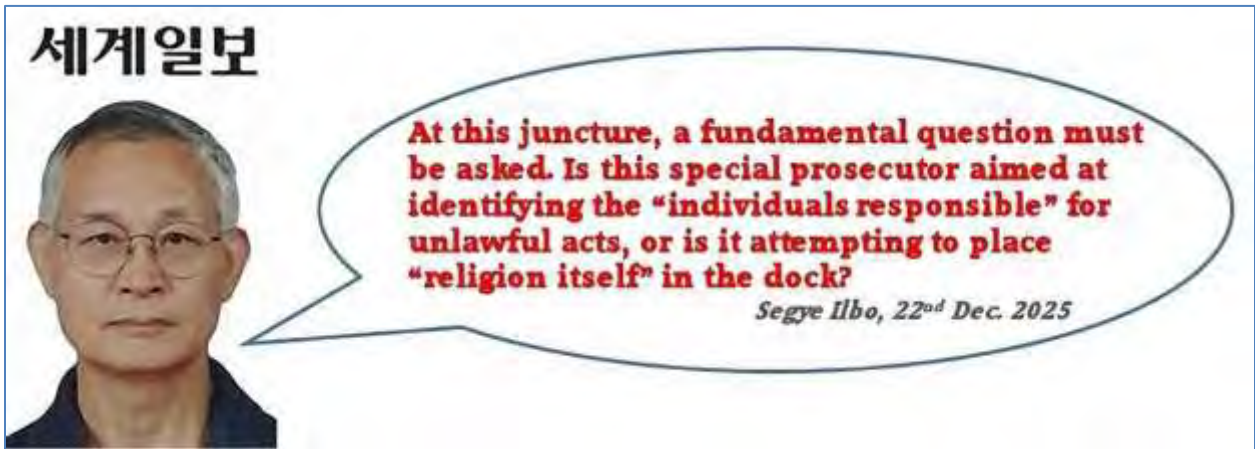


FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Collective Judgment in Holy Mother Han Probe

Knut Holdhus
December 23, 2025



A quote from religious affairs reporter Jeong Seong-su in [Segye Ilbo](#) Dec. 22, 2025



Probes by special prosecutors, religious freedom, and media coverage: Where accountability ends and collective blame begins

Religious affairs correspondent Jeong Seong-su (정성수) wrote an opinion piece for the South Korean daily [Segye Ilbo](#) headlined "[The 'Unification Church Special Prosecutor' Is Nothing to Fear](#)". It was published on 22nd December.

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Since President Lee's own party was drawn into lobbying claims, two weeks ago, South Korean politics has become increasingly focused on the possible appointment of a special prosecutor to investigate alleged ties between the [Family Federation](#) and political power.

Because of certain claims by former [Federation](#) leader [Yoon Yeong-ho](#), what initially appeared to be partisan rhetoric has now solidified into a near certainty. Politicians across the ideological spectrum have publicly invoked phrases such as "church-state collusion", "illegal political funding", and "influence peddling". Even the presidential office has indicated openness to the investigation. At this point, the political momentum behind the special prosecutor appears irreversible.

Reporter Jeong emphasizes in his [article](#) that amid the intensity of the political debate, an essential question risks being overlooked: What, exactly, is the target of this investigation? Is it intended to hold specific individuals accountable for concrete unlawful acts, or is it drifting toward putting an entire religious movement on trial in the court of public opinion? This distinction matters profoundly, not only for the [Family Federation](#) but for the health of democratic governance itself.

In democratic societies, investigations into corruption or abuse of power are both legitimate and necessary. According to the [Segye Ilbo](#), when political authority, financial resources, and social influence intersect in opaque or improper ways, rigorous scrutiny is a form of institutional self-correction. However, democracies are also built on clear limits – limits that define who may be investigated, on what grounds, and with what protections. The danger arises when those limits blur and suspicion expands from individual wrongdoing to collective blame.

South Korea's constitution, like those of many Western democracies, enshrines two principles that must coexist: the separation of religion and state, and the freedom of religion. These principles are often

misunderstood as being in tension with one another. In fact, they are mutually reinforcing. The separation of church and state is not designed to suppress or marginalize religion, but to prevent political power from exploiting religious belief for its own ends. At the same time, freedom of religion protects individuals and communities from being targeted or penalized simply because of their faith.

The concern raised in the [article](#) by Jeong Seong-su is that much of the political language surrounding the proposed special prosecutor has begun to frame the [Family Federation](#) itself – not merely particular actors within it – as a suspect entity. When an entire [religious organization](#) is casually described as a "political intervention group" or the central player in a scandal, democratic norms are placed under strain.



Stereotyping Catholics as trying to take over the world. Here, a colored version of the "Whore of Babylon" illustration from Martin Luther's 1534 translation of the Bible. The term refers to both a symbolic female figure and a place of evil as mentioned in the Book of Revelation of the New Testament. She is described more fully in Revelation 17:5 as "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth". Leading reformers like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Knox taught that the figure represented the Catholic Church. Author: From the workshop of Lucas Cranach

In Western historical memory, such generalizations evoke uncomfortable precedents, where religious minorities became convenient symbols of broader political anxieties.

If evidence exists that unlawful political donations were made, or that certain individuals engaged in improper exchanges with those in power, then accountability should be clear, narrow, and personal. Responsibility in democratic legal systems attaches to actions taken by identifiable individuals, not to religious labels or group affiliations. To suggest otherwise – to imply that millions of ordinary believers must bear suspicion or social stigma simply because they share a religious identity – amounts to a form of collective punishment. Such an approach undermines the presumption of innocence and risks normalizing discrimination.

The human consequences of this shift in tone should not be underestimated. When religious organizations are publicly framed as politically suspect, ordinary believers often pay the price. People begin to question whether they should conceal their faith at work, in schools, or within their local communities. They may face subtle exclusion, reputational harm, or open hostility, despite having no connection whatsoever to political decision-making or financial misconduct. From a democratic perspective, this outcome is deeply troubling.

The [article](#) also raises a broader critique of political behavior itself. It asks whether politics truly acts as a guardian of democratic pluralism or whether it treats religion instrumentally – embracing it when useful and discarding it when expedient. When religion is viewed primarily as something to be "managed", "controlled", or sacrificed during moments of political crisis, it ceases to function as a space of conscience and moral conviction. Instead, it becomes another tool within the machinery of power.

For decades, the [Family Federation](#) has publicly advanced ambitious ideals, including national reconciliation, global peace, and international cooperation in the post-Cold War era. Its activities – such as promoting international conferences, unofficial diplomacy, or large-scale infrastructure visions – are undeniably controversial and invite debate. In pluralistic societies, such debate is not only acceptable but healthy. However, controversy alone does not constitute criminality. To retroactively reinterpret all such initiatives as mere profit-seeking schemes or political lobbying efforts risks erasing the sincerity of belief that motivates many participants.



Advancing ambitious ideals and large-scale infrastructure visions: Here, from a proposed tunnel between South Korea and Japan: the entrance to the exploratory shaft in Karatsu on the southern island of Kyushu, Japan

As the special prosecutor process moves forward, the political environment is likely to become even more polarized. Progressive and conservative factions may weaponize the issue against one another, with little incentive to protect a [religious organization](#) that offers no clear electoral advantage. In such a climate, the [Family Federation](#) risks becoming politically isolated – criticized by one side as an object of reform or eradication and used by the other merely as a tactical device. Neither posture offers genuine protection.

Given this reality, [Jeong's article](#) argues that seeking salvation through political alliances is neither realistic nor wise. Instead, the most durable source of protection lies in principles rather than personalities. Constitutional guarantees, legal standards of individual

responsibility, the presumption of innocence, and established human-rights norms form institutional barriers that are harder to erode than political goodwill. These are the same safeguards that protect any religious or ideological minority when public sentiment turns hostile.

The conclusion drawn is both pragmatic and normative. The [Family Federation](#), rather than searching for powerful patrons, should insist on clear boundaries: investigations may proceed, but accountability must remain individual; faith itself must not be criminalized; and no precedent should be set in which an entire religion is sacrificed to satisfy political pressure. Governments change, administrations come and go, but democratic dignity depends on upholding these limits consistently.

Ultimately, the argument is not a plea for immunity, but a defense of democratic discipline. In moments of political turbulence, the true test of democracy lies not in how aggressively it pursues suspicion, but in how faithfully it preserves principles. Holding fast to those principles, the article suggests, is the most sober and dignified path forward – not only for the [Family Federation](#) and its believers, but for the integrity of democratic society as a whole.

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special task force of the *National Police Agency* at police headquarters in Seodaemun, Seoul. According to *JoongAng Ilbo*, Jeong was questioned as a witness rather than a suspect, but her stature within the *organization* underscores the importance of her testimony. She previously served as vice president of Cheonmu-won, formerly the *Family Federation's* highest administrative body, and is widely regarded as having been the second most powerful figure within the organizational hierarchy. Known as one of *Mother Han's* closest aides, Jeong is believed to have had oversight of, or at least deep familiarity with, the *Federation's* financial flows.

Following the marathon questioning session, Jeong declined to answer questions from reporters. Journalists pressed her on whether the alleged transfers of money and valuables to politicians were carried out on direct instructions from *Mother Han* herself, and on the origins of a large cash reserve kept in a *Federation* vault. Jeong's silence did little to quell media speculation.



Jeon Jae-soo (전재수).
Photo (2023): 이데일리TV /
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Investigators are particularly focused on whether these transfers were linked to lobbying efforts connected to *Federation* priorities. One recurring issue is the long-standing proposal to build an *undersea tunnel* between South Korea and Japan, a project promoted by organizations affiliated with the *Family Federation*. Police are examining whether financial inducements were offered to secure political support for this initiative.



The proposed route for an undersea tunnel linking Japan and South Korea. Photo: Worldmap. License: CC ASA 3.0 Unp

Suspicion has grown as it emerged that all three politicians attended an event in 2018 related to the *undersea tunnel*, hosted by the *International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace* (IAPP), an organization founded in 2016 under the initiative of *Mother Han*. Further fueling concerns, former Minister Jeon reportedly continued to participate in *Federation*-related forums connected to the *tunnel project* as recently as October of this year. Investigators have also obtained congratulatory messages sent by Jeon to *Family Federation* events, which they are analyzing as part of a broader effort to map the depth of his relationship with the *religious organization*.

Another line of inquiry involves a *Federation*-affiliated foundation's purchase of 500 copies of Jeon's book shortly after its publication in 2019, at a cost of about 10 million won (ca. 6,800 US dollars). Police are examining whether this purchase constituted an indirect financial benefit and whether it was authorized or later reviewed by *Mother Han* herself.

The investigation is not limited to witnesses. On 17th December, police conducted an in-person interview with *Mother Han* at *Seoul Detention Center*, where the 82-year-old religious leader is being held since 22nd September. The officers also questioned a *Federation* official described as the *organization's* "treasurer" to determine the origin and use of the large cache of cash allegedly kept in *Mother Han's* "personal vault".

Authorities have already questioned Yoon Yeong-ho, the former head of the *Family Federation's* world headquarters, who is widely seen as the initial source of the allegations. Investigators are now cross-checking his statements against financial records, testimony from other insiders, and physical evidence obtained through search and seizure operations.

According to the *JoongAng Ilbo* article, these raids, carried out at the *JoongAng Ilbo's* main compound in Gapyeong and its Seoul headquarters, yielded records and receipts related to luxury goods purchases. Police are reportedly tracing the purchase of high-end watches from brands such as Bulgari or Cartier and may extend the investigation to the retail outlets involved.

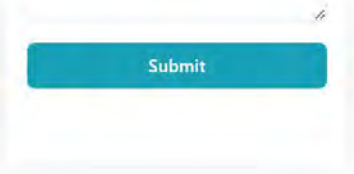


Yoon Yeong-ho, here 9th August 2020. Screenshot from video by FFWPU



Former Minister Jeon has vehemently denied the allegations. In a Facebook post, he dismissed the claims with sarcasm, stating that authorities "might as well say" he received enormous sums of cash and dozens of watches. He has also rejected the idea that he would trade political support for personal gain, emphasizing his long-standing opposition to the Korea-Japan *undersea tunnel* project on policy grounds. According to Jeon, the *project* would harm the future of the city of Busan, and he argues it is implausible that he would compromise such convictions for relatively modest personal benefits.

Analysts view the recent developments as part of a wave



initiated politically charged investigation against opponent: [Lee Jae-myung](#), President of South Korea since 4th June 2025. Photo: Jeonnam Provincial Government / Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain image](#). Cropped

Analyses with the recent developments support the view of political vengeance dressed up as justice, against what is perceived as conservative religious leaders with a lot of influence. Lee became president in June 2025. He soon appointed special prosecutors to investigate possible wrongdoings by the former conservative government and its supporters. On 18th July, the largest church in the world, the *Yoido Full Gospel Church*, was raided by a large party of police officers investigating alleged corruption ties to the former government and unlawful political funding.

On the same day, several locations belonging to the [Family Federation](#) were raided by hundreds of police officers sent by the special prosecutors.

In July, special prosecutors raided the home and offices of another religious leader, Billy Kim (Kim Jang-hwan – 김장환), former pastor of *Sanghwa Central Baptist Church* and founder of the *Far Eastern Broadcasting Corporation*. His alleged crime was illegal lobbying. The investigation is still going on.

In August, Reverend Jeon Kwang-hoon (전광훈) from the large *Sarang Jeil Church* was given a big fine for what was claimed to be unlawful fundraising practices at a large rally in support of former President Yoon.



Pastor Son Hyun-bo, here August 2025. Photo: [Bitter Winter](#)

And pastor Son Hyun-bo (손현보) from the megachurch Segyero in Busan has been held in detention since August while his alleged illegal support for the Yoon administration is being investigated.

But it certainly looks like the prosecution initiated by the current Lee administration is now [backfiring](#). As the [JoongAng Ilbo](#) report reveals, several lawmakers from Lee's own Democratic Party are being drawn into the investigations.



Reverend Jeon Kwang-hoon (전광훈) from Sarang Jeil Church. Photo (March 2024): [MBC PD수첩](#) / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC Attr 3.0 Unp](#)

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Featured image above: Cartoon version of South Korean police interrogation. Illustration: [Grok xAI](#), 20th December 2025.

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