

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: George Stallings - Shared Suppression - Blacks and Unificationists

Knut Holdhus
May 16, 2026



George Stallings - Born in 1948 in North Carolina, USA. After being ordained as a Roman Catholic priest, he devoted many years to the Black Catholic movement. In 1989, he founded the independent Catholic church "Imani Temple". The following year, he publicly declared his separation from the Roman Catholic Church on a television program and was subsequently excommunicated. He also served as chairman of the American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC), which promotes interfaith tolerance and reconciliation



[Sekai Nippo](#)

American faith leader speaks out against dangerous precedent-setting religious suppression by Japanese state comparing it to historic treatment of blacks in the U.S.A. as second-class citizens

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[Feature Interview] Family Federation Dissolution Issue; Unite in the Spirit of Dr. King!

"It Resembles the Structure of Racial Discrimination"

Interview with Archbishop George Stallings of the Independent Catholic Church "Imani Temple"

by Yosuke Yamazaki (山崎 洋介)

Archbishop George Stallings of the Independent Catholic Church "Imani Temple"

The United States was founded on the principle of religious freedom. How does a Christian leader who has long been involved in the black church movement and the defense of religious liberty in America view the dissolution order against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#))? We spoke with Archbishop George Stallings of the independent Catholic church "Imani Temple".

Interviewer: Yosuke Yamazaki (山崎 洋介)

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"Painful to Witness the Persecution"

- What is your view of the dissolution order against the Family Federation?



Imani Temple African-American Catholic Congregation on Maryland Ave, NE in Washington, DC

It is deeply painful for me to witness the current persecution of the [Family Federation](#) in Japan, especially because I personally saw how the church founders, Rev. [Sun Myung Moon](#) and Dr. [Hak Ja Han Moon](#), devoted 34 years in the United States to defending religious freedom.

What causes me even greater pain is that, as an African American, I have personally experienced discrimination and unjust treatment. I believe religious freedom - which concerns human dignity - is a right as important as the civil rights that Black Americans fought to obtain through their struggle against discrimination.

"The Government Is Taking Away

Believers' Right to Decide for Themselves"

- How do you view the situation in Japan compared with the religious freedom you experienced in the United States?



Former Roman Catholic archbishop Emmanuel Milingo leading a consecration of clergy at the Imani Temple in Washington DC in 2006.

I have benefited greatly from religious freedom in America. It was because of that freedom that I was able to leave the Roman Catholic Church and establish the Black-centered independent Catholic church "Imani Temple". Only in America could I freely express my faith without persecution.

However, the Japanese government has decided that [Family Federation](#) members are "brainwashed" and is pursuing the [religious organization's](#) dissolution on the basis of donations. The Tokyo High Court is not supposed to judge religious beliefs, worship, or the financial practices of a religion, yet it has stepped into that realm and is trying to deprive believers of the right to make their own

decisions.

"If Separation of Church and State Collapses, Religion Itself Will Collapse"

- What are your thoughts on the relationship between religion and the state?

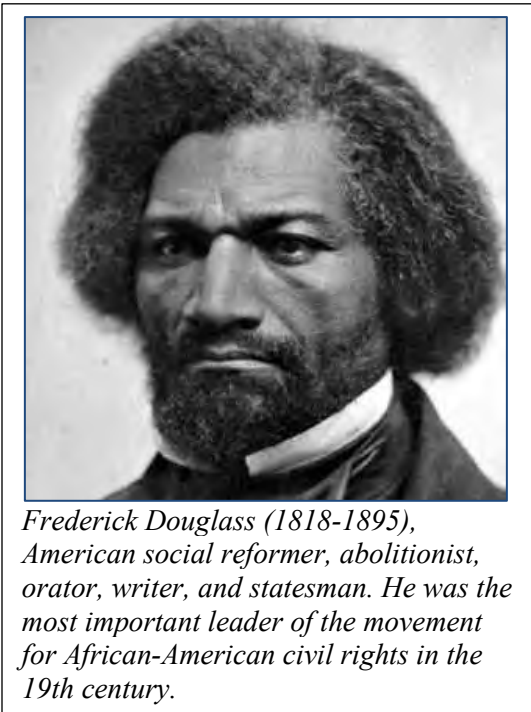
The principle of separation of church and state - that the government must not interfere in religion - is a fundamental principle clearly stated in the U.S. Constitution and must be absolutely upheld. If this principle collapses, religion itself will move toward destruction.

What makes this especially serious is that such a problem is occurring not only in communist countries, but also in Japan, a nation that has built a reputation as a democracy. Someone must stop this trend.

Think about the history of America from slavery to the civil rights movement. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and many other leaders fought for justice, and Black Americans expressed their hope for freedom through songs even under severe oppression. The Negro spiritual "Oh Freedom" says, in essence, "Before I'd be a slave, I'd rather be buried in my grave and go home to my Lord and be free." For them, the longing for freedom was inseparable from faith. It also reflected the conviction that evil state power must be resisted.

I see this issue as an attempt by the "empire" of the state to impose its values and strip away religious freedom.

Frederick Douglass, the black leader of the abolitionist movement, said: "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will." If we do not stand up now, those in power will take away even more freedoms. That is why this is the time to unite and proclaim the truth - and through that, victory will surely come.



"It Definitely Reminds Me of the History of Discrimination Against Black Americans"

- Do you see similarities between the discrimination experienced by African Americans and the current situation in Japan?

Absolutely. In fact, I often think about what is happening in Japan in light of the historical experience of African Americans.

The abolitionist movement in America eventually led to civil rights legislation because not only Black Americans but also others stood up and raised their voices. Likewise, in Japan, resisting the actions of the government and the [High Court](#) will require the cooperation of other churches. If the dissolution of the [Family Federation](#) is allowed, the impact will spread to other religions as well. If churches in Japan unite and speak out together, it is possible to overturn this decision.

Japan needs leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. - people who speak boldly and courageously based on faith. As long as the government and courts believe they can do anything without consequence, the situation will not change. But if people resist persistently and show determination, victory will come into view.

"Silence Allows the Abuse of Power"

- How do you view the fact that many religious organizations in Japan remain silent regarding the dissolution order against the Family Federation?

It is a sign of cowardice. They fear becoming targets themselves, and they fear going against the wishes of those in power. But that silence is precisely what allows the government's excessive use of power and further threatens religious freedom.



The [Family Federation](#) has not committed criminal offenses, yet a dissolution order was [approved](#) based on civil matters. This creates a [dangerous precedent](#) that could extend to other religions as well. The religious community should be united in stopping it.

I see this situation as reflecting the words of 2 Timothy 3:5 in the New Testament: "Having a form of godliness but denying its power." Outwardly, they maintain faith, but through fear they deny the true power of religion.

What is needed now is for the religious world to overcome fear, unite, and speak truth to power. If they remain silent, religious freedom will be further violated, and other religions will face the same danger.

"The Simultaneous Religious Suppression in Japan and Korea Is Strange"

- In Korea, Family Federation President Hak Ja Han has reportedly been held under confinement for six months.

In Korea, not only the [Family Federation](#) but churches that positively influence society are

being targeted, even though they have committed no crimes. The allegations against [President Han](#) have not been proven, and no valid basis has been presented for holding her for six months.

It is strange that similar religious persecution is occurring simultaneously in Japan and Korea. Why are religious organizations suddenly being persecuted and prosecuted now? It is difficult to understand.

The governments have not demonstrated why intervention in religion is supposedly necessary to "protect the people". They treat believers as though they are powerless citizens incapable of speaking out for themselves if problems arise. The same is true in Korea. If the [religious organization](#) were truly committing human rights abuses, there would be far more complaints from victims, yet such voices are limited. In other words, the government's claims do not match the actual response of citizens.

"The International Community Must Raise Its Voice"

- Regarding the Japanese government's response toward the Family Federation, what role can the international community and the United States play?

Realistically speaking, it would be difficult for the U.S. government to force Japanese courts to overturn their rulings. What can be hoped for is that pressure from the international community will accumulate and encourage the [Supreme Court](#) to reconsider the decision.

The current Japanese government believes it can exercise its power in a corrupt manner and determine the fate of religious organizations.

The possibility that the Supreme Court will overturn the [High Court's decision](#) may not be high, but even so, people must not remain silent. What is needed is a voice powerful enough to shake the conscience of the nation.

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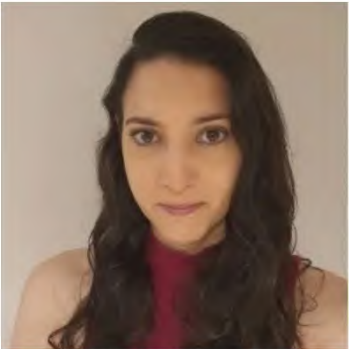
Is It Civic Education Or Political Involvement?

May 10, 2026

minority religions

The relationship between media narratives and state power has become increasingly significant in contemporary debates about religious freedom and social control. In societies marked by rapid information circulation, emotionally charged reporting, and public anxieties surrounding “dangerous groups”, media discourse does not merely reflect public sentiment; it actively shapes the legal and political frameworks through which minority religions are understood and governed. One of the most consequential mechanisms within this process is guilt by association: the transformation of accusations directed at leaders, members, or isolated incidents into a generalized condemnation of an entire religious community. Once this mechanism becomes normalized in public discourse, it can move beyond stigma and produce concrete institutional effects.

Recent developments in Japan and South Korea demonstrate how narratives originally constructed through media framing and “anti-cult” rhetoric can evolve into direct state intervention against religious minorities. In both countries, public controversies involving religious organizations have generated conditions in which legal categories, administrative procedures, and political discourse increasingly treat certain religious groups not as communities protected by freedom of religion, but as social threats requiring supervision, restriction, or elimination. These developments reveal how modern democratic states may absorb and formalize media-generated suspicions into law and public policy.



Maria Vardé. Photo: [Bitter Winter](#)

Maria Vardé’s article, “[Beyond the Leader. 2. The Legal Effects of Guilt by Association](#)”, published in [Bitter Winter](#) on 14th May 2026, explores this transition from cultural stigma to institutional consequence. The [article](#) argues that media narratives do not simply influence how the public

perceives minority religions; they may also create the emotional and political atmosphere necessary for governments to justify extraordinary legal measures. Through examples from Japan, South Korea, and Argentina, Vardé traces how accusations associated with individuals can be expanded into narratives depicting entire religious organizations as inherently manipulative, fraudulent, or dangerous.

The Japanese case following the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) in July 2022 provides one of the clearest illustrations of this dynamic. The assassin, Tetsuya Yamagami (山上徹也), explained that he held



Logo of [Bitter Winter](#), the world’s leading online magazine on religious liberty and human rights.

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explained that he held deep resentment toward the **Unification Church** – in Japan, since 2015 the **Family Federation for World Peace and Unification** – because his mother had allegedly

made excessive donations to the movement years earlier. Abe himself was targeted because of his public connections to organizations linked to the **Family Federation**. However, according to Vardé, the media and “anti-cult” commentators gradually reframed the event in a way that shifted moral responsibility away from the assassin and onto the **religious organization** itself.

Within this narrative transformation, Yamagami increasingly appeared in public discourse not primarily as the perpetrator of political violence, but as a victim shaped by the **religious group**’s influence. Simultaneously, the **Federation** came to be represented as the deeper cause of the assassination. This reframing had consequences extending far beyond media commentary. It contributed to a political climate in which Japanese authorities altered the interpretation of laws governing religious corporations.

Historically, the dissolution of religious organizations in Japan had generally required evidence of criminal conduct. Yet after Abe’s assassination and the extensive public campaign against the **Family Federation**, earlier civil disputes concerning donations were reinterpreted as sufficient grounds for requesting dissolution. Courts accepted this expanded interpretation, thereby lowering the threshold for state intervention against a religious body.

Vardé emphasizes that this process depended heavily on anti-cult concepts such as “brainwashing” and “mind control” [See editor’s note 1 below]. Under this framework, the religious teachings and practices of the **faith minority** were no longer viewed as expressions of faith or spiritual discipline, but as mechanisms designed to **manipulate** followers financially and psychologically. The voluntary actions of believers – particularly donations – were recast as inherently invalid because members were presumed incapable of exercising genuine free will.

This narrative produced a powerful legal implication: if followers were assumed to be permanently **manipulated**, then even the absence of complaints could be interpreted as evidence of continued control. The **organization** itself therefore came to be portrayed not merely as controversial, but as structurally deceptive and socially harmful. According to the article, the practical consequences were immediate and severe. Religious facilities were **closed**, assets were transferred to **liquidators**, and the ordinary religious lives of believers were disrupted while the organization faced potential dissolution.

South Korea presents a related but distinct development. There, guilt by association has also expanded from media discourse into legislative initiatives. The article discusses the case involving **Hak Ja Han** (한학자) – also called **Mother Han** – co-founder and leader of the **Family Federation**, who became embroiled in allegations concerning political bribery connected to associates and public officials. Although she denied knowledge or involvement, the controversy intensified broader political efforts to increase state oversight of religious organizations.


Shinzo Abe in March 2022, few months before he was assassinated. Photo: United States Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel / Wikimedia Commons. Public domain image. Cropped



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Controversial new law
interpreted as
targeting the [Family
Federation for World
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Here its logo



Controversial new law
interpreted as
targeting the
Shincheonji Church of
Jesus. Here, its logo.



The current Lee Jae-myung administration is trying to introduce a vague new law that would give the state powers to arbitrarily dissolve religious organizations, effectively violating the country's constitutionally guaranteed religious freedom. Illustration: ChatGPT, 5th March 2026.

During Lee Jae-myung (이재명) administration of South Korea introduced legislation commonly referred to as the “Church Dissolution Act”. Although framed in neutral legal language, the political discourse surrounding the bill reportedly made clear that organizations such as the [Family Federation](#) and Shincheonji [\[See editor's note 2 below\]](#) were among its primary targets. The proposed law would authorize extensive state powers, including compulsory inspections, interrogation of religious leaders, revocation of legal status, dissolution of organizations, and state control over assets.

Unlike the Japanese case, which emerged from a specific national trauma tied to Abe’s assassination, the South Korean proposal appears to institutionalize a broader mechanism of state supervision over religions considered socially or politically problematic. Vardé argues that this marks a significant shift. The issue is no longer limited to responding to a singular controversy; rather, the state acquires a generalized framework for regulating or potentially eliminating religious groups perceived as undesirable.

A central concern raised throughout the [article](#) is that these policies are often justified through language that appears reasonable and protective. Governments and media actors invoke concepts such as victim protection, public safety, social order, or national security. Yet beneath this reassuring vocabulary lies a deeper transformation: as Vardé points out, actions attributed to specific individuals becomes generalized across entire communities.

In this sense, guilt by association becomes more than a social prejudice. It evolves into an administrative and legal principle capable of restructuring the boundaries of religious freedom. Once suspicion is embedded into institutional procedures, religious belonging itself may acquire legal significance. Minority faiths become vulnerable not because of demonstrable criminal conduct by all members, but because narratives surrounding leaders, associates, or isolated incidents allow the state to treat the entire organization as inherently suspect.

The experiences of Japan and South Korea therefore illustrate a broader contemporary problem: the convergence of media sensationalism, “anti-cult” discourse, and expanding state authority. Vardé’s analysis suggests that when emotionally charged narratives dominate public debate, democratic institutions may gradually normalize exceptional measures against unpopular religions. What begins as media framing can ultimately reshape legal doctrine, administrative practice, and the lived reality of religious communities.

By examining these developments, the [article](#) raises important questions about the fragility of religious liberty in modern societies. It invites reflection on how democratic states balance public concern with the protection of minority rights, and how quickly narratives of suspicion can become embedded in systems of governance. Most importantly, it warns that when guilt by association is accepted as a legitimate framework for public policy, the transition from social stigma to institutional repression may occur with surprising ease.

Text: *Knut Holdhus, editor*

Maria Vardé graduated in Anthropological Sciences at the University of Buenos Aires and is currently a researcher at the *Instituto de Ciencias Antropológicas, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad de Buenos Aires* (Institute of Anthropological Sciences, Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities, University of Buenos Aires). She has written and lectured on archeology, spirituality, and freedom of religion or belief.

Featured image above: *Alarmist media narratives leading to state repression in South Korea and Japan.*
Illustration: ChatGPT, 15th May 2026

[Editor’s note 1: In Japan, the **“mind-control” myth** has been a powerful tool used to stigmatize and suppress new religious movements (NRMs), particularly since the 1980s. The concept suggests that NRMs manipulate or “brainwash” their followers, depriving them of free will and rational thought. This narrative gained traction after the 1995 Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas attack, when public fear of dangerous cults intensified. Although Aum was an extreme and violent exception, the incident cast suspicion on all NRMs, allowing critics, media, and the government to label diverse groups as manipulative or psychologically coercive.

The “mind-control” myth serves multiple social and political functions. It simplifies complex questions of belief, making it easier to portray converts as victims rather than as individuals exercising spiritual agency. This framing justifies legal and social intervention, including the coercive **“deprogramming”** of believers – sometimes involving confinement or psychological pressure to force renunciation of faith. Lawyers, ex-member groups, and certain media outlets have used the idea of mind control to construct NRMs as threats to family stability and national order, reinforcing social conformity and Japan’s preference for established, non-controversial religions such as Buddhism and Shinto.

In recent years, the myth resurfaced following the 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose attacker cited resentment toward the [Family Federation](#). A public outrage largely created by media reignited scrutiny of NRMs, and politicians and journalists revived “mind-control” rhetoric to explain fundraising and recruitment practices. Critics argue that this framing discourages genuine religious tolerance and critical examination of Japan’s restrictive religious climate. Overall, the “mind-control” myth functions less as a scientific or psychological concept and more as a moral [policy](#) – a cultural weapon used to delegitimize minority

panic – a cultural weapon used to delegitimize minority faiths and to reaffirm mainstream social norms about religion, obedience, and the boundaries of acceptable belief.]

[Editor's note 2: Shincheonji, officially known as *Shincheonji Church of Jesus, the Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony*, is a new religious movement founded in South Korea in 1984 by Lee Man-hee, who claims to be the promised pastor mentioned in the Bible's Book of Revelation. Shincheonji teaches that the Book of Revelation is being fulfilled through its church and that Lee Man-hee has received divine revelation to interpret it.]

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