

Sept. 11, 2012 Commentary:

**About the media coverage
on the occasion of the death of Rev. Sun Myung Moon**

by Dr. Peter Schulte*



In latter years it has become a journalistic norm, to handle the term 'sect/cult' more or less noncritically and nonobjectively. Most recent example is the media coverage on the occasion of the death of Rev. Sun Myung Moon, the Founder of the Unification Church (today: Family Federation for World Peace). Although this movement has already been active for over 50 years and is present in many countries of the world, its religiousness and core teachings have been reduced by the media to only one term: 'sect/cult'. This signal effect – and implied 'call to ward against' - is unmistakable: totalitarian dictatorship, dependency, repressive rituals, brainwashing. The term 'sect/cult' has meanwhile become the paragon for an all-inclusive description of new religious movements – however says nothing about their content.

In antique times 'sects' had the reputation of being special religious or philosophical schools and parties. Jesus is described in the Bible as the leader of a sect, as “an instigator of insurrections among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.”(Acts 24,1-6). In the middle ages they were the “grassroots movements” - so called Christian lay-peoples' movements – which didn't accept the alliance of the official Church and politics, and called for a return to the original teachings: to live like the Apostles, preach the Word, and be a good example to others. Well-known historical-examples are the Cathars, Waldensians or also the Hutterites. Their stigmatization as 'sects/cults' by the worldly and church authorities sealed their fate.

Since the 1970s we have been experiencing a renaissance of the term sect/cult, that refers primarily to **new religious movements**. Especially the mainstream churches warned against becoming a member of the “youth-sects”, as they were called at the time. In a grand style, they propagated difficult to verify claims and justified their actions, in that they referred to so-called ex-members as proof. How many or also how few there have been until now, or still are, nobody knows. With polemic and omnipotent fantasies of almightiness they approached the encounter with new religious movements, for – after all – there could only be one church and one truth, namely their own.

To approach religious pluralism, as it exists in 2012, with the “sect/cult-cudgel” and the insinuation of delusions, is out of touch with the times in which we are living in and presumptuous. That would be negating modern achievements – like the Enlightenment and religious freedom – as well as related self-determination of one's religion and world view. That the religious feelings of people have been hereby constantly trodden upon, no newspaper writes about that.

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Translation from the original article in German, distributed by:

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