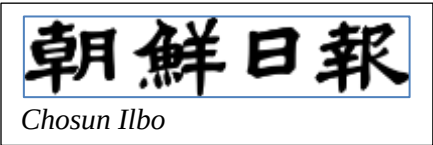


FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Who Is Really in Charge of Holy Mother Han's Trial?

Knut Holdhus
January 14, 2026



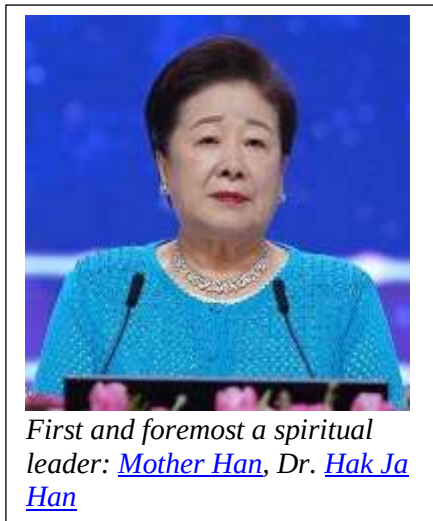
Artistic impression of court hearings January 13, 2026. Illustration: ChatGPT



Witnesses heard at 13th January continuation of trial at Seoul Central District Court over alleged political donations from religious organization

The large South Korean daily Chosun Ilbo carried on 13th January an article with the long headline: "["I Don't Know About Chairman Hak Ja Han': Unification Church Executive Testimony Prompts Judge to Say, 'Is Yoon Yeong-ho the Chairman? \[...\] False Statements Constitute Perjury'"](#)"

The [report from Chosun Ilbo](#) reports on a pivotal courtroom moment in an ongoing South Korean criminal trial that examines alleged improper ties between a religious organization and a political party. At the center of the case is the [Family Federation](#), a globally known religious movement founded in South Korea, and accusations that it covertly intervened in partisan politics during the country's 2022 presidential election. The trial focuses on whether senior [Federation](#) leadership unlawfully directed mass political party enrollment and political donations in violation of South Korea's Political Parties Act.



First and foremost a spiritual leader: [Mother Han](#), Dr. [Hak Ja Han](#)

The defendants include Chairman and Co-Founder [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자 – 82) – also known as [Mother Han](#) – and [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호), the former Global Headquarters Director. Prosecutors allege that the [Federation](#) attempted to exert political influence by orchestrating "split donations" to local branches of the conservative People Power Party, South Korea's main right-leaning political force. Such actions, if coordinated by an organization rather than individuals, are illegal under Korean law.

In South Korean campaign finance practice, the term "split donations" (Korean: 쪼개기 후원) describes a method by which a large amount of money is divided into numerous smaller contributions and then donated in the names of multiple individuals. In many cases, those individuals are acting as stand-ins and may have little or no genuine role in the decision to donate. The purpose of this practice is to evade legal caps on political contributions or to obscure the true origin of the funds. An organization seeking to exceed contribution limits or conceal its participation may

therefore channel money through members, staff, or other nominal donors.

In the case involving [Mother Han](#), prosecutors contend that 144 million won (ca. 100,000 US dollars) in funds belonging to the [Family Federation](#) were fragmented and funneled to lawmakers via intermediaries. Although the transactions were recorded as separate, individual donations, investigators argue that the money ultimately came from a single pool controlled by the [religious organization](#).



During a court hearing on 13th January, several former leaders of [Family Federation](#)-affiliated organizations testified as witnesses. According to the [Chosun Ilbo](#), their testimony followed a strikingly consistent pattern: they claimed that all politically sensitive actions – including recruiting [Federation](#) members into the People Power Party and delivering donations – were decided solely by [Yoon Yeong-ho](#). According to these witnesses, they merely followed [Yoon's](#) instructions and believed that [Chairman Han](#) had no knowledge of, or involvement in, these political activities.

The [Korean daily](#) points out that this line of testimony prompted visible skepticism from the presiding judge, Woo In-sung (우인성) of the Seoul Central District Court. At one point, the judge directly questioned the logic of the witnesses' claims, asking rhetorically whether [Yoon Yeong-ho](#), rather than [Chairman Han](#), was effectively acting as the [organization's](#) top authority. In hierarchical organizations – particularly religious ones – ultimate obedience is generally expected to flow toward the chairman or spiritual leader, not a subordinate administrator. The judge underscored that knowingly false statements in court could constitute perjury, a serious criminal offense.

One key witness, identified only by the surname Park, previously served as a regional director in South Gyeongsang Province and allegedly acted as a courier delivering political donations to local party offices around the time of the presidential election. Park testified that he complied with [Yoon's](#) directives even when they conflicted with what he believed were [Chairman Han's](#) intentions. When challenged by the judge, Park explained that [Yoon](#) exercised unilateral control over both personnel appointments and financial resources, leaving subordinates with little practical ability to object.



Additional testimony emphasized a sharp division between spiritual leadership and political activity. Another witness, also surnamed Park and formerly the head of the South Gyeongsang chapter of the Universal Peace Federation (an affiliated organization), stated that [Chairman Han](#) concerned herself exclusively with religious and spiritual matters. According to this witness, [Chairman Han](#) did not provide guidance on secular political issues and, to the witness's recollection, did not speak about party politics during religious events.

However, this portrayal was complicated by questioning from [Yoon Yeong-ho's](#) defense

team. [Yoon's](#) attorney suggested that the internal power dynamics of the [religious organization](#) made it difficult for regional leaders to resist [Yoon's](#) orders, precisely because he was widely perceived as enjoying [Chairman Han's](#) trust. [Yoon](#) had been appointed Global Headquarters Director under [Chairman Han's](#) authority, leading many within the [organization](#) to assume that [Yoon's](#) directives reflected the [chairman's](#) will, whether explicitly stated or not. One witness conceded that this perception likely influenced compliance.

Taken together, the testimony reveals a central tension in the trial: whether [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) acted independently, abusing delegated authority, or whether he functioned as an extension of [Chairman Han's](#) leadership. The judge's pointed remarks suggest concern that witnesses may be attempting to shield senior leadership by attributing all responsibility to a single subordinate. As the case proceeds, the court must determine not only what actions occurred, but where true decision-making power resided within the [Family Federation](#) during the 2022 national election.

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At Issue: Religions Taking Reality Seriously

- January 13, 2026
- Knut Holdhus



When lived faith brings change – Why real-world religion easily becomes an issue, making some feel uneasy



Modern discussions of religion often assume that faith belongs primarily to the private sphere: beliefs held in the mind, rituals practiced in designated spaces, and moral principles applied individually. In an article headlined “Why Do ‘Event Religions’ Always Become

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Religious affairs
reporter Jeong
Seong-su (정성수).
Photo
(2025): *Segye Ilbo*

Controversial? in the South Korean daily *Segye Ilbo* 13th January 2026, religious affairs correspondent Jeong Seong-su points out that when religion stays within those boundaries, it is generally tolerated – even when its doctrines are unusual or demanding.

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Problems tend to arise, however, when religion moves beyond belief and attempts to reorganize everyday life, social relationships, and public order. Jeong's **opinion piece** addresses this precise tension by introducing a distinction that is rarely made explicit in Western discourse: the difference between "doctrinal religion" and what the author calls "event religion". The headline asks why religions that insist on realizing their truth in real historical life ("event religions") – rather than remaining as abstract beliefs (doctrinal religions) – inevitably provoke controversy and social resistance.

The Korean expression translated as "event religion" – 사건 종교 – means a religion that grounds its truth in *historical action*, seeks realization in lived reality, and demands social, relational, or structural change.

According to the [article](#), religions follow one of two broad paths. Some remain primarily as doctrines – systems of belief, theology, and moral teaching that people accept, debate, or reject intellectually. Others originate as events: concrete historical interventions that do not merely propose ideas about how life should be lived, but attempt to demonstrate and embody those ideas within the real world. An "event religion" does not remain content with faith as inner conviction; it insists on manifesting itself through relationships, families, social structures, and history itself. And for precisely that reason, the author argues, event religions almost always become controversial.

This controversy is not caused by irrational belief or theological impurity. On the contrary, the problem is that event religions are very realistic. They intrude into areas that societies tend to guard carefully: [marriage](#), family formation, authority, lineage, social norms, and collective identity. Historically, many of the religions now regarded as established traditions began as event religions.

The early Jesus movement before Christianity became an institution, the Exodus faith of ancient Israel, early Buddhism, and Islam all began not as abstract philosophies but as lived historical disruptions. They demanded change not only in belief, but in how people organized their lives together. Societies, the [Segye Ilbo article](#) suggests, have always found this unsettling.

The figure of Jesus is central to this kind of argument. From this perspective, Jesus was not primarily a teacher of doctrine or a founder of an organized religion. He did not leave behind a systematic theology, a legal code, or an ecclesiastical structure. Instead, his message was embodied in how he lived: radical love without resentment, forgiveness without conditions, and ethical action focused on the present rather than rewards in the afterlife. Jesus did not explain his vision in theoretical terms; he enacted it.

Yet this way of life, the article emphasizes, remained historically unfinished. Jesus did not establish a family, leave descendants, or stabilize his movement within existing social structures. His execution ended the event without bringing it to completion. What followed, therefore, was not simply continuation but reinterpretation. That role fell to the apostle Paul.

Paul, who never met Jesus during his lifetime, transformed what appeared to be historical failure into theological success. The crucifixion was reframed as a necessary condition for salvation rather than a defeat. The unfulfilled hopes of history were redirected toward the afterlife. This reinterpretation allowed Christianity to survive, spread, and eventually become a world religion. However, it also fundamentally changed the nature of the movement. The life of Jesus ceased to be primarily a path to be followed and



The Pharaoh tried to stop the Exodus faith of the ancient Israelites. Illustration: Distant Shores Media/Sweet Publishing. License: CC ASA 3.0 Unp. Cropped



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became instead a doctrine to be believed. The disruptive "event" was sealed into a manageable belief system. In the language of Jeong's article, Christianity ceased to function as an event religion.



Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900) about 1875. Photo: Friedrich Hermann Hartmann (1822-1902) / Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain image](#). Cropped.

This transition is where the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) enters the discussion. Nietzsche's famous critique of Christianity, the article argues, was not aimed at Jesus himself but at the religion that developed after Paul. Nietzsche saw Christianity as a moral system that glorified weakness, suffering, and failure. Yet paradoxically, he held a certain respect for Jesus as a human figure – someone who lived without resentment, deferred judgment, and affirmed life in the present moment. This is why Nietzsche has sometimes been called "the thirteenth disciple": while the institutional Church preserved Jesus as doctrine, Nietzsche sought to destroy that doctrine in order to recover the vitality of Jesus' life and movement.

According to religious affairs reporter Jeong, Nietzsche's declaration that "God is dead," from this viewpoint, was not a simple rejection of faith. It was a diagnosis: a statement that what had once been a living, transformative event had hardened into lifeless dogma. Still, Nietzsche's critique stopped at exposure. He could explain why the original event failed, but he could not offer a practical way to reestablish such an event within history.

The [article](#) then turns to the [Family Federation](#), formerly the [Unification Church](#), as a radically different response to this dilemma. Unlike mainstream Christianity, the [Family Federation](#) does not view the crucifixion as the completion of salvation. Instead, it is understood as an unfinished historical moment – something that must still be fulfilled in human society. Salvation, in this framework, is not primarily about individual belief or personal redemption after death. It is about the restoration of relationships, families, and social structures in the present world.

Central to this vision is the idea of the "[True Parents](#)", figures who complete what Jesus could not by forming a family and establishing a lineage centered on goodness. In this model, salvation becomes something that must be verified within history rather than merely affirmed by faith. It is no longer enough to believe correctly; the truth of the religion must be demonstrated through lived, social reality.

This is where the [Family Federation](#) fully embraces the burden of being an event religion. Its most visible and controversial practice – the [Marriage Blessing](#) – is not presented merely as a religious ritual but as a means of restructuring human relationships around the ideal of "one human family under [God](#)". When such practices aim to extend beyond a single religious community and propose a universal social order, tension is inevitable. Religion, at that point, stops asking only for belief and begins to challenge how society itself is organized.

The [article](#) makes a striking claim at this juncture: if an event religion truly succeeds, it should eventually disappear as a religion. Once its core structures are established in reality – true families, restored lineages, stable social patterns – there is no longer a need for ongoing doctrinal expansion or religious instruction. According to Jeong, authority does not pass endlessly from leader to leader; it is fixed in the structure that has already been realized. Subsequent leadership exists to manage, not to recreate, the original event.

From this perspective, controversy surrounding the [Family Federation](#) is not accidental or merely the result of misunderstanding. It is structurally inevitable. Any religion that insists on embodying salvation within real human life must accept constant scrutiny, criticism, and the risk of failure. Event religions have no right to remain comfortable or unchallenged.



Saint Paul (ca. 10-67 AD), one of the apostles of the early church and author of several letters in the New Testament. From painting by El Greco, from Saint Louis Art Museum, Missouri, USA. Photo: Jonathunder / Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain image](#)



Christ Crucified, painting by Diego Velázquez (1599-1660). Photo: Museo del Prado. [Public domain image](#)

[Jeong's article](#) concludes with a clear thesis: event religions become problematic not because they are false, but because they are so real. The path of the [Family Federation](#) is difficult not because it rejects society or seeks attention, but because it refuses to reduce salvation to words, doctrines, or explanations. It attempts, instead, to complete salvation through lived human experience. And that, the author suggests, is precisely why it provokes unease – and why it cannot avoid controversy.

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