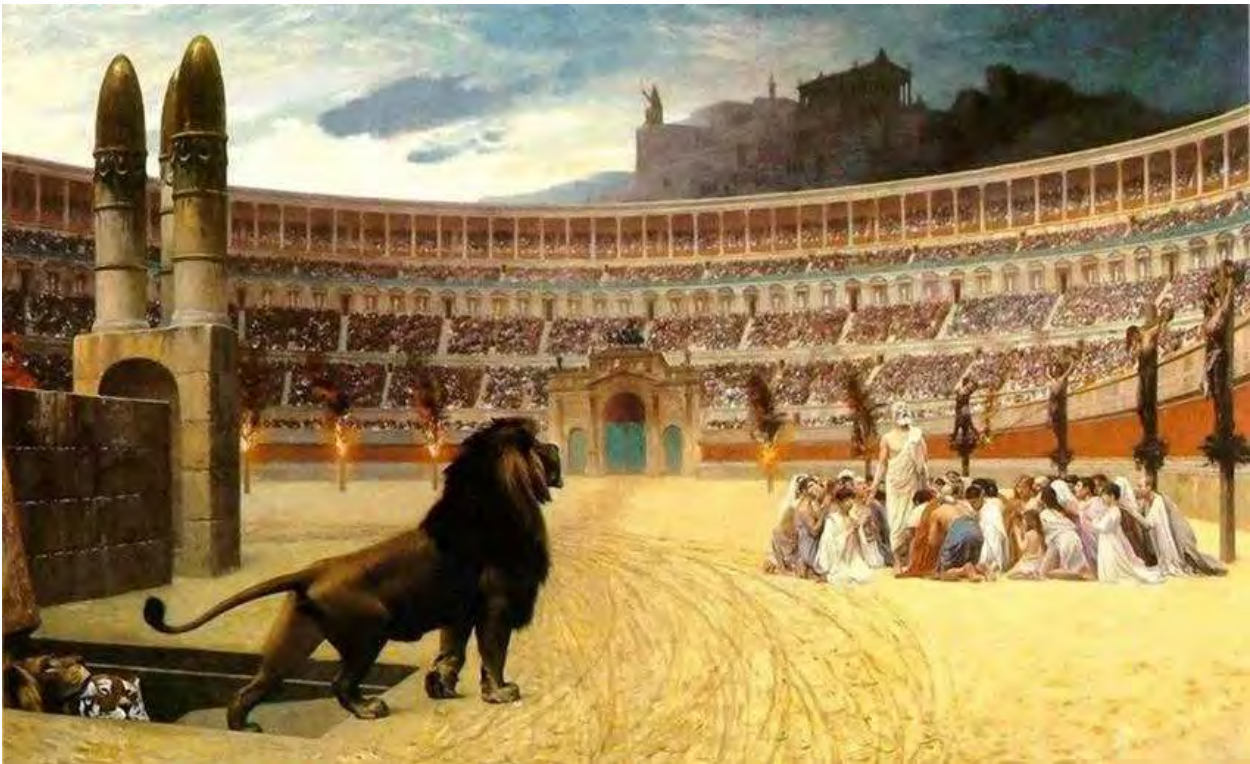



FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: in Korea Raids as Political Spectacle and Media Trials

Knut Holdhus
July 26, 2025



The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer, painting by Jean-Leon Gerome (1824-1904)




Reverend Demian Dunkley,
President of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) in USA. Here, speaking Jan. 19, 2025

American paper: Investigation staged as televised political spectacle as images, headlines, and language have become today's tools of suppression to shame, isolate, and silence those with different convictions

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"[Faith dragged back into the Colosseum: When the State turns faith into a spectacle of control](#)", is both a defense of religious liberty and a powerful indictment of what Dunkley sees as a calculated campaign of state overreach cloaked in legal authority.



Two days after the raid: Holy Mother Han on July 20, 2025 in Gapyeong, South Korea

The Washington Times In his 25th July 2025 opinion piece in The Washington Times, Dr. Demian Dunkley, President of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU) USA, offers a profound and impassioned response to a troubling series of events unfolding in South Korea. The article, ["Faith dragged back into the Colosseum: When the State turns faith into a spectacle of control"](#), is both a defense of religious liberty and a powerful indictment of what Dunkley sees as a calculated campaign of state overreach cloaked in legal authority.

At the center of this controversy is the 18th July raid by South Korean prosecutors on [Family Federation](#) properties - including the private residence of Dr. [Hak Ja Han](#), known to millions as "Holy Mother Han", the 82-year-old matriarch of the [Family Federation](#) and a prominent global advocate for peace.

According to Dunkley, over 1,000 agents descended on sacred grounds, searching personal belongings and treating the residence of a spiritual leader as though it were the scene of a high-profile criminal case. Yet despite the intensity of the operation, no formal charges or indictments have followed. This, Dunkley argues, reveals the true nature of the episode - not as justice, but as political theater.

Dr. Dunkley's op-ed reads not just as a defense of his faith and leader, but as a principled warning about the dangerous entanglement of state power and media spectacle. By invoking the imagery of the Roman Colosseum, where early Christians were paraded and persecuted

for public entertainment, Dunkley draws a haunting parallel: today's arenas are digital, the persecution happens through images, language, and public messaging rather than brute force. It's persecution by perception, not punishment by blood - but it can still destroy lives, reputations, and freedom.

The tools of suppression have evolved from lions and swords to press leaks and televised raids. The goal, however, remains eerily familiar - to shame, isolate, and silence those whose convictions may challenge prevailing narratives or political agendas.



*His church was also raided:
Paul Yonggi Cho (1936-2021),
the founder of Yoido Full
Gospel Church. Photo (2015)*

Crucially, the article situates this incident within a broader international context. Dunkley references similar state actions against other minority faiths in Korea - including Shincheonji [See editor's note 1 below] and the World Mission Society Church of God [See editor's note 2 below] - underscoring a pattern of religious scapegoating.

Demian Dunkley writes that the 18th July raid was not an isolated incident,

"The same week, prosecutors raided Yoido Full Gospel Church - Korea's largest Pentecostal congregation - and Far East Broadcasting, a major Christian media outlet. Their leaders were branded by innuendo and paraded before the press. The charges? Vague lobbying. No convictions. No verdicts.

This is not justice. It is theatre. The special prosecutor's office in Korea has a growing record of overreach against minority faiths [...]. Sweeping raids. Camera crews. Media trials. It is a pattern."

In the opinion piece, Dunkley also points out the distorted media portrayal of the raid on the [Family Federation](#)'s sacred sites,

"I had read in the news that hundreds of our young people were ordered to block the police - blaring headlines over pixelated photos of crowds at the gates. But when I arrived, I saw the truth. They had simply gathered outside the walls, praying and singing hymns of peace, as busloads of police seized control of the grounds with military precision.

And yet, the media painted the police as the victims."

Dunkley also draws attention to the growing chorus of international concern. From the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom to Human Rights Watch and South Korea's own National Human Rights Commission, voices across ideological and national lines have warned of democratic backsliding, particularly in the areas of protest rights and freedom of conscience.



Another persecuted new religious movement in South Korea: Shincheonji. Here. their Peace Palace near the town of Chung Pyung in Gapyeong county

One of the most compelling aspects of Dunkley's article is his humanization of Dr. [Hak Ja Han](#). Far from

portraying her as a detached religious figure, he presents her as a dignified elder, an international peacebuilder, and a mother-figure to millions.

Demian Dunkley actually met her soon after the raid and writes,

"She spoke softly, not in fear, but with a sorrow so deep it made the air in the room feel heavier. She shared how investigators had gone through her drawers, and how certain items - things symbolic of her mission and legacy - were now missing. Among them, she said quietly, were her pearl necklace and earrings: 'the ones I wore on the world tour are gone'."



Her quiet heartbreak at the loss of those meaningful personal items becomes a powerful metaphor for the deeper loss Dunkley suggests has taken place: the violation of sacred space, the desecration of spiritual trust, and a wound to the moral conscience of a nation.

This moment, Dunkley suggests, is not just about one religious community. It is a test of Korea's identity as a democracy and of the international community's willingness to defend religious liberty wherever it is threatened. He directly invokes Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees every human being the right to believe, worship, and act according to

conscience - whether alone or "in community with others". In doing so, Dunkley makes a case not for preferential treatment of the [Family Federation](#), but for the universal and non-negotiable right to religious freedom.



Backlash against the [Family Federation](#) after his assassination in 2022: Shinzo Abe, here in 2017

The article also takes on particular resonance when placed alongside recent history in Japan. Following the 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, there was a similar media-driven backlash against the [Family Federation](#) in Japan, with little regard for due process or factual nuance. Dunkley points out that the South Korean government now seems to be repeating that script, mobilizing public institutions not to seek justice, but to reinforce political control through spectacle and public shaming.

What makes Dunkley's article especially powerful is its moral clarity. He does not equivocate or deflect responsibility. He acknowledges that if specific individuals have committed wrongdoing, they should be held accountable. But he draws a firm line between individual misconduct and collective demonization - a distinction too often blurred in the court of public opinion. His ultimate appeal is not just to lawyers or journalists, but to leaders of conscience everywhere.

This is what gives the article its urgency. Dunkley warns that silence in the face of these violations will not protect other communities. On the contrary, it sets a precedent that can - and will - be used against others. Calling readers to consider not only the facts of the moment, but the moral and legal implications for the future, Demian Dunkley writes,

"Do not wait until it's your altar, your prayer, your people."

In a world increasingly marked by polarization and sensationalism, Dunkley's voice stands out not just for its emotional resonance, but for its principled insistence on justice, conscience, and faith. His article is not simply a response to one raid or one injustice - it is a broader call to defend the dignity of belief itself, wherever and however it is expressed.

"Faith dragged back into the Colosseum" is a stirring defense of religious freedom and a deeply personal testimony of faith under fire. It compels us to ask: What kind of society do we become when we allow sacred things to be treated as spectacle, and conscience to be sacrificed for the sake of control?

The answer, as Dunkley argues, will define not only South Korea's future - but ours.

See also [Raids Blur Line Between Justice and Politics](#)

See also [Heavy-Handed Raid on Sacred Sites Condemned](#)

Text: Knut Holdhus

[Editor's note 1: 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.]

[Editor's note 2: The World Mission Society Church of God (WMSCOG) is a South Korean new religious movement founded in 1964 by Ahn Sahng-hong, who is regarded by followers as the Second Coming of Christ. The church teaches that Ahn fulfilled biblical prophecy and restored the truth of the early church, which it believes was lost over centuries of Christian history. One of the church's most distinctive doctrines is the belief in God the Mother, a divine female figure represented by Zahng Gil-jah, who is believed to be living in South Korea today. This belief is based on their interpretation of various biblical passages, especially from Genesis and Revelation.]

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Heavy-Handed Raid On Sacred Sites Condemned

- July 25, 2025
- Knut Holdhus

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Editorial in South Korean daily: Aggressive and insensitive investigators making investigation appear as veritable religious persecution in raid on temple regarded as holy by millions

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On 23rd July 2025, the South Korean daily *The Segye Ilbo* published a compelling editorial headlined “Excessive Investigation Undermining Religious Values: The Search and Seizure at the Family Federation”.

세계일보

The logo of the Segye Ilbo

The paper voices concern over what it calls an excessive and

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potentially unconstitutional search and seizure at the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (previously the [Unification Church](#)) by a special prosecutor’s team. The search, conducted on 18th July, was part of a wider investigation into alleged state interference and election meddling involving political figures such as

- former First Lady Kim Keon-hee (김건희),
- businessman, political broker, and journalist Myung Tae-gyun (명태균),
- shamanistic religious leader Geonjin Beopsa – real name: Jeon Seong-bae (전성배).

While accountability and justice are essential pillars of a democratic society, the editorial raises an urgent and valid question: at what point does an investigation cross the line into religious persecution?



Sacred site: the [Cheonwon Temple](#). Here, prayer vigil at night. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

The editorial underscores that even in cases involving national-level political scandals, investigators must operate within the bounds of law and constitutional rights – most importantly, the right to religious freedom. The [Family Federation](#) claims that its headquarters, [Cheonwon Temple](#) in Gapyeong – regarded as a sacred site by millions of followers worldwide – was subjected to an aggressive and insensitive raid. If these allegations are accurate, the investigators’ actions do not merely represent procedural overreach; they risk severely damaging public trust in the very institutions meant to uphold justice.

A particularly alarming aspect, as highlighted by *Segye Ilbo*, is the **reported behavior of some investigators who allegedly handled sacred religious artifacts with disrespect – actions such as kicking or carelessly touching these items. For any religious community, such behavior is not only offensive but deeply traumatic.** These acts, if true, go beyond poor judgment – they represent a direct affront to the sanctity of a global faith tradition.

The editorial wisely avoids the pitfall of defending religious organizations unconditionally. It acknowledges that no institution – religious or otherwise – should be beyond the reach of the law. The [Family Federation](#) itself has stated its willingness to cooperate fully with the authorities. But cooperation must be met with fair treatment. Investigations based on flimsy evidence or partisan motives undermine both justice and democratic integrity. As *Segye Ilbo* points out, initiating sweeping searches on the basis of circumstantial evidence alone opens the door to stigma, and possibly irreparable harm, for the [religious organization](#) and its followers.

The editorial in the Korean daily claims this is not just a domestic issue. The [Family Federation](#) is an international religious body with a presence in more than 200 countries. Its followers look to South Korea as the origin of their faith. Since its founding over 70 years ago, the [Federation](#) has worked closely with world leaders to promote peace, humanitarian work, and Korean peninsula stability. The [Family Federation](#) has also contributed to enhancing South Korea’s global reputation. Any investigation that disregards this context risks being interpreted – especially abroad – as state-sponsored religious intolerance. According to the editorial, this is a diplomatic issue as much as it is a legal one.

Criticism of the special prosecutor’s conduct has already emerged from both ruling and opposition political factions, signaling that concerns over fairness and proportionality are not limited to religious circles.

Segye Ilbo rightly draws parallels to past incidents in Korean history where religious groups became scapegoats during periods of social or political



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social or political unrest. These historical wounds remain unhealed, and repeating such mistakes in today's legal climate could fracture trust between the state and civil society even further.

In conclusion, the editorial published by *Segye Ilbo* is not a blanket defense of any religious organization. Rather, it is a thoughtful, principled appeal for balance –

recognizing the importance of legal accountability while insisting on the equal importance of religious liberty and dignity. In a pluralistic democracy, the rule of law must be enforced, but never at the cost of fundamental freedoms. Upholding those freedoms, especially in moments of political tension, is what truly defines the maturity of a just society.

See also [Raids Blur Line Between Justice and Politics](#)

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Text: Knut Holdhus

Featured image above: One of the sacred sites that was raided – Cheon Jeong Temple in Gapyeong, South Korea. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

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Strongly persecuted in South Korea due to refusal of military service based on religious beliefs: The Jehovah's Witnesses. Thousands of believers have been imprisoned for conscientious objection to conscription. Here, their pamphlet stand in front of the Daeseongri station in South Korea 10th July 2016. Photo: [Jhcbs1019](#) / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 4.0 Int](#). Cropped

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