

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Mother Han's Torment Mirrors 1955 Hounding of Sun Myung Moon

Knut Holdhus
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[Father Moon](#) with students from Ewha Woman's University in Seoul in 1955, expelled from their studies because of their newfound faith

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The echo of Sun Myung Moon's acquittal in the authoritarian South Korea of 1955 raises questions about religious freedom and due process today

The detention of [Family Federation](#) leader [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자) in South Korea today is taking place against a strikingly familiar historical background. More than seven decades ago, in 1955, the

founder of what was then a small and persecuted [new religious movement](#) was arrested, imprisoned and put on trial amid intense public accusations concerning his faith and the conduct of his followers. After approximately three months in detention, [Sun Myung Moon](#) (문선명) was acquitted of all the charges against him and released. Yet the damage caused by the campaign surrounding his arrest went far beyond the courtroom. It helped establish a pattern in which religious controversy, hostile media coverage and pressure from established Christian institutions became intertwined.

See also [70 Years On: Detention History Repeats Itself](#)



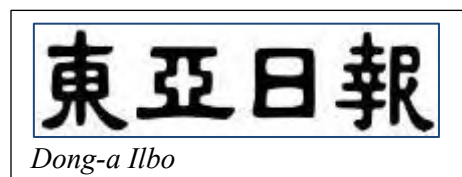
Played a key role in outreach activities at Ewha and Yonsei: Full-time lecturer Yang Yun-yeong. Through her, several other professors joined the [Unification Church](#) in 1954 and early 1955

A 6th October 2026 [article](#) by Christian scholar Bae Deok-man (배덕만) in OhmyNews provides an unusually detailed account of this formative episode. Writing from within the Protestant tradition, Bae examines what he calls the "1955 Unificationism Incident" (1955년 통일교 사건) as part of the broader history of Korean Protestantism. His approach is notably historical rather than polemical. Instead of simply repeating the accusations made against the [religious movement](#), he traces how the controversy developed and what consequences it produced.

The confrontation began before [Sun Myung Moon](#) himself was arrested. During 1954 and early 1955, the [movement](#) expanded its missionary activity among students and professors at Ewha Womans University and Yonsei University. Several academics became followers, including professors Yang Yun-yeong (양윤영), Han Chung-hwa (한충화) Kim Young-oon (김영운 - Young Oon Kim), [Choi Won-bok](#) (최원복), and Lee Jeong-ho (이정호) from Ewha and Professor Park Sang-rae (박상래) from Yonsei. When university authorities discovered their involvement, they were urged to abandon the new faith. They refused. In March 1955, the professors were dismissed and 16 students (14 from Ewha and 2 from

Yonsei) who refused to leave the [movement](#) were subsequently expelled.

This aspect of the story is particularly significant from the perspective of religious freedom. The controversy was not confined to theological disagreement. It involved institutional decisions to remove people from their academic positions because of their religious affiliation and convictions.



Bae notes that the large South Korean newspaper Dong-A Ilbo criticized these actions, arguing that dismissing professors and expelling students on religious grounds, without a basis in school regulations or law, could infringe both religious freedom and academic freedom.

The reaction of established Protestantism was nevertheless increasingly severe. The [new movement](#)'s theology challenged central assumptions of established churches. It taught that Christ had completed spiritual salvation through the Cross but that "physical salvation" remained unfinished, requiring the Second Coming and a new revelation - the "[Principles](#)" - to interpret the Bible. Rumors surrounding the [movement](#), including sensational allegations concerning its teachings and the conduct of its members, further intensified the controversy.



From a hearing at Seoul District Court on 20th September 1955 where [Sun Myung Moon](#) and four of his followers stood trial. From left, Kim Won-pil, Yu Hyo-won, Yu Hyo-min, [Sun Myung Moon](#). Yu Hyo-young is not in this photo but was also in the line-up

Against this background, [Sun Myung Moon](#) (문선명) was taken into detention on 4th July 1955, together with four followers. The charges included violations of the Military Service Act and disturbing public morals. The case was presented to the public as another dramatic confrontation with the controversial new religion. Yet the judicial outcome was strikingly different from the public atmosphere surrounding the arrest. After approximately three months in detention and trial, [Moon](#) was found not guilty on all charges. The others arrested with him received only relatively light sentences for matters such as Military Service Act violations or document forgery - not for the sensational allegations concerning a "cult" or sexual misconduct.

The episode nevertheless had a lasting impact. Rather than disappearing, the [movement](#) became more visible. Extensive media attention increased public awareness, while criticism from established denominations intensified. The 1955 confrontation therefore became a formative moment in the emergence of [Unificationism](#) as an independent religious movement.

The historical parallel with the treatment of the [Family Federation](#) under the present South Korean administration should therefore be approached carefully. The circumstances are obviously different. South Korea in 1955 was a very different political and institutional environment, and today's legal proceedings involve allegations that must be assessed through the contemporary judicial process. Yet the underlying question remains recognizable: what happens when a minority religious movement becomes

the object of intense political, media and religious hostility?

That question has particular resonance when a religious leader is detained before being convicted. Detention can have consequences that extend far beyond the eventual verdict. Public reputation may be damaged, organizational activities disrupted and the presumption of innocence weakened in the eyes of society.

The story of 1955 offers an important reminder. Accusations can create enormous public pressure long before a court determines whether the underlying criminal charges are proven. In [Sun Myung Moon's](#) case, the historical record described by Bae Deok-man (배덕만) ultimately produced an acquittal. Yet the controversy surrounding his arrest became one of the decisive events in the history of the movement.

Seventy-one years later, the question of how South Korea treats a persecuted religious minority is again attracting national and international attention. The lesson of 1955 is not that contemporary allegations should be ignored. It is that religious controversy must not be allowed to substitute for evidence, and public hostility must never become a substitute for due process.

See also [70 Years On: Detention History Repeats Itself](#)

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

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Lawsuit Challenges Exposure Of Religious Faith

October 6, 2026 • The News Desk

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Lawsuit by a Family Federation member highlights the risks of exposing religious affiliation amid growing public hostility



Tokyo, 6th October 2026 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese.
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[Feature Interview]

“Exposing Someone’s Faith Is an Invasion of Privacy”

Ruling in Lawsuit Against Eito Suzuki on 8th October

by Takahide Ishii (石井孝秀)

A ruling will be handed down on 8th October by the *Tokyo District Court* in a lawsuit brought by A, a male member of the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* (FFWPU, formerly the *Unification Church*), who claims that journalist Eito Suzuki (鈴木エイト) violated his privacy by exposing his religious faith, photograph, and real name to the public. A is seeking ¥10 million in damages and the deletion of the relevant article posted on Suzuki’s X (formerly Twitter) account.

Ahead of the ruling, A spoke about the background to the lawsuit and how he feels about the matter today.

Interviewer: Takahide Ishii (石井孝秀)

– What led you to file a lawsuit against Eito Suzuki for violating your privacy?

At the time, I was living in a particular community where I had been the representative of a volunteer organization since around 2015. We regularly organized activities such as neighborhood cleanups and visits to historical sites, and local children also participated during the summer holidays.

I am not a member of the local community myself, but when a parent and child I knew in the area asked me for advice about starting a children’s cafeteria, I helped them get it started and cooperated with the activities.

However, after the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), Suzuki began labeling the *Family Federation* and its members as antisocial, and my activities in the community also became a target of criticism.

週刊文春

The logo of the *Shukan Bunshun*.
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wondering how they had found out where I lived. However, in the *Shukan Bunshun* article, my name was given only by its initials.

Then, around 2023, at a lecture attended by more than 300 people, Suzuki displayed a photograph showing former Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Hakubun Shimomura (下村博文) visiting the children’s cafeteria. I was also visible in the photograph. In doing so, Suzuki revealed that I was a member of the *Unification Church*, as well as my full name and the name of the volunteer



Militantly campaigning against the *Family Federation*: Activist journalist Eito Suzuki, born as Kiyofumi Tanaka. Photo: Mikkabie / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 4.0 Int. Cropped

A reporter from *Shukan Bunshun* even came directly to my home to interview me after receiving information from Suzuki. Both my family and I were terrified,



Hakubun Shimomura.

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name and the name of the religious organization I headed.

Photo (2012): 首相官邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 4.0 Int

– Suzuki has described the volunteer organization as a “disguised volunteer organization” used for missionary purposes, claiming that it concealed its “true identity” as a religious organization. He says he exposed your personal information because it was necessary to warn people about it.

I was simply engaged in activities for the benefit of the local community. If you say that we were “hiding our identity,” it sounds as though we were operating under false names. But I was carrying out these activities openly under my real name.

Volunteering was something that gave my life meaning. It was neither intended for missionary purposes nor a cover for hiding the organization's identity.

Suzuki also made posts on X referring to my activities at the children's cafeteria. Although he used only my initials in the text, some of the images he uploaded included captions in katakana spelling out my name.

Some of my fellow volunteers were understanding of my faith. But there were also people who took Suzuki's posts at face value and reacted negatively, saying things like, “Is this a church organization?”

I have also become estranged from people with whom I worked at the children's cafeteria. I probably will never be able to go there again.

– The first oral hearing was held in September 2024, and the trial concluded in July this year.

During my opening statement, I became so emotional that I unexpectedly began to cry. I appealed to the presiding judge: “Are members of the [Unification Church](#) not allowed to volunteer?”

However, Suzuki subsequently wrote an article suggesting that my tears had merely been an act, and that I had been conferring calmly with my attorney even while riding in the elevator. None of this was true, and I found it extremely offensive.



Hearing case that highlights the risks of exposing religious affiliation amid growing public hostility against [Family Federation](#): Tokyo District Court. Here, the joint building of the Tokyo High Court, Tokyo District Court, and Tokyo Summary Court in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo, Japan. Photo (2012): Rs1421 / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 3.0 Unp

The defense has also pointed out that, on a business-oriented social-media platform on which I had registered long before the assassination, I had included my name and the fact that I was an employee of the [religious organization](#) in my profile. They argue that I had “absolutely no intention of hiding” my faith.

But the manner in which information is made public, and the circumstances in which it is disclosed, are entirely different matters.

There is a significant difference between voluntarily making your personal information public yourself and having a third party expose your real name, religious faith, and other personal attributes to an unspecified number of people at a time when criticism of the religious organization is intensifying.

Precisely because we are living in the current climate, I believe that when it comes to people who are particularly important to me, if I am going to tell them about my faith, I want to do so directly and with care.

– What do you hope society will take away from this lawsuit?

I know several fellow believers who have experienced something similar: they have been labeled “[Unification Church](#) members” and, based on the assumption that they might be using community activities for missionary work while hiding their identity, have been pushed out of those activities.

It is truly unreasonable. Why should activities that were appreciated by the local community have to be destroyed?

The Constitution guarantees freedom of conscience, and when the [dissolution order was decided](#), the *Tokyo High Court* also recognized that the human rights of believers are protected.

Yet the current situation is that discrimination is being justified by a prevailing social atmosphere that says, “The [Family Federation](#) is a bad organization.”

I want Japan to be a country where, regardless of what religion people believe in, not only their faith and privacy are protected, but also their right to participate and contribute actively in society.

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