional activities such as the MEPI, advocacy for an “International Peace Highway” that would cross the Bering Strait, as well as global character education programmes.

One of the most remarkable projects of the UPF was the MEPI, which reportedly brought over 20,000 Ambassadors for Peace from around the world for

²⁹ Such introductions typically include lectures on the “ideal of creation,” the value of marriage and family, the origin of evil and conflict, and strategies for peaceful conflict resolution.

interfaith peace-building to Israel, Palestine, and Jordan. This programme included fact-finding tours, service projects, youth activities, conferences, interfaith prayers, peace marches, and pilgrimages. Initially launched by the UPF's predecessor organisation, MEPI activities stretched from 2003 to 2014 (IIFWP 2003; Universal Peace Federation 2014; cf. Moon Hyun Jin 2007: 10).³⁰

The Bering Strait Project, a proposed construction project extolled by Mun as the "World Peace King Bridge and Tunnel," aims to connect the North American and Russian land masses via an international highway system. Mun considered the realisation of such a global infrastructure, planned to cross the inter-Korean border, as a crucial step towards realising lasting peace and prosperity (T'ongilgyo 2009: 30–32 [Peace Message no. 1]). Its more detailed outlines envision a multipurpose infrastructure, including rail lines, pipelines, fibre-optic cables, and power transmission lines. Connected with such a "peace corridor" is the hope of opening up opportunities of mutual trade and improved relationships between nations that shared a conflictive past (Spanovich 2007).

The UPF's character education initiative is titled "Discovering the Real Me," which features a non-sectarian curriculum along with student texts and teacher manuals from elementary level through high school.³¹ This programme's narrative-based approach seeks to reach students beyond ethnicity or religious affiliation while incorporating stories from various local cultures and focusing on "traditional values." By operating this programme the UPF aims to fight back the "pernicious influence of Western media" and the sprawling of individualistic lifestyles. It has attracted some interest among professional educators and has been implemented at a community level in Zambia, Uganda, Nepal, India, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh (Saunders 2008). The materials reportedly found acceptance in several Filipino schools, American after-school programmes, as well as in summer courses in Dominica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica (Walsh 2009).

The Assembly 2007 also hosted the first meeting of the UPF Interfaith Working Group, building on the UM's decades-long experience with interreligious projects (Pokorny and Zoehrer 2022). This platform rallied seventy representatives from North America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia to discuss strategies for cooperation in several areas, including youth interfaith projects, faith-based humanitarian action, interfaith dialogue, as well as HIV prevention programmes in Africa (Walsh 2007a).

During Mun's lifetime, the ILCs often held special sessions at a location distant from the main venue where the founder would speak extemporaneously to participants for several hours. However, such occasions were not without risk to the

³⁰ The organising committee of the MEPI encompassed a significant contingent of the UM's international leadership; see IIFWP 2003.

³¹ See <https://www.upliftingeducation.com/discovering-the-real-me> (accessed: October 8, 2022).

UPF's profile. Even among the top levels of the UPF leadership different opinions abounded regarding the question of how to strike the balance between universality and inclusivity at its conferences on the one hand, and the main sponsor's right to advocate particular Unificationist tenets—including Mun's soteriological role—on the other hand. Somewhat conflicting with the UPF's diplomatic and interfaith format, guests had to be especially prepared before listening to the founder's talks because Mun had no qualms about declaring his messianic calling (cf. Balcomb 2009: 101). To this day, the UPF thus faces an ongoing tension between the often unstated but invigorating religious dimension of its mission and its non-evangelising, outwardly secular, UN-oriented peace-building work. However, as Michael Balcomb, communications director of UPF from 2005 to 2012, remarked, the ultimate purpose of its international conferences is indeed to raise a cadre of Ambassadors for Peace through Mun's teachings.³² Closely related to this objective was the aim of bringing high-ranking political and religious leaders to participate at events and ceremonies conducted by Mun (cf. Balcomb 2009: 161–162). Since his passing in 2012, his widow Han Hak-cha has confidently taken on Mun's mantle of charisma. But whereas Han continues Mun's tradition of greeting UPF guests at international gatherings and delivering a message, she prefers to keep her talks much shorter compared to her late husband.

The UPF's work was held in high esteem by Mun and he spared no costs to keep it up and running. The management of the ILCs alone constituted an enormous investment of the UM's financial, human, and organisational resources. A substantial portion of the UPF secretariat's staffing and overall budget supported the ILCs, which flew in participants from across the globe. These participants include former and active prime ministers, heads of state, elected officials, diplomats, as well as religious and community leaders. Whereas many ILC attendees expressed appreciation for the programme and the work of the UPF in feedback questionnaires, almost none of them would go on to adopt leading responsibilities in the organisation (cf. Balcomb 2009: 7–9). At a commitment of this scale, the question of return on investment and how to assess the outcome of such costly events naturally arises, being an ongoing point of discussion among Unificationist leaders.³³

³² In 2008, Balcomb served as aide and speechwriter of the UPF co-chair Mun Hyön-jin (aka "Preston Moon").

³³ Most religious NGOs pursuing intercultural dialogue at a global level struggle with financial constraints (Haynes 2019: 173). Having kept the basic format of the ILCs and "World Summits" for fifteen years, the turnout for UPF has seen little change. However, not being a for-profit-organisation in the first place, the UPF's continued engagement has been made possible largely due to the priority the organisation enjoyed in the founder's millenarian agenda, its continued promotion by the present UM leader Han, the dedication of committed rank and file members, and the relatively stable financial support from UM-related foundations. Until recently, the UM could also rely on the generous support of its Japanese branch. However, due to the Abe incident, an increased public scrutiny of

As Mun founded the UPF at the age of eighty-five, the organisation also served as the experimental setting for the attempt to pass on his authority to the next generation. Since the late 1990s, the declared heir apparent was Mun's third (and eldest living) son Mun Hyŏn-jin 문현진/文顯進 (b. 1969), alias Hyun Jin "Preston" Moon, an Olympic equestrian and graduate of Columbia University (BA in History, 1995), Harvard Business School (MBA, 1998), and the Unification Theological Seminary (MRE 2001). He first assumed a public role within the UM in 1998, when he was appointed Vice-President of the International FFWPU. Appearing in public as an "energetic speaker with a revivalist style," his primary focus had been the education of the movement's younger generation below the age of forty-eight before taking on the appointment as the chair of Unification Church International (UCI), the UM's US holding company, in 2006. This way, Hyŏn-jin was put in charge of the bulk of church assets in the US, including *The Washington Times* (Mickler 2013: 48). In 2007, Hyŏn-jin was appointed co-chair of UPF International, thus working side by side with his father-in-law Kwak.

The Global Peace Festival

The highlight of the UPF under Hyŏn-jin's helm was the organisation of the Global Peace Festival (GPF), a series of large-scale events that aimed to "promote peace through the arts, sports, service and education" (Walsh 2007b). The Korean National Assembly Hall and the City Hall of Seoul served as the first GPF venues in July 2007, only a few days after an ILC (Kim 2017: 132–133). Other festivals were held in Jerusalem, London, Paris, Frankfurt, and Cotonou (Benin). A major breakthrough for Hyŏn-jin's peace activism was the GPF held in December 2007 at the Quirino Grandstand in Manila, the Philippines. It attracted VIP support, including the public endorsement of Jose De Venecia Jr. (b. 1936), Speaker of the Philippine House of Representatives (2001–2018) as well as the Department of Education, the Philippine Information Agency, and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (Today's World 2008: 27–29). Its programme included public clean-ups, parades, dance and musical performances, and interfaith prayers. Additional features included addresses by both political and religious leaders, including De Venecia and Manila's mayor Alfredo Lim (1929–2020), as well as Martin Luther King III (b. 1957), son of the civil rights activist Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968). The event attracted a crowd of reportedly 200,000 people (Universal Peace Federation 2007).

The GPF's slogan "One Family under God" reportedly met with wide approval in a nation that has been marred by Muslim-Christian conflicts, in particular on its second-largest island Mindanao (Today's World 2008: 27). Striking a decidedly

the donation system of the Japanese FFWPU (cf. Pokorny and Zoehrer 2023) is expected to lead to significant cutbacks in UPF's budget.

supra-denominational and inclusive tone, these festivals aimed “to achieve a culture of peace and reconciliation among people of all nations, races, religions” (Universal Peace Federation 2007). Chu Tong-mun 주동문/朱東文 (aka Douglas Joo), a Unificationist elder, businessman, and president of *The Washington Times*, interpreted the slogan thus:

One family under God means no racism, no oppression. The culture of service is explained from the Divine Principle [i.e., the core Unificationist teaching’s] viewpoint, and people embrace these ideas without negativity. [...] [T]he vision has great value in its ability to uplift and motivate people by painting a picture of heaven on earth that is approachable, attainable (Moffitt 2008: 17).

Unificationist millenarianism formed the linchpin of the GPFs. The brand of public mass celebrations solemnising a better world to come gave maximum exposure to the Unificationist idealism encapsulated in a single motto. Larry Moffitt, then special assistant to Hyŏn-jin, put it this way: “The Global Peace Festival represents the world encountering Father’s [Mun’s] vision” (Moffitt 2008: 17).

The Manila event would set the bar for the format of more than twenty national-level GPFs that took place in 2008 on five continents (Walsh 2008; Goto 2008; Moffitt 2008).³⁴ By mid-2008, the GPF had advanced to become the central focus of the UPF. From July 2008 onwards, the ILCs were absorbed into the GPF programme, on which all human and financial resources subsequently focused. The comparably smaller ILC component was eclipsed by mass rallies, pop performances, and citywide service projects involving thousands of participants. At the same time, the number of ILCs increased with the number of GPFs. By the end of 2008, a GPF took place almost every week at a different location, often many thousands of miles apart (cf. Balcomb 2009: 170). For maximum visibility, Hyŏn-jin teamed up with local politicians, athletes, entertainers, and civil society activists. Seeking to popularise the UPF, he extended the organisation’s sphere of activity from what he perceived as an “ivory tower” of elitist discourse down to the “street level.”

Towards a Secularised Peace Movement?

Hyŏn-jin consistently presented the UPF as a comprehensive and inclusive peace movement and avoided terminology that would sound too sectarian. He thus preferred to speak in broad, generic terms about “God’s dream” rather than his father’s teachings, whose more idiosyncratic views Hyŏn-jin avoided to address in public (cf.

³⁴ The 2008 series of GPFs commenced in July with a city-wide celebration in Asunción, Paraguay, and concluded in late December with a festival in Haifa, Israel. The high-profile venues were as diverse as the United States Capitol Grounds, the Jomo Kenyatta Centre in Nairobi, Kenya, the Sukbaataar Square in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, as well as large-scale sports arenas in Japan, Solomon Islands, Malaysia, and Brazil (cf. Walsh 2009).

Global Peace Festival Foundation 2009). Moreover, he was convinced that Mun's objective was not to create "another religion." Throughout Hyön-jin's ministry, his stance regarding the UM's identity was "avowedly anti-theological and anti-institutional" as one Unificationist observer puts it (Mickler 2013: 50). He had already set this tone at his inaugural address as the President of World CARP, the UM's student organisation, on March 31, 2000:

Father's [i.e., Mun's] message goes beyond just religion. If what we believe and what we profess can be a way of life, as Father clearly said, there is no need for religion. Religion is a tool or a product in which fallen man can come once again closer to God, but the ultimate purpose is not just the liberation of the spirit but the liberation of spirit and body. We believe in building a substantial foundation, not just a faith-based foundation (Moon Hyun Jin 2000).³⁵

According to Hyön-jin, the UM ought to discard "its church-centered framework" and become "the model of an inter-religious, international, interracial movement that can unite all religions, nations and NGOs within the 'One Family Under God' peace movement" (Moon Hyun Jin 2007: 10–11, 13). He envisioned a movement that would bridge divisions by stressing humanity's common origin in God rather than urging others to adopt particularistic Unificationist beliefs and the blessing sacrament (Universal Peace Federation 2007). In this vein, Hyön-jin downplayed Unificationist denominational creeds, in particular its "Christology," which assumes Mun to be the "Lord of the Second Advent" (*chaerimju* 재림주/再臨主) in order to preserve the "universal appeal" of the *Divine Principle* (Balcomb 2009: 75–76).³⁶

The GPF motto "One Family under God" went hand in hand with the promotion of the UN's Millennium Development Goals.³⁷ While mostly tuning down religious language, Hyön-jin's GPF project enhanced its secular appearance by defining its official objectives in terms of the UN jargon of dialogue, co-operation, and prosperity.³⁸ Still, despite publicly negating the UPF's denominational identity, Hyön-jin de facto operated firmly within the millenarian time frame outlined by Mun. Thus, for example, he announced that God's dream of an ideal world of peace would be completed by February 22, 2013. This was the day that Mun had proclaimed as

³⁵ Cf. Hyön-jin's definition of his father's legacy following the latter's passing: "Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon is widely misrepresented and misunderstood as the founder of the Unification Church. However, his overarching purpose was never to establish a church. [...] Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon taught universal truths in order to reestablish a relationship between God and humanity. He did not seek to construct a new theology for a new religion. Many of the central points of his teachings are present in most religions, footprints of God's work to reconnect with humanity" (Moon Hyun Jin 2012).

³⁶ The *Wöllli kangnon* 원리강론/原理講論 (Exposition of the Principle), that is, the formerly chief canon book of Unificationists (Pokorny 2018b: 329–330).

³⁷ Cf. <https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml> (accessed: September 12, 2022).

³⁸ In the aftermath of his split from mainline Unificationism, Hyön-jin's GPF acquired the ECOSOC special consultative status in 2019 (United Nations Economic and Social Council 2021).

“Foundation Day” (*kiwŏnjŏl* 기원절/基元節), that is, the providential moment when the Unificationist millennium (Pokorny 2013a) was expected to come to fruition substantially (Moon 2007; cf. Kim 2017: 134). Furthermore, Hyŏn-jin did advocate a form of theology, although radically reduced to a few key points and shared only when addressing close adherents in less public settings. To this day Hyŏn-jin envisions himself as the rightful inheritor of his father’s spiritual foundation and thus being at the helm of divine providence (cf. Kim 2017: 78).

Criticism

Hyŏn-jin’s work force ultimately consisted of dedicated Unificationists. Setting up the GPFs was a tour de force that scooped out the human and financial resources of UPF and the UM businesses. Put in the words of the Unificationist historian Michael Mickler, “the GPFs were expensive and the pay-back was elusive” (Mickler 2013: 49).³⁹ Given the established *modus operandi* of Unificationist NGO activity, the argument of financial burden appears somewhat far-fetched. In any case, Hyŏn-jin’s work drew controversy and intense internal criticism. Resistance against him culminated in a “message from the spirit world” allegedly received by the Unificationist “court medium” Kim Hyo-nam 김효남/金孝南 (b. 1952),⁴⁰ but perhaps rather drafted by senior FFWPU leaders who were reportedly disgruntled by Hyŏn-jin’s sense of entitlement (Kim 2017: 164). In March 2009, Mun suspended Hyŏn-jin from his public missions. He asked Hyŏn-jin to accompany him for one year to receive spiritual training. However, Hyŏn-jin refused to fulfil his father’s request and continued his activities as planned.

Parting Ways

Meanwhile, Mun went on to pursue his own vision of an “Abel UN” as the crucial providential tool to usher in a new era on the Korean peninsula and the world/cosmos at large. The day following a mass blessing ceremony on October 14, 2009, Mun spoke extemporaneously to assembled guests at the *Ch’ŏnjŏnggung* 천정궁/天正宮 (Palace of Heavenly Righteousness) at the Unificationist headquarters in Songsan 송산/松山, fifty kilometres east of Seoul. Mun proclaimed that “we have gone beyond the UN” and the “kingdom of peace has begun.” Some three and a half years before the so-called Foundation Day, which Mun did not survive to see, he anchored the Abel UN within an abstract Korea-centric millenarian vision:

³⁹ A typical GPF would involve several hundred VIPs, whose flight and hotel accommodation needs to be covered; service projects; mass events in prestigious public venues, such as stadiums; greeting addresses by local dignitaries; and the production of glossy promotional publications (Mickler 2013: 49).

⁴⁰ On Kim Hyo-nam, see Pokorny 2017: 219–221.

From now on, those countries that join the Abel UN should speak in Korean, and conduct important events in Korean. They should us[e] the language that is the origin of the homeland centered on God and True Parents. [...] This [language] is the beginning and the destination of the world of culture centered on God. We have already passed our destination and a new era of Heaven has commenced. Therefore, we need to establish the traditions of the world of a new culture; for the first time in history a new culture is being begun (Moon Sun Myung 2009: 5).

In short, the elderly Mun's messianic self-understanding, growing theological exuberance and crypticism, salient Koreacentrism, and spontaneous style of leadership became increasingly incompatible with Hyön-jin's salvific self-image and his (at least outwardly) secularised, sober, and internationally oriented approach of peace activism. Ultimately (also prompted by increased factionalism with the wider UM leadership), the two Mun's "charismas" clashed, resulting in Hyön-jin's disassociation from mainline Unificationism in order to build his own organisation for realising world peace. Through the assets of the UCI, which Hyön-jin continued to chair (disputedly) and which had operated as the UPF's main sponsor, he secured a stable financial base. With control over the UCI, he had the means to operate independently from the mainline UM and create the Global Peace Foundation in late 2009.⁴¹ This episode was pivotal to the breakaway of Kwak and Hyön-jin from Mun and the (mainline) UM. The split was also a direct expression of the tension of UPF's self-identification as a broad civil social peace movement on the one hand, and an elongated arm of the FFWPU with close attachments to Mun's messianic charisma on the other hand.

The UPF as an Interfaith Platform and National Security Forum: The Hyöng-jin Period (2009–2013)

To Attend "True Parents"

Considering the relative success and public recognition the UPF enjoyed under Kwak and Hyön-jin, the decision to replace the two co-chairs with Mun Hyöng-jin 문형진/文亨進 (b. 1979; alias Hyung Jin "Sean" Moon) came as a surprise. Hyöng-jin, Mun's seventh and youngest son from his marriage with Han, is a graduate of Harvard College (Bachelor of Liberal Arts, 2003) and Harvard Divinity School (Master of Theological Studies, 2006). Well-known to Unificationists for his shaved head and avid interest in martial arts and Buddhist meditation practices, he rapidly climbed through the ranks of the UM. Whereas his first public role was ministering a small congregation in Seoul in 2007, he was soon entrusted with the position of international president of the FFWPU in April of the following year (Mickler 2013: 52). The leader-

⁴¹ The Global Peace Foundation describes itself as "non-sectarian," promoting "an innovative, values-based approach to peace building, guided by the vision of One Family under God." See <https://www.globalpeace.org/about-us> (accessed: October 27, 2022).

ship change that put Hyōng-jin in charge of the Unificationist flagship NGO was announced to UPF leaders by the headquarters office of the FFWPU on November 4, 2009—a move that was immediately contested by Hyōn-jin but to no avail.⁴²

At his inauguration as the chairman of UPF on November 18, 2009, Hyōng-jin struck a decisively denominational tone in stark contrast to Hyōn-jin’s inclusive style. He underscored the fundamentally religious identity of the Unification Movement that informs all its endeavours, including the UPF (Moon Hyung Jin 2009; Mun Hyōng-jin 2009).⁴³ Lauding the UM’s global expansion within the lifetime of its founder, he honoured the unwavering commitment of Unificationists to the providential cause, highlighting in particular the sacrifices made by the Japanese community:

[...] [T]he Japanese family members shed blood, sweat and tears for the whole world to support the economic foundation for the worldwide providence [including UPF activities]. Where does such a foundation come from? It comes from faith. Attending True Parents, our respected Japanese family members are making sacrifices for True Parents and for the whole world! They

⁴² On the same day, Hyōn-jin denounced the announcement in a letter addressed to UPF regional chairs, national leaders, and senior advisors. Questioning the authority of the FFWPU to make such decisions, he pointed out that the UPF “has been guided by the vision of my Father, and governed by a board of directors, and by the advice and guidance of the members of the Presiding Council and the Global Peace Council” (Moon Hyun Jin 2009). He formally announced his breakaway from mainline Unificationism—consisting of the FFWPU, the UPF, and associated organisations—by stating that “I remain as committed as ever to UPF’s original ideals and to my Father’s peace messages, and the vision of building one family under God. For this reason, I remain committed and will devote my heart and soul to developing the Global Peace Festival series in 2010 and the Global Peace Convention in Manila this December. These programs will not go forward as projects of UPF, and will have no formal or legal association with FFWPU. Rather, a separate GPF foundation is being established for this purpose. [...] Rest assured that the original vision of the UPF, and the roadmap to peace articulated by my Father will be carried forward with GPF” (ibid.). Hyōn-jin closed his letter with a statement that stressed his secularised/pluralistic interpretation of his father’s teachings, which would become the key mark of distinction of his ministry: “My Father’s ideal is a God-centered world in which people of every race, religion, nationality and culture live in harmony as members of one family under God. He did not intend to establish simply a church or new religion” (ibid.). Hyōn-jin’s disciples still defend the view that Mun envisaged a non-sectarian family movement that would lead into a new era of the ideal world that does not require religion for the salvation of humankind. Insisting that Mun never intended to create a traditional church structure, they accuse the FFWPU of denominationalism and a clericalised leadership. Thus, the current FFWPU would violate the purpose with which it was originally founded: to transcend religious boundaries and disseminate true family values as a decentralised, quasi-secular movement (cf. Marshall 2022).

⁴³ Whereas transcripts of the original address have been removed from official Unificationist websites, they can still be found in the Korean blogosphere. An official English translation is available as a short excerpt at <https://www.upf.org/resources/speeches-and-articles/2433-inauguration-speech> (accessed: September 15, 2022).

are the warriors who have fought for the Church and all institutions. [...] Because of such faith, the Unification Church was able to come this far (Mun Hyöng-jin 2009).⁴⁴

In other words, it is religious fervour that ultimately drives the UM, not expensive conferences in fancy hotel rooms or supranational institutions. Testifying to his father's messianic status, Hyöng-jin stated that “[w]e need to know that his identity was not only that of a patriot, world peace leader, and religious person, but also as the messiah, saviour, and True Parents” (Mun Hyöng-jin 2009).⁴⁵ He thus criticised the secular approach of his older brother Hyön-jin, who vocally de-emphasised the religious roots of the UPF and their father's self-understanding. Whereas Hyön-jin attempted to rebrand the UPF as a trans-denominational civil movement, Hyöng-jin tied the organisation back to its founder's sphere of influence (Bromley and Blonner 2012: 91–92).⁴⁶ He openly declared that Mun gave the instruction “to merge all religions into one family that attends True Parents” (Mun Hyöng-jin 2009).⁴⁷

Disseminating the (Marriage) Blessing

In Hyöng-jin's view, the UM—whose religious core body, the FFWPU, he renamed as “Unification Church” (*T'ongilgyo* 통일교/統一敎) in July 2009—has the sole purpose of glorifying and attending True Parents.⁴⁸ As a consequence, “One Family under God” is not supposed to remain an abstract ideal but must be ritually enacted through participation in the (marriage) blessing centring on “True Parents of Heaven, Earth and Humankind” (*ch'önjin ch'am pumonim* 천지인[天地人]참부모님), that

⁴⁴ 특별히 일본의 식구들이 전 세계를 위해 피와 땀과 눈물을 흘려 세계 섭리를 위한 경제적 기반을 지원했습니다. 그런 기반이 어디에서 옵니까 바로 신앙에서 옵니다. 참부모님을 모시고 참부모님을 위해, 전 세계를 위해 희생하고 활동하시는 우리 일본 식구님들! 그 분들이 교회와 모든 기관들을 위해 싸운 용사들입니다. [...] 그런 신앙 때문에 통일교가 여기까지 올 수 있었습니다.

⁴⁵ 애국가, 세계평화지도자, 종교인만이 아니라 메시아, 구세주, 참부모로서의 정체성을 알게 해야 합니다.

⁴⁶ Already at his inauguration as the International President of FFWPU on April 18, 2008, Hyöng-jin announced that he was going to steer the FFWPU into a more confidently religious direction: “I studied religion for seven years [...]. No matter how much we say we are not a religion, in the eyes of religious scholars and society, we are most definitely a religion. [...] [I]f we were to eliminate the religious aspect of our movement, would we be any different from a social movement? [...] We manifestly have a theology, our Divine Principle and True Father's teachings and we have True Father himself. Therefore, without a doubt we should strengthen our church. I strongly believe that we need to develop our church further, so that more people can support True Parents' mission” (Moon Hyung Jin 2008: 23).

⁴⁷ 모든 종교를 참부모님 모시고 한 가정으로 만들 수 있는 사명을 주신 것입니다.

⁴⁸ This understanding coincides with the way one Korean elder, a retired Professor of Sun Moon University, explained the ultimate purpose of the UPF, which is “to worship True Parents” (personal communication, August 15, 2022).

is, Mun and Han. In his inaugural address as UPF chairman, Hyōng-jin remarked that the primary objective of the UPF is to bring about a profound spiritual transformation for the entire human race. The only approach to that end is the dissemination of a central Unificationist sacrament, the blessing (*ch'ukpok* 축복/祝福). Also called the “World Peace Blessing Ceremony” (*segye p'yōnghawa ch'ukpoksik* 세계평화축복식/世界平和祝福式), the ceremony aspires to unite in marriage men and women of all races, nationality, and creed (Balcomb 2010a: 3; cf. Pokorny 2018a). Although UPF events have featured simple blessing ceremonies before, Hyōng-jin advocated for a much closer relationship between the UPF and the FFWPU by emphasising the latter’s key ritual and bringing marriage and family values to the forefront.⁴⁹

In this vein, Hyōng-jin held a UPF Interfaith Assembly on the premises of the *Ch'ōnbokkung* 천복궁/天福宮 (literally: Palace of Heavenly Blessing) in Yongsan 용산/龍山, Seoul, on October 9, 2010.⁵⁰ Representatives of seven faith traditions, including Sunni Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Shintō, Christianity, Buddhism, and the Druze faith gathered for prayers, readings, and the consecration of the *Ch'ōnbokkung*’s main sanctuary. The following day, the dignitaries attended a mass blessing ceremony as honorary guests, with some receiving the blessing themselves (Today’s World 2010; cf. Balcomb 2011).

Promotion of an Interreligious Council as a UN Body

Substantially reducing civil social engagement, service projects, and grand festivals, Hyōng-jin refocused efforts on interfaith outreach, including the UPF’s advocacy of an interreligious council, which was a key feature in Mun’s plan to reshape the UN. During August and September 2010, three consultations about the UPF’s proposal for an interreligious council at the UN took place in Geneva and Bern, Switzerland. Participants included representatives of mainline religious traditions and the UM as well as representatives of government missions at the UN, academic institutions, and international NGOs. Various possible models for the proposed council were discussed, *inter alia*, the advisory committee of the UN Human Rights Council (consisting of eighteen experts), the World Council of Churches (which considers theological and

⁴⁹ For example, Hyōng-jin declared that “[t]here is no better way to create a world of peace than by strengthening marriages and building God-centered families. Father Moon teaches us that peace is rooted in the family; the family is rooted in God; and God’s essence is true love. In this way, on the foundation of the individual and family centered on God, we can expand the realm of peace to other levels, to the tribe, society, nation and world” (Moon Hyung Jin 2011a).

⁵⁰ Having first opened on February 21, 2010, the *Ch'ōnbokkung* has a capacity of 20,000 persons and served at the time as the world headquarters church of the FFWPU. This building was regarded as the predecessor to another building that would serve not only as “the World Unification Church Headquarters but also [as] the international headquarters of the Abel UN and all providential organizations founded by True Parents” (Cromwell 2010; cf. Moon Hyung Jin 2011b).

demographic criteria in its representation), the House of Lords in the UK (whose members include religious dignitaries), and the Swiss Council of Religions. Several options were examined regarding the criteria of selecting representatives, the standards required of council delegates, and the advisory function of the council towards the UN Secretary-General (Handschin 2011).

However, ultimately, the project of a UN-associated interreligious council has been put on hold for three main reasons.⁵¹ First, the idea that religion could guide politics due to its own virtue and wisdom rooted in a long-standing tradition is now regarded presumptuous. Religious representatives cannot generally claim to profess higher ethical standards than politicians. Likewise, none of the religious bodies constituting the interreligious council could purport immunity to ideological subversion and ulterior motives. Thus, even if it served as an advisory board to the UN general assembly, the moral authority of such a council would be questionable from the outset. Second, in order to preserve their dignity, established religious traditions are likely to decline their participation in an interfaith council together with new religious movements they regard as “cults” and potential competitors. However, the UPF sees no point in endorsing an interreligious council if there is a high probability that the FFWPU’s voice was to be excluded. Third, since Mun’s first proposal of an interreligious council in 2000 and in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks, several UN initiatives have already been launched that openly invite religions to engage in dialogue within a UN framework. The most prominent of these initiatives is the Interfaith Harmony Week, which is celebrated by places of worship and NGOs around the world (including the UPF) in the first week of February every year (Pople 2012).⁵² At last, the current leadership of the UPF has come to deem Mun’s initial proposal to launch an interreligious council at the UN not feasible at this point.

Focus on National Security and Anti-Communism

Next to the interfaith aspect, the UPF under Hyōng-jin’s chairmanship emphasised national security as a key objective in its overall strategy. In late 2010, the UPF resumed its “World Assemblies.” A series of three assemblies were held in New York, Las Vegas, and Seoul. Apart from religious dignitaries, the events hosted politicians, diplomats, and military strategists (Walsh 2011a). In a sermon to the congregation at

⁵¹ Personal Interview with Thomas G. Walsh on March 1, 2022. For a more detailed analysis of the fate of Mun’s proposal of an interreligious council at the UN, see Mickler 2008.

⁵² The initiative was proposed in 2010 by King Abdullah II (b. 1962) and Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad (b. 1966) of Jordan and unanimously adopted by the UN General Assembly. Cf. <https://www.un.org/en/observances/interfaith-harmony-week> (accessed: October 19, 2022). Although UN-endorsed interfaith activities are a far cry from Mun’s idea of an interreligious council with consultative authority at the General Assembly, they have intensified the engagement of religious organisations with the UN.

the *Ch'önbokkung* on December 18, 2011, Hyöng-jin conveyed his realisations regarding the political dimension of the Abel UN:

As you know, many lack confidence that the UN has the power to resolve the problems of the world and doubt that it will be able to block the fearsome forces that are gathering. In light of this, in 2004, Father [i.e., Mun] declared the establishment of the Abel UN.⁵³ [...] I felt spiritually that if the Unification Church family were to help bring Korea and Japan together in the area of national defense [...] because they comprehend the threat of communist powers, this would be the beginning of the substantial Abel UN (Moon Hyung Jin 2011b: 12).

This remark underlines that Hyöng-jin did not limit UPF activities to (mostly symbolic) interfaith work but remained conscious of the organisation's key political objective: Korean reunification. A strategic aim to this end was the preservation of South Korean defensive abilities and the reinforcement of the country's alliance with Japan. Together with the US the two nations ought to form a bulwark of "democracy and freedom" against communist aggressors and safeguard peace in the Pacific region. He continued:

The strong democratic countries in the Pacific region must bring their strength together as quickly as possible, for the communist realm is currently expanding, increasing in military strength and producing weapons, and we may soon face a major crisis. In this era, no one other than our Korean-Japanese families, and furthermore, all families in the Unification Church hold the solution. Only the Unificationist families can bring peace to the Pacific region. [...] Countries in the Abel realm, the countries that uphold democracy and freedom, must establish the Abel UN and thereby bring about peace in the Pacific Rim era and protect it. If this comes to pass, then Father will become the substantial savior of the Pacific region (Moon Hyung Jin 2011b: 12–13).⁵⁴

At this point, Hyöng-jin reactivated the earlier avertive Unificationist millenarianism of the 1950s and 1960s:

As you know, Divine Principle prophesies a third world war. There are two ways for this to happen. The first way is for an actual war of nations' military forces to break out. The second way is for it to be an ideological war. It is certain that a third world war will come, but if the Abel UN can be established and, as a result, we can block the outbreak of an actual war involving troops and weapons, then True Parents will indeed become the savior of the substantial world (Moon Hyung Jin 2011b: 13).

⁵³ In fact, he already did so in 2003. See Pokorny and Zoehrer 2022: 7.

⁵⁴ See also Hyöng-jin's remark in an interview he gave in March 2012: "We don't want nations to fall into subservience [to communist states]. Do we want to live that kind of world? The Unification Church has to fight to stop that. No one else is doing that. We have to bring nations into the Abel UN, and stop the steady rise of dictators. It's part of the good fight" (Moon Hyung Jin 2012: 24).

Honouring Legacies of Peace

During Hyōng-jin's chairmanship, Mun proved once more that he was still capable of imprinting his stamp on the UPF's activities as its founder. When Mun heard of the passing of Alexander M. Haig Jr. (1924–2010), a statesman and former general who had participated in several campaigns in the Korean War, he directed the UPF to hold a “Memorial Festival of Ascension and Unity” on March 18, 2010, at the United Nations Secretariat Building in New York to appropriately honour Haig's life and work.⁵⁵ This ceremony was broadened to include the recognition of the more than one hundred UN personnel killed in the 2010 Haiti earthquake as well as a number of high-ranking politicians who had recently passed away and had been close friends of the UPF. Following this memorial festival, a series of “Legacy of Peace” events was rolled out in Washington D.C., Las Vegas, and Honolulu. After each memorial ceremony, where departed local personalities were also commemorated, Mun would address the audience with impromptu remarks about the nature of life and death (Balcomb 2010b).

Such interventions on the part of the founder aside, the main feature of Hyōng-jin's chairmanship of the UPF was the twofold thematic focus on interfaith outreach in the name of Unificationism on the one hand and preparedness for a military conflict between communist and democratic nations on the other hand (see Balcomb 2012). From 2013, shortly following Mun's passing, Hyōng-jin's standing (alongside that of two of his siblings-cum-closest supporters) within the Korean FFWPU in general and the relationship with his mother in particular deteriorated quickly, resulting in his ultimate split from the UM in 2015. He subsequently formed his own group in the small village of Newfoundland, Pennsylvania, incorporated as “World Peace and Unification Sanctuary” in the same year. His so-called “Rod of Iron Ministry” stridently reinforces his emphasis on an unapologetic religious identity and, notably, the right to carry arms (Moon Hyung Jin Sean 2018).

The Post-Mun Solidification of the UPF as an Umbrella for Unificationist Peace Initiatives: The Walsh Period (2013–present)

Following Mun's death on September 3, 2012, his wife assumed the sole authority over the UM. In the wake of her husband's passing, Han announced her vision to revitalise the church and recover the vibrant spirit of its early days in the 1950s and 1960s. Taking a surprisingly critical stance on Mun's manifold but mostly short-lived initiatives, Han announced that she would reduce the number of projects outside the framework of the FFWPU and focus on proselytising efforts. Consequently, she sold

⁵⁵ Regarding this ceremony and a comprehensive account on the Unificationist funerary tradition, see Pokorny 2020.

Mun's customised Sikorsky S-92 helicopter, cancelled the expensive biennial international soccer tournament Peace Cup that the movement sponsored between 2003 and 2012, and sold a major share of the North Korean auto manufacturer Pyeonghwa Motors (*P'yŏnghwa chadongch'a* 평화자동차/平和自動車) (Mickler 2013: 58–59). Therefore, UM leaders speculated that Han would let the UPF phase out and focus instead on revival and evangelisation through the FFWPU. However, despite her first intentions to introduce an austere back-to-basics approach, Han's leadership eventually did not result in any significant cuts to the work of the UPF. On the contrary, the UPF in fact turned out to be promoted more than ever as the UM's most dominant outreach strategy.

In this respect, Han communicated her desire for a more cohesive message of the UM, stating that “[a]ll NGOs we have worked with until now, whether UPF, FFWPU, WFWP, etc., must come under Heavenly Parents' [*hanŭl pumonim* 하늘부모님, i.e., God's] great umbrella and testify about Heavenly Parents 120 per cent” (FFWPU International Headquarters 2020).⁵⁶ She thus reorganised the UM organisational core into three main groups: first, the FFWPU, which has a strong focus on religious community life and proselytisation; second, the International Association of Youth and Students for Peace (IAYSP; *Segye P'yŏnghwa Ch'ŏngnyŏn Haksaeng Yŏnhap* 세계평화청년학생연합/世界平和青年學生聯合),⁵⁷ which is tasked with imbuing young people with character education and family values; and third, the UPF, which is commissioned to destigmatise the UM as a whole and enhance its reputation as a serious peace movement. Like Mun, Han assigns the UPF a crucial role in the Unificationist millenarian quest.

Whereas Mun and Han have provided the necessary human and financial resources to the UPF, the mastermind and executive force behind the UPF ever since its inception is Thomas G. Walsh, the NGO's secretary general (2005–2013) and chairman from 2013 onwards following Mun Hyŏng-jin's ousting. Holding a doctoral degree from Vanderbilt University (Nashville, Tennessee) in the field of religious ethics, Walsh has been active as a teacher, author, and editor, serving the UPF and its predecessor organisations in a leadership role for more than forty years (cf. Balcomb 2009: 14). Under Walsh's chairmanship in the post-Mun era, UPF activities have seen an increased focus on themes related to the global UN agenda, including the Millennium Development Goals (2000–2015) and the Sustainable Development Goals (2016–2030) (Walsh 2012; 2015). He deprioritised the UPF's original task to reform

⁵⁶ 하늘부모님의 큰 우산 아래 그동안 우리가 해왔던 엔지오(NGO; 비정부기구), 천주평화연합 [UPF], 가정연합 [FFWPU], 여성연합 [WFWP] 등 모든 것이 들어가서 120 퍼센트 하늘부모님을 증거해야 됩니다.

⁵⁷ The IAYSP was formally launched in February 2017 and focuses its activities on Africa, South America, Asia, and the Pacific region, although smaller chapters also exist in America and Europe. See <https://iaysp.org/> (accessed: February 23, 2022).

the UN and allocated resources to acknowledge activists engaged in areas expected to draw more positive publicity, such as refugee aid, climate change, and global health.

In 2013, Walsh resumed the UPF's tradition of hosting annual World Summits. Conferences continue to take place at local, regional, and international levels. Its international summits continue to gather former (and occasionally current) presidents and prime ministers, as well as representatives of religion, culture, and civil society. The venues of these conferences highlight the global reach of UPF, for example: the Continental Africa Peace Summit held in Dakar, Senegal (2018); the South-east Europe Peace Summit in Tirana, Albania (2019); or the Asia Pacific Summit in Phnom Penh, Cambodia (2019).

Pulling together the strings of the most important UM-related NGOs, many of which have their beginnings before the formal founding of UPF in 2005, the UPF now consolidates an array of seven subgroups. These include:

- (1) the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP; *Segye P'yŏnghwa Kukhoe Ŭiwŏn Yŏnhap* 세계평화국회의원연합/世界平和國會議員聯合), launched at the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea on February 15, 2016;
- (2) the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD; *Segye P'yŏnghwa Chonggyoin Yŏnhap* 세계평화종교인연합/世界平和宗教人聯合), launched in 2017;
- (3) the International Summit Council for Peace (ISCP; *Segye P'yŏnghwa Chŏngsang Yŏnhap* 세계평화정상연합/世界平和頂上聯合), launched in 2019;
- (4) the International Media Association for Peace (IMAP; *Segye P'yŏnghwa Ŏllonin Yŏnhap* 세계평화언론인연합/世界平和言論人聯合), launched at the UPF World Summit on February 2, 2020;
- (5) the International Association of First Ladies for Peace (IAFLP; *Segye P'yŏnghwa Yŏngbuin Yŏnhap* 세계평화영부인연합/世界平和令夫人聯合), launched in 2020;
- (6) the International Association of Academicians for Peace (IAAP; *Segye P'yŏnghwa Haksurin Yŏnhap* 세계평화학술인연합/世界平和學術人聯合), launched in 2020;
- (7) the International Association for Peace and Economic Development (IAED; *Segye P'yŏnghwa Kyŏngjein Yŏnhap* 세계평화경제인연합/世界平和經濟人聯合), launched in 2020.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ An eighth NGO, the International Association of Arts and Culture for Peace (IAACP; *Segye P'yŏnghwa Yesurin Yŏnhap* 세계평화예술인연합/世界平和藝術人聯合), was announced in 2020 but has not yet formally launched.

Peace activism has not fallen short either. In 2015, the UPF initiated Peace Road, a series of regional events of marches, hikes, marathons, and cycling tours that seek to draw public attention to Mun’s vision of an “International Peace Highway” first proposed in 1981.

The UPF is now overseeing and streamlining the bulk of UM-related NGOs and peace initiatives. After a three-year mourning period following the death of Mun, the UPF has facilitated several new projects, including the Sunhak Peace Prize (*sŏnhak p’yŏnghwasang* 선학평화상/鮮鶴平和賞; an alternative Nobel Peace Prize first awarded in 2015), the Rally of Hope series (starting in 2018), and the Think Tank 2022 (a forum for exploring paths to reconcile the two Koreas). While aligned with the UPF’s broader vision, these projects pursue more narrow objectives, address specialised target groups, and hold their own events.

The UPF has also intensified the Korea-centrism of Mun’s later ministry. Whereas New York City and Washington D.C. served as the main venues for international UPF events in its early years, the focus has now shifted to Seoul and the UM’s headquarters at the shore of Lake Ch’ŏngp’yŏng 청평/淸平. This development is in part due to practical reasons and in part inspired by Mun’s millenarian vision of creating a city-state on Korean soil modelled after the Vatican (cf. Pokorny and Zoehrer 2022; 2023).

A notable shift has occurred in the focus of the UPF’s activities following Han’s directions and Walsh’s execution thereof. The emphasis on interfaith work, originally a major pillar of the UPF, has retreated to the background in favour of a stronger outreach to political figures. And once more, the issue of national security in South Korea and Japan has become the centrepiece of international UPF conferences and its affiliated project Think Tank 2022.

External and Internal Challenges

The UPF’s trajectory has been decisively influenced by both external and internal factors. Among the external challenges that have contributed to shaping the UPF’s identity, objectives, thematic focus, and methodology are: first, the UM’s problematic public image; second, the UN standards set for affiliated NGOs constraining the UPF’s millenarian passion; and third, the political and social climate in the UPF’s constituent countries.

External Challenges

Public Image

Internally, the UPF is expected to foster public recognition of the UM's peace-building efforts and thus contribute to destigmatising the broader movement, endowing it with a more robust social status.⁵⁹ Most indicative of the acknowledgment of the UPF as a recognised contributor to peace and development is its attainment of the ECOSOC general consultative status. Next to this breakthrough in the secular realm is the UPF's gradual development of a working relationship with established churches. On January 13, 2014, Walsh and the secretary general of UPF-Argentina Miguel Werner were invited to a consultation of the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences on the Syria conflict.⁶⁰ The event exemplifies that, in certain (conservative) circles, the (post-Mun) UPF is perceived as a partner in the field of dialogue on conflict resolution and reconciliation.⁶¹ However, so far the Vatican has hesitated to send a public message of support to UPF events, a highly symbolic act that could easily be misconstrued as the pope's endorsement of Unification theology.

Next to its broader peace-building agenda, the UPF has indeed functioned as a diplomatic outpost aimed at "worshipping True Parents" in a public, solemn, but mostly discreet and elitist manner. However, in particular during the Kwak/ Hyōn-jin and Walsh chairmanships, the UPF has kept its profile clearly distinguished from the FFWPU. Therefore, it would be a distortion to view the UPF only as a publicity machine tasked to restore the tarnished public image of the UM's core religious organisation. As the Abe incident has shown, the UPF seeks to preserve an all-embracing, reconciliatory demeanour and has mostly shied away from open confrontation with the anti-cult movement, radical political groups, and aggressive media coverage. The UM's defensive battle continues to be carried out primarily by FFWPU core members, lawyers, and allied human rights organisations.⁶²

The UPF has gone to great lengths to standardise and professionalise its public appearance, adjusting its programmes to meet the standards of the UN culture,

⁵⁹ Personal Interview with Thomas G. Walsh on February 22, 2022.

⁶⁰ For example, see <https://www.upf.org/interfaith-programs/5571-pontifical-academy-of-sciences-convenes-consultation-on-syria> (accessed: October 19, 2022).

⁶¹ Efforts are made to maintain the relationship with the Vatican. On July 1, 2019, Pope Francis received a UPF delegation in a private audience. The meeting has been indexed in the Press Bulletin of the Holy See. See <https://www.upf.org/peace-education-and-human-development/peace-education-reports/8562-upf-delegation-meets-with-pope-francis-at-vatican> and <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2019/07/01/0567/01173.html>, respectively (accessed: October 19, 2022).

⁶² See, for example, the complaint on the persecution of the UM in Japan submitted by the Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience (CAP-LC) to the Human Rights Committee in October 2022 (CAP-LC 2022).

and thus attain an air of public respectability. Yet, the very identity of the UPF as a diplomatic enterprise of Unificationism poses a natural challenge in this respect. This is because the UPF cannot be extracted from its religious matrix, which is no stranger to controversy.

Hovering Between Religious Profile and Secular Standards

The UPF's work is markedly shaped by its hovering between the Unificationist religious and charisma-oriented profile on the one hand and its adaptation to standards set for UN-affiliated NGOs on the other. Without doubt, the determining factor behind the UPF's drive and normative orientation remains Mun's millenarian and axiological visions, however they may be interpreted by its respective leadership. Nevertheless, like other faith-based organisations associated with the UN, the UPF finds itself subject to the same constraints as non-religious NGOs, which implies operating in an environment characterised by an overwhelmingly liberal-secular outlook. The UPF's general compliance with the UN's values and objectives, including, for example, the sustainable development goals, and its abstention from using language and promoting views considered to be diplomatically untenable,⁶³ reflects a pragmatic approach that enhances its engagement with international institutions and networks and endows the organisation with growing legitimacy and credibility.

Karsten Lehmann (2016: 177, 182) argued that the engagement of religious bodies with the UN gradually changes their own make-up towards a form of secularisation, resulting in a shift in their contribution from "church diplomacy" to "civil society activism." There is some indication that this dynamic indeed plays out to some degree in the case of the UPF and the wider UM. As for the former, the organisation has become part and parcel of the UN-affiliated NGO landscape. This is underlined by the organisation's involvement with events of high symbolic value, for example, the tenth anniversary memorial service for the victims of the 9/11 attacks convened by the UN General Assembly in New York, to which the UPF sponsored the musical offering of the New York City Symphony (Kagawa 2011b). Furthermore, the NGO has cultivated a broad rapport with the UN system, for example, by regularly observing the UN-designated International Day of Peace (September 21) and the Interfaith Harmony Week (the first week of February), as well as by submitting its quadrennial report on its worldwide activities.⁶⁴ Buzzwords such as dialogue, tolerance, harmony, mutual understanding, sustainability, and development are virtually omnipresent in

⁶³ Such include, among others, the Unificationist rejection of homosexuality or non-binary gender identities, which are antithetical to key doctrinal tenets. With some exceptions occurring at the local level, the UPF generally bypasses the subject all along.

⁶⁴ Other UN days supported by UPF events are the International Women's Day (March 8), the International Day of Families (May 15), and the Global Day of Parents (June 1). See <https://www.upf.org/united-nations> (accessed: September 11, 2022).

current UN-related discourses. The high-profile UPF events are no exception, and its organisers (and most participants) are “singing from the same song sheet” (Haynes 2019: 172). UN-affiliated NGOs need to apply this rhetoric to signal conformity with the current international order and place their non-binding suggestions for change in a cautious and respectful manner.

However, the UPF’s efforts to make inroads in the secular realm are not limited to UN events and rhetoric but have repercussions on the UM’s own self-understanding. One way in which the relative success of the UPF has a substantial retroactive effect on the UM is the reframing of its leadership training. The Unification Theological Seminary (UTS), established in Barrytown, New York, in 1975, has traditionally been the cadre factory for the international FFWPU and other UM-related organisations, including the UPF. On October 10, 2022, Thomas G. Walsh, himself a UTS alumni, was inaugurated as the seventh president of UTS. Whereas UTS will retain classes in Unification theology, Walsh has been commissioned to create a graduate school that offers courses in peace studies, diplomacy, and international relations. This development clearly indicates that, at least internationally, the UM will keep increasing its focus on peace-building activism while cutting back traditional forms of proselytisation and church growth. Overall, the diplomatic arena in which the UPF is manoeuvring adheres to a clearly stipulated code of conduct that has to some extent “domesticated” the Unificationist idiom. However, the specific millenarian and axiological nomenclature upon which Unificationism rests, and thus sets the intrinsic impulse for the UPF’s trajectory, *ab ovo* renders the latter’s frame of action challenging. The UPF’s very activities are a balancing act, marshalling core Unificationist ideas to an extent that is still tolerated within the diplomatic realm.

Regional Specifics

The engagement of the UPF’s national branches is not equally distributed worldwide, often depending not only on existing UM infrastructure but also on local interest and political climate. Whereas the US-American UM was less comfortable with the UPF’s wider multicultural approach,⁶⁵ the organisation has rapidly evolved to become an attractive field of activity in Latin America, Europe (in particular, the Balkans), and several African nations—such as Senegal and Zambia. South East Asia has also proven a fertile ground for the UPF’s development and expansion, in particular Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Centring on the Philippines, the UPF has launched the Pacific Christian Leadership Conference in October 2021, an ecumenical network dedicated to strengthening “freedom, faith, and family” in the region (UPF

⁶⁵ The US branch of the UM has rather focused its resources on building alliances with Afro-American pastors through the framework of the American Clergy Leadership Coalition (ACLC), founded in 2000. See <https://www.aclc.info/> (accessed: October 9, 2022).

USA 2022b). In areas where conventional proselytising is risky, the non-denominational format of intercultural UPF events has proved a safer way for Unificationist outreach. Still, restrictive and authoritarian states in the Islamic sphere and Eurasia, most notably Russia and China, are rather unwelcoming towards international NGOs. Important exceptions are Nepal and Cambodia. Over the years, the UPF has developed close government-level ties with these two countries with the hope of cultivating diplomatic relations with North Korea.⁶⁶

In Japan, the major outlets for Unificationist NGO engagement have been the IFVOC and FWP, whereas the importance of the UPF in Japan has gradually grown under Han’s leadership. Through its sub-organisation, the IAPP, the UPF Japan has built a base with Japan’s members of parliament by placing national security as its top concern. The UPF’s outreach efforts in Japan have been critically damped by the Abe incident. At this point, it is unclear whether and how the UPF’s Japanese branch will continue its operations.

In the Unificationist homeland South Korea, the role of the UPF has been rigorously reinforced since 2013. In its early phase, the UPF’s World Summits on peace used to take place primarily in New York. However, in the past decade, the venue for its major international conferences shifted to South Korea as did its thematic focus, thus reflecting the growing Korea-centrism of the wider UM. Since 2013, the Korean movement serves as the host for the annual ILCs or World Summits, which usually take place in Seoul and at the UM’s Ch’öngp’yöng headquarters. In terms of mobilising power, the UPF belongs to the ranks of NGOs that are most enthusiastically lobbying for a peaceful reunification of the Koreas. Its only serious rival in this regard is a UM-breakaway group: Hyön-jin’s Global Peace Foundation and its flagship projects Action for Korea United, a coalition of NGOs promoting peaceful reunification,⁶⁷ and One Korea Global Campaign, which aims to rally international support for a “unified, free, and independent nation” (Global Peace Foundation 2019: 2).

The quite varied cultural and socio-political environment in which the UPF operates to some extent thematically predetermines the effective scope of action. This compartmentalises the UPF’s general operation plan into a range of units more often than not limited to local chapters only.

Internal Challenges

Two main internal factors contribute to the dynamics of the UPF’s operations and bear potential conflict: first, a tension between the UPF’s high investments and meagre returns in terms of substantial commitment to the Unificationist cause; and second, the FFWPU’s ongoing succession struggle.

⁶⁶ Personal Interview with Thomas G. Walsh on February 22, 2022.

⁶⁷ See <http://koreaunited.kr/> (accessed: November 9, 2022).

Prioritising Networking over Evangelising: Is It Worth the Investment?

Its ambition to reform the UN notwithstanding, the UPF is effectively modelled after the UN in many ways, including its broad field of activity that seeks to have a “universal” impact. The dispersion of the UPF’s focus and resources raises the question (among a growing number of internal critics) of how substantial its return on investment is (incidentally, a critique that is often hurled at the UN bureaucracy itself).

One key to the UPF’s appeal to non-Unificationists is that it provides guests (Ambassadors for Peace) relatively easy access to high-profile international events and networks. In fact, whereas attendees expressed some appreciation for the explicitly Unificationist elements of UPF programmes, higher value was attributed to the welcome banquets and breaks as these occasions offer ample opportunity for socialising and informal interaction (Balcomb 2009: 186–218). However, such benefits are enjoyed virtually without any cost or long-term commitment on behalf of the attendees.

Faith-based organisations typically face the challenge of determining the effectiveness of their approach. This task is complicated by the fact that the aims and strategies of religious NGOs are less readily quantifiable. How does one measure spiritual guidance, peace building, personal or social transformation, and progress towards *Ch’ŏnilguk*? How is the organisation’s success in realising its millenarian mission supposed to be assessed? Which criteria determine what counts as a positive outcome? The question of evaluation standards inevitably emerges wherever the distribution of financial resources is open to debate (Berger 2003: 36).

A notable benefit the UPF gains in particular from its international conferences lies in bringing a high-status audience to “attend True Parents.” For example, in February 2022, former UN Secretary General Pan Ki-mun 반기문/潘基文 (Ban Ki-moon; b. 1944; p. 2007–2016) and the Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen (b. 1952), who are both co-chairs of the Think Tank 2022, shared a stage with Han during the UPF World Summit in February 2022. Such encounters with “shakers and makers” have always been crucial to the founding couple, and the effort to realise them has been a driving force behind the Unificationist enterprise. This publicity keeps being greatly appreciated by rank and file Unificationists, especially in South Korea and Japan where it is also instrumentalised to improve the markedly negative image of the UM among the public, and more significantly, the stakeholders of domestic politics and civil society.

The essence of a diplomatic club is not so much what it *does*. It is who it is *connected* with that determines its reputation and credibility. Walsh underscores the utility of the UPF as an outreach tool thus: “Every relationship is a credential. We try to leverage our connections.”⁶⁸ Another UPF official explained that the “UPF is about

⁶⁸ Personal Interview with Thomas G. Walsh on March 18, 2022.

give-and-take action [i.e., a key Unification theological tenet], the forming of deep and meaningful relationships.” In other words, the UPF’s chief intention is not conventional evangelisation in terms of making new FFWPU members here and now, but rather the more general missionary work encompassing the building of networks and the steady dissemination of “universal spiritual values” into secular contexts, such as diplomacy, governance, academia, and the media (Balcomb 2009: 10).

Not all Unificationists share the optimism of the UPF staff. Among some longstanding FFWPU members, the UPF’s mandate of inclusivity and self-restraint has led to a certain degree of disillusionment. They doubt that the NGO’s watered-down message in the name of “doctrinal humility” (Cornille 2009) will generate visible results in terms of new members (cf. Balcomb 2009: 10). The UPF’s high-profile conferences supposedly lack sustainable impact because they do not help people to undergo conversion and thereby fully commit to kingdom-building.

Unlike the FFWPU, the UPF is unable to deliver the experience of profound personal transformation attained by fully immersing oneself in Unificationist doctrine. As one member put it, the “UPF fails to convey the essence about God, the spirit world, and True Parents. It’s a talking shop. Nobody among the UPF leadership dares to share the truth.”⁶⁹ However, for UPF exponents, the realisation of the NGO’s political long-term aims—the renewal of the UN and the reunification of the Korean peninsula—will require greater leverage than what the UM’s core membership alone can provide. And as long as the UPF receives Han’s full support, the organisation will stow away any internal criticism. Yet, a more pressing issue the UPF cannot ignore is the question of how to transition leadership from one generation to the next.

Generational Transition

The discussion above has to some extent shown how intricately the UPF is intertwined with the quasi-dynastic succession struggles of the Mun family and the UM’s ongoing crisis of identity. The founder’s two attempts to install a son as UPF chairman proved relatively short-lived in both cases. Whereas Hyön-jin was not willing to proactively extol his father’s messianity and the UM’s religious character, Hyöng-jin was formally dismissed by his mother for failing to demonstrate filial piety towards herself. As long as the UM operates in a salvific leader-centred manner, its outreach projects—including the UPF—will be affected by family disputes and related legal battles. Until the simmering question of succession within the UM has been resolved, the UPF does not rest on solid institutional grounds.

The UM’s inherent ambiguities that so far were held at bay by the charismatic authority of “True Parents” are manifold: Korea-centrism versus universalism; classi-

⁶⁹ Personal communication (September 22, 2022).

cal evangelisation versus interfaith and political networking; and the allocation of resources for elitist gatherings of distinguished personalities versus long-term educational programmes and groundwork—to name just a few examples. These tensions will require prudent strategising by the next generation of leadership. With two prior attempts to transfer the founder’s charisma to a son by means of a UPF chairmanship having failed, a third attempt is presently in preparation with the designation of Ch’oe Yŏn-a 최연아/崔妍娥, the second wife of Mun and Han’s first-born son Mun Hyojin 문효진/文孝進 (1962–2008), as the chair of UPF Korea on September 19, 2018.⁷⁰ Notably, her son Mun Sin-ch’ul 문신출/文信出 (b. 1999) was designated by Han to take on the role of executive leader of the UM in the future. However, real power is currently being wielded by Yun Yŏng-ho 윤영호/尹鏞鎬 (b. 1976), Han’s secretary and closest aide, who has been holding the positions of secretary general of FFWPU International since 2017 and director general of UPF International since early 2022. The future of the UM thus seems to lie in Yun’s hands, although his authority is disputed among Korean members, in particular the second generation (Kim 2021).

Once more, the fate of the UPF seems intimately intertwined with the UM’s succession question that has repeatedly shaken its trajectory over the past fifteen years. Whereas it is too early to tell, the UPF’s future course is expected to meet with considerable challenges and will be affected for better or worse by the UM’s upcoming generational shift. The outcome of this process is uncertain and may well end in yet another schismatic fracture of the UM, unless the movement develops a workable legal framework that strikes a balance between (inherited?) charisma and robust institutions.

Concluding Remarks

This article profiled the major activities and changing self-identity of the international UPF leadership. Driven by the expectation of the imminent establishment of *Ch’ŏnilguk*, Mun declared that the UPF “[u]nlike the UN, which clings to superficial and formal slogans, will truly fulfil its messianic mission for the sake of humankind on a more fundamental and practical level” (T’ongilgyo 2009: 204 [Peace Message no. 11]).⁷¹ However, as the above exploration has shown, the organisation’s trajectory

⁷⁰ Between 2014 and 2019, Ch’oe served as the international president of the WFWP, a sub-organisation of the UPF. Alongside Walsh and eleven other high ranking Unificationist dignitaries, she was appointed by Han as a member of the Cheon Il Guk Supreme Council (*Ch’ŏnilguk ch’oego wiwŏnhoe* 천일국최고위원회/天一國最高委員會) in 2014. The Supreme Council was established to serve as the supreme legislative organ of the Unificationist millennium or *Ch’ŏnilguk* (Pokorny and Zoehrer 2018: 247–252).

⁷¹ 외적이요, 형식적인 구호에 매달리는 유엔이 아니고, 보다 근본적이고 실질적인 차원에서 진정 인류를 위한 메시아적 사명을 다하게 될 것입니다.

was not only defined by the agenda laid out by Mun but also to a large degree by how his ideas were implemented by the UPF's respective leadership. The main thrust of the UPF has wavered considerably between forging a trans- and supra-denominational peace movement, a soft proselytising approach to reach the privileged, and an auxiliary network to boost a genuinely Unificationist kingdom-building project.

Hyōn-jin, the Harvard-educated CEO and former Olympic equestrian, made the UPF a de-theologised, inclusive footstool for a popular movement dedicated to celebrating global peace makers, local heroes, and clean-up projects by high schoolers. His younger brother Hyōng-jin, the pessimistic political realist and fervent spiritual leader (now turned apocalypticist), regarded the UPF as a forum for discussing national security issues as well as an outreach tool that ultimately serves to glorify his parents as the messianic couple and world saviours. Thomas G. Walsh, the long-term diplomatic tactician, was the backbone of and mastermind behind the UPF. He has deftly navigated between the vision and demands of the charismatic founding couple on the one hand and the necessities of a domesticated NGO with UN-accreditation on the other. Now, the septuagenarian's major challenge is to raise a new UPF cadre that will have to draw from the younger (but largely disenchanting) generation of (cultural) Unificationists.

Despite the disputes among Mun's sons and leading disciples about the UPF's true mission, its basic mode of operation remained essentially Unificationist: to engage in networking with high-level political representatives and draw their attention to Mun and Han's millenarian programme, which, among others, anticipates as a key episode the imminent peaceful reunification of the Koreas. Belief in the "True Parents" and their cause continues to inspire idealism among rank and file UPF activists, creating a plethora of interfaith, intercultural, and civil social initiatives at local, regional, and international levels. Thus, charisma-orientation and millenarian urgency is what calibrates the UPF's organisational culture. In preparation of an approaching post-Han era, the organisation is faced with the problem of transferring leadership to the next generation. However, as the organisation's own history has shown, any attempt to transfer the founder's charisma is a precarious matter.

Another, perhaps more pressing challenge has ensued from the setback caused by the Abe incident. If the financial support of the Japanese FFWPU membership runs dry due to political and legal repercussions, it is unlikely that the UPF can maintain its current extent of activity.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACLC	American Clergy Leadership Coalition
CAP-LC	Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience

CRNGO	Committee of Religious NGOs
CSVGC	Committee on Spirituality, Values and Global Concerns
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
FFWPU	Family Federation for World Peace and Unification
GPF	Global Peace Festival
HSAUWC	Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity
IAACP	International Association of Arts and Culture for Peace
IAAP	International Association of Academicians for Peace
IAED	International Association for Peace and Economic Development
IAFLP	International Association of First Ladies for Peace
IAPD	Interreligious Association for Peace and Development
IAPP	International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace
IAYSP	International Association of Youth and Students for Peace
IFVOC	International Federation for Victory over Communism
IIFWP	Interreligious and International Federation for World Peace
ILC	International Leadership Conference
IMAP	International Media Association for Peace
ISCP	International Summit Council for Peace
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
MS	<i>Mun Sŏn-myŏng sŏnsaeng malssŭm sŏnjip</i> 文鮮明先生말씀選集 (see Mun Sŏn-myŏng Sŏnsaeng Malssŭm P’yŏnch’an Wiwŏnhoe)
NGO	non-governmental Organisation
UCI	Unification Church International
UM	Unification Movement
UN	United Nations
UNAOOC	United Nations Alliance of Civilizations
UPF	Universal Peace Federation
UPF	Universal Peace Federation
UTS	Unification Theological Seminary
WFWP	Women’s Federation for World Peace

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