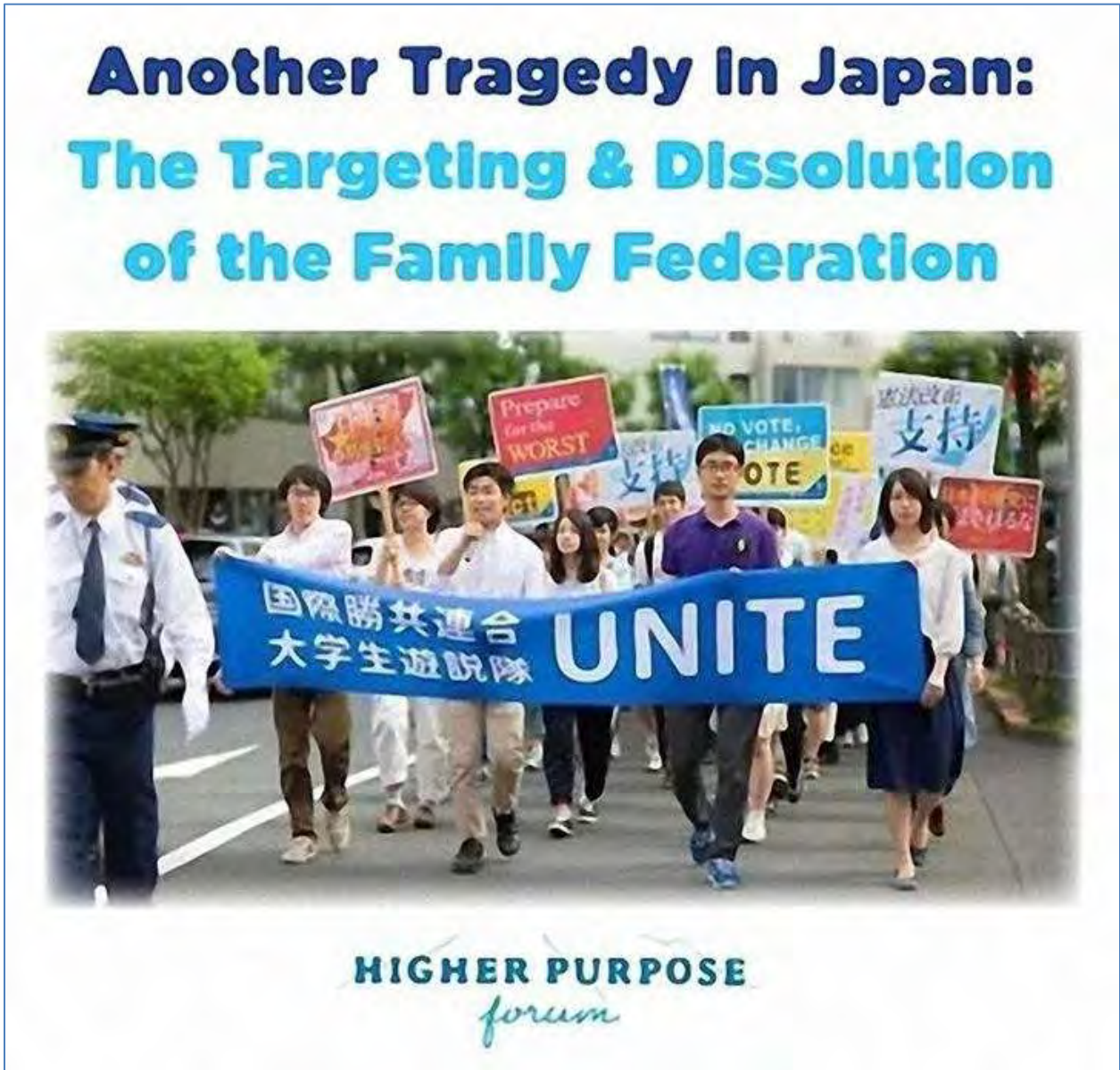


**FFWPU Europe and Middle East: James Edgerly's *Another Tragedy in Japan: The Targeting and Dissolution of the Family Federation***

Knut Holdhus  
August 16, 2025



Edited version of "[Another Tragedy in Japan: The Targeting and Dissolution of the Family Federation](#)" by James Edgerly, 2nd edition published by the [Higher Purpose Forum](#), July 2025



James Edgerly, founder and director of the [Higher Purpose Forum](#). Screenshot from live transmission by [HPF](#) May 8, 2024

In his new book, James Edgerly delves into religious freedom on trial in Japan and the legal and social aspects of the 2025 dissolution order against the Family Federation

[Review]

**Another Tragedy in Japan**

[Another Tragedy in Japan: The Targeting and Dissolution of the Family Federation](#), is the title of a 40-page booklet moderated by James B. Edgerly and published by [Higher Purpose Forum](#) as a second edition in July 2025. The publication presents a deeply considered reflection on the legal and social pressures confronting the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU) - formerly the [Unification Church](#) - in Japan. Edgerly is founder and director of the [Higher Purpose Forum](#), which according to him is an "independent project of the Unification Movement".

Edgerly dedicates the booklet to [Toru Goto](#) - a Unificationist who twice suffered [abduction and forced confinement](#) by his family, the second time for [more than 12 years](#) - from 1995 to 2008. After years of legal battle, he achieved a landmark Supreme Court victory in 2015. That court ruling did not end the coercive practices of dehumanizing [faith-breaking](#) entirely, but made it much more difficult for the professional



deprogrammers to market their shady services. [Goto's story](#) serves as a testament to both the resilience of faith and the broader trajectory of rights for religious minorities in Japan.



*The reality of faith-breaking: Toru Goto, a member of the [Family Federation](#), in 2008, barely able to move after being held in forcible detention by his own family in league with professional faith-breakers for more than 12 years*



*Tomihiko Tanaka, President of the [Family Federation](#) in Japan, speaking at a press conference at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan on the afternoon of 26th March 26, 2025 in Tokyo, Japan*



*Tetsuya Yamagami, the suspect for the assassination of Shinzo Abe, the former prime minister of Japan*

**Situational Context and Legal Background**

Edgerly measures the recent [dissolution order](#) issued by a Tokyo court against a broader historical backdrop. In October 2023, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) filed a request to dissolve the [Family Federation](#) of Japan, citing allegations like "manipulative fundraising" and other civil violations. In March 2025, the Tokyo District Court [granted that request](#) - an unprecedented legal step against a [religious organization](#) that had no criminal convictions on record.

Edgerly contrasts Japan's legal and cultural response with that of other democracies, particularly the United States, where religious freedom, including for unpopular movements, remains more vigorously safeguarded. He underscores that the civil cases cited by the court in Japan stem largely from decades-old disputes - all predating a 2009 compliance reform [See editor's note below] - and that many plaintiffs are ex-members whose testimonies originated from "[deprogramming](#)" conditions now considered coercive and discredited.

**The Media, Law, and Public Sentiment**

One of the most striking elements in the [booklet](#) is the analysis of two press conferences at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan (FCCJ), held just two days apart in March 2025. On [26th March](#), [Federation](#) President [Tomihiko Tanaka](#) calmly and factually responded to criticism - highlighting, for instance, the disappearance of complaints and civil cases over the past seven years, and the overwhelming origin of plaintiffs from [deprogramming](#) scenarios.

In contrast, on 28th March, representatives from anti-Unificationist lawyer networks (e.g., NNLASS) made sweeping claims, calling the [Federation's](#) activities "fabrications" and labeling its ceremonies as forced mass weddings. Their tone was triumphalist and dismissive of [Federation](#) perspectives - but received applause from the press, underlining a broader media bias.

Edgerly argues that this polarized messaging - and the absence of active Unificationist voices in the courtroom or investigative processes - exemplifies a disturbing erosion of due process and fair representation.

**Historical Campaign Against the Federation**

Edgerly situates the recent legal attack within a five-phase historical arc spanning over five decades:

1981-2025 - Anti-Unification legal entities formed early, engaging in [deprogramming](#) referrals, lawsuits, and generating "manufactured victims" The so-called "[Defection Business](#)" grew into a significant civil litigation mechanism.

2009-2022 - The 2009 compliance measures [See editor's note below] marked a pivotal reform. Meanwhile, the Toru Goto case in 2015 reduced forced [deprogramming](#) significantly, setting a precedent for religious freedom protections.

2022-Present - The assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in July 2022 by Tetsuya Yamagami (who blamed the [Federation](#) for his family's bankruptcy) triggered a national backlash. Anti-Unification lawyers quickly framed the [Federation](#) as culpable, shifting public anger towards institutional dissolution rather than focusing on the assassin himself.





*From a conference by International Federation for Victory over Communism (IFVOC) in Japan 1972*

## Democratic and Human Rights Stakes

Edgerly warns that dissolving a [religious organization](#) without criminal violations - primarily based on civil claims and hostility - sets a dangerous precedent for Japan's democratic ethos and for [religious freedom globally](#). He notes how international bodies like the [U.S. State Department](#), the U.N., and [religious freedom advocates](#) have raised alarm, emphasizing that such actions [deviate from both Japan's constitution](#) and international obligations under instruments like the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR).

He particularly highlights the lack of transparent dialogue, the "herd mentality" of media-fueled public sentiment, and the marginalization of the [Family Federation's](#) narrative - all signaling a broader slide toward ideological conformity and against pluralism.

## Analysis

Edgerly's [booklet](#) offers more than documentation; it is a care-filled plea for balance, justice, and empathy. This narrative:

Humanizes the believers - showcasing their victimization and the trauma of [harassment](#), [job loss](#), evictions, and [social ostracism](#).

Elevates legal awareness by clearly showing that those bringing suit were beneficiaries of coercive methods, undermining the integrity of evidence.

Connects modern events to long-standing tradition of pluralistic suppression, reminding us that the tensions predate the Abe assassination.

Champions democratic resilience, highlighting voices - journalists, [international advocates](#), and faith leaders - who reject the punitive [dissolution order](#) and stand for religious liberty.

In doing so, it challenges readers to consider whether a truly democratic society should retaliate against religious minorities through legal means based on prejudice rather than fair adjudication.

## Conclusion

In [Another Tragedy in Japan](#), James Edgerly provides a powerful, compassionate account of a religious community caught in the crossfire of decades-long ideological warfare, public outrage, and legal overreach. The [booklet](#) goes beyond chronicle - it is a call for empathy, justice, and vigilance. It affirms that democratic values and [religious freedoms are fragile](#), especially when public pressure eclipses critical thinking and fair treatment.



**[Editor's note:** The 2009 compliance declaration of the [Unification Church](#) of Japan (now the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#)) was a formal commitment by the [organization](#) to reform its practices in response to longstanding public criticism and legal challenges.

The [Unification Church](#) in Japan had faced numerous allegations related to recruitment tactics and donation solicitation, termed "spiritual sales" (靈感商法) by a hostile network of activist lawyers who had declared the [religious organization](#) an enemy. These issues led to multiple lawsuits orchestrated by the activist lawyers and significant media backlash. This prompted the [organization](#) to take measures to restore its reputation and demonstrate compliance with legal and ethical standards.

The [religious organization](#) pledged to stop possibly unethical donation practices, including what the hostile network of lawyers claimed amounted to "pressuring members into making large financial contributions under spiritual pretexts."

This was in response to accusations from the same activist lawyers that followers "were being manipulated into giving away substantial amounts of money or property."

The [Unification Church](#) stated it would enhance internal oversight to ensure compliance with ethical and legal standards. Measures included better training for leaders and stricter guidelines for evangelization and solicitation of donations.

After this compliance declaration, there was a significant decrease in the number of lawsuits against the [Unification Church](#) - since 2015 called the [Family Federation](#). The [religious organization](#) has used this as evidence that it has improved its practices and should not be subject to [dissolution](#).]

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# Apartment Prison: Faith-Breaking In Modern Japan

- August 15, 2025
- Knut Holdhus

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New book: English version of one of modern Japan's most disturbing human rights cases: The attempted faith-breaking of Toru Goto – locked up for over 12 years in apartment turned prison


[Review]

## 4536 Days in Captivity

Toru Goto's *Battle for Survival – 4536 Days in Captivity* is both a survivor's testimony and a meticulously documented chronicle of one of modern Japan's most disturbing human rights cases: the abduction and




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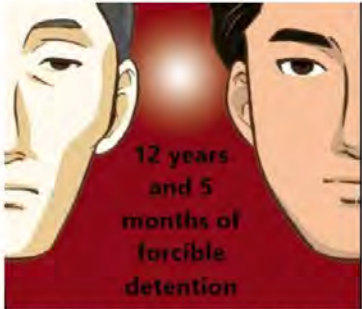
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prolonged confinement of a man by his own family, under the guidance of professional “deprogrammers”, in an effort to force him to **abandon his religious faith**. Spanning **twelve years and five months** of captivity – 4,536 days – followed by seven years of legal battle, Goto’s account is an unflinching examination of coercion, the corrosion of trust, and the resilience of belief under extreme pressure.



Toru Goto went through 12 years and 5 months of forcible detention. Illustration: [Japanese Victims' Association against Religious Kidnapping and Forced Conversion](#)

The book opens with the stark image of photographs from court records – dim rooms, cracked glass, worn tatami – taken from the very **apartment** in central Tokyo where Toru Goto (後藤徹) was hidden away for over a decade. This framing sets the tone: evidence and memory intertwined, each reinforcing the reality of an ordeal that might otherwise seem unbelievable. The crime, formally recognized in Japanese courts, is not set in a distant war zone or a remote prison, but in the midst of an ordinary city neighborhood, just minutes from a bustling train station.

Goto begins by introducing his family – respectable, educated, middle-class. His father, a successful corporate executive; his mother, a gentle and devoted homemaker; his siblings, capable and supportive. The warmth of his childhood – family outings to fish in Okutama, the comfort of his mother’s cooking – stands in tragic contrast to what would come later. This contrast is deliberate: it challenges any easy assumption that such extreme acts can only be committed by “bad” or obviously unstable people.

The turning point comes in the mid-1980s when Goto’s older brother encounters the **Unification Church** (now called the **Family Federation**) and introduces him to it. Initially skeptical, Goto finds in the **church’s** teachings a sense of purpose and hope that answers deep personal doubts. Within a year, all three siblings are members, and for Goto, the faith becomes a central part of his life. But as membership grows nationally, so does opposition – from both theological rivals and political adversaries, some of whom adopt the controversial practice of “**deprogramming**” through **abduction and confinement**.



Illustration Of Toru Goto being **kidnapped** in order to **coercively break his faith**. Image: [National Association of Victims of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Deconversion](#)

What follows in Chapter 1 is a gradual tightening of the net. Goto’s brother is the first to vanish, **seized and confined** under the direction of anti-**Unification** activists. Later, Goto himself is lured by his father to what he believes will be a meeting, only to be locked in a “connecting room” at a luxury hotel and subjected to verbal assaults from deprogrammer Takashi Miyamura (宮村峻) and former

believers. Though he eventually escapes, the experience teaches him that physical force is not the only danger – psychological pressure and isolation can be equally devastating.

The book’s middle sections describe the intricate network behind these **deprogrammings**: pastors, ex-members, and laypeople coordinating to coach families on how to lure, restrain, and “rehabilitate” relatives. Goto investigates the history of these efforts, linking them to broader political movements of the Cold War and to the media-fueled moral panic over “new religions” in Japan. This is one of the book’s strengths: it is not simply memoir, but also a sociological record of a particular moment in Japanese religious politics, where anti-communist activism, theological disputes, and sensationalist journalism converged to legitimize extrajudicial coercion.

The most harrowing part of the narrative begins in September 1995, when, after years of cautious contact with his family, Goto is abducted again – this time with meticulous



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planning and the clear intent of prolonged confinement. He is taken to an apartment in Niigata, its doors and windows secured with heavy locks, where his captors, including his parents and siblings, rotate to maintain constant watch. Here, professional deprogrammer Pastor Yasutomo Matsunaga (松永堡智) begins a campaign of criticism, ridicule, and theological challenge designed to break Goto's faith.



*Faith-breaker: pastor **Yasutomo Matsunaga** (松永堡智) of the Niitsu Evangelical Christian Church. Photo: FFWPU*

The conditions are psychologically punishing: total isolation from news, friends, or any outside contact; daily verbal assaults; the manipulation of family bonds to induce guilt. Former members are brought in to model "successful" departures from the church. The aim is not merely intellectual persuasion but emotional exhaustion – an erosion of identity through relentless pressure. Goto, drawing on years of mental preparation and prayer, resolves to resist. His strategy is pragmatic: to feign doubt, endure the attacks, and wait for a genuine chance to escape.

Through these pages, the reader feels the claustrophobia – not only the physical confinement but the narrowing of mental space under constant surveillance. Goto's detailed descriptions of the apartment layouts, lock mechanisms, and routines emphasize how control is engineered down to the smallest detail. His earlier experiences at the "Cat-dog apartment" and *Ogikubo Glory Church* had taught him that opportunity could come unexpectedly – during a supervised outing, or in a moment when vigilance lapses.

The narrative also follows the collateral damage: his younger sister's abduction, his fiancée's disappearance into a similar "rehabilitation" process, the complicity of police who dismiss such incidents as "family matters". Each case reinforces a core theme – that the social and legal environment of the time allowed these abductions to continue largely unchecked.

Goto's eventual release is not the end of the story. The final sections shift from survival to legal and moral vindication. He files civil and criminal complaints, navigating a legal system often reluctant to confront the intersection of family autonomy and individual rights. His victories in district and high courts, and the ultimate affirmation by the Supreme Court, are presented not as personal triumphs alone but as precedents for the protection of religious freedom and personal liberty in Japan.



*Protesting against the evil of deprogramming (faith-breaking) in Shinjuku, Tokyo 8th December 2024. Here, Toru Goto (後藤徹), representing the **National Association of Victims of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Religious De-Conversion** (center), delivering a speech. The posters behind him carry pictures of Toru Goto hardly able to walk after more than 12 years of forcible confinement. Photo: Reiwa Kato (加藤玲和)*

The analysis that emerges from Goto's account is layered. At one level, it is a study in endurance – the inner resources required to survive long-term captivity without capitulating to psychological manipulation. At another, it is an exposé of a quasi-organized system of coercive faith-breaking, involving religious leaders, lay operatives, and family members, operating in a grey zone tolerated by public opinion and law enforcement. At yet another, it is a meditation on the fragility of trust: how quickly shared history and affection can be weaponized when belief systems clash.

Crucially, Goto resists casting his family as one-dimensional villains. He acknowledges their ordinariness, their earlier kindness, even their concern – however misguided – about his choices. This nuance invites the reader to grapple with the uncomfortable reality that extreme actions can emerge from love distorted by fear, disinformation, and social pressure. It also underscores the role of third-party instigators, whose influence and coaching magnify familial anxieties into acts of



coercion.

From a broader human rights perspective, *4536 Days in Captivity* raises urgent questions about the balance between protecting individuals from perceived harm and respecting their autonomy. It challenges the idea that “family matters” should be immune from legal scrutiny when they involve deprivation of liberty. It also highlights the dangers of conflating theological disagreement with moral or mental unfitness.

For readers unfamiliar with Japan's religious landscape, the book serves as a valuable primer on the [Unification Church's](#) contested position, the cultural stigma attached to “new religions”, and the ways in which public fears can be mobilized to justify rights violations. For those concerned with freedom of belief, it is a sobering reminder that such freedoms are only as secure as the willingness of institutions – and communities – to defend them consistently, even for unpopular minorities.

In the end, Goto frames his survival not in terms of stubbornness alone but of purpose: the conviction that faith, once freely chosen, should be defended as a matter of personal dignity. His testimony is offered not only to recount what happened to him but to stand with “those who are facing lonely and difficult battles in silence.”

*4536 Days in Captivity* is thus more than memoir. It is a legal document in narrative form, a case study in psychological resilience, and an ethical challenge to societies that permit the erosion of rights in the name of protection. It invites empathy without demanding agreement on theology, and it leaves the reader with a lasting unease about how easily ordinary life can be turned into a prison when fear is given license over love.

*Battle for Survival – 4536 Days in Captivity* has been published in Washington DC by The Washington Times Global Media Group, 2025.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

**Featured image** above: The English version of Toru Goto's new book: *Battle for Survival – 4536 Days in Captivity*. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

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