

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Scholar Kim Min-ji Sounds Alarm - Korean State Raiding Sacred Sites

Knut Holdhus
July 27, 2025



Old fire alarm bells in Belfast, Northern Ireland in 2009

세계일보

Segye Ilbo

Korean professor rings alarm bells as she defends sanctity of sacred spaces: Special prosecutor's overreach must not become a witch hunt

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Professor Kim Min-ji, President of the Korean Association for Peace and Religion and professor at Sun Moon University

In a special contribution to the South Korean daily the [Segye Ilbo](#) on 22nd July 2025, Professor Kim Min-ji (김민지), President of the Korean Association for Peace and Religion and professor at Sun Moon University, raises urgent concerns about the increasing involvement of special prosecutors in South Korea's religious sphere. Her article, titled "[The Special Prosecutor's Overreach Must Not Become a Witch Hunt](#)", is both a warning and a call for the preservation of constitutional values, especially the cherished principle of religious freedom. Kim argues that recent investigations by prosecutors - particularly high-profile raids targeting religious institutions and leaders - risk undermining democratic norms and potentially dragging the nation back into an era of politically motivated scapegoating.

At the heart of Kim's critique is the assertion that investigations targeting the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly known as the [Unification Church](#)), Yoido Full Gospel Church, Far East Broadcasting Company, and prominent Christian figures like Kim Jang-hwan (김장환) [See editor's note 1 below] and Lee Young-hoon (이영훈 - Senior Pastor of Yoido Full

Gospel Church since 2008) [See editor's note 2 below] reflect an alarming trend. She warns that state power is being exercised in a way that disregards both the symbolic sanctity of religious spaces and the fundamental rights of religious communities. According to Kim Min-ji, these developments may not stem solely from a pursuit of justice but could be influenced by political incentives to demonstrate results or manipulate public sentiment.



Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC), a Christian media organization that produces and broadcasts evangelical radio programming around the world, with a primary focus on Asia, the Middle East, and parts of Africa and Eastern Europe. FEBC broadcasts in more than 100 languages across over 50 countries, including China, North Korea, Indonesia, Mongolia, Russia, Cambodia, and others

A Caution Against Politicized Justice

Kim Min-ji makes it clear that she does not oppose lawful investigations. On the contrary, she affirms that no one - religious institutions included - should be above the law. What she finds troubling, however, is the apparent imbalance in the authorities' approach: the decision to conduct large-scale, high-visibility raids on religious groups appears to be based more on their symbolic and public value than on clearly substantiated criminal evidence. This, she argues, creates a perception that religion is being unfairly targeted because it lacks the institutional power or media influence that political or business entities often possess.

The comparison to the Shincheonji Church of Jesus [See editor's note 3 below] during the COVID-19 pandemic is particularly poignant. That incident, Kim recalls, demonstrated how quickly public opinion can be swayed into demonizing a minority religious group, resulting in disproportionate legal responses and long-term reputational harm. She views the current situation as a

dangerous echo of that precedent, one that could lead to further erosion of civil liberties and deepen divisions in South Korean society.



The Shincheonji Peace Palace near the town of Chung Pyung in Gapyeong county. Photo taken 2nd March 2020, at the start of the Corona epidemic, when the Shincheonji Church of Jesus faced intense scrutiny and persecution - rooted more in stigma than purely public health concerns. It happened after a woman, later dubbed "Patient 31", attended two services in Daegu at Shincheonji's regional branch. She unknowingly became a super-spreader, infecting dozens of worshippers in tightly packed masses. To the left in the picture is a large MBC outside broadcast vehicle

Preserving the Sanctity of Religion

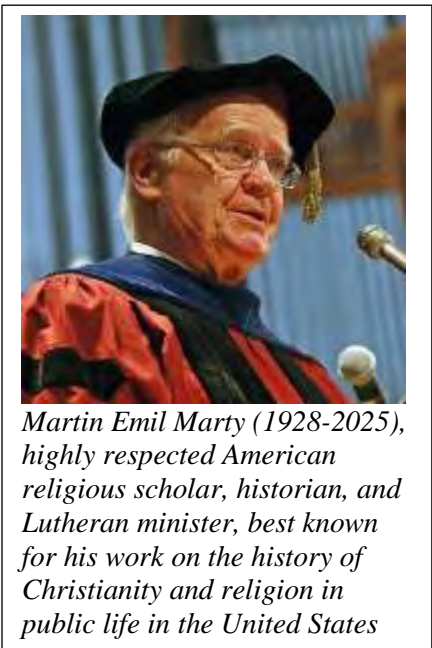
Professor Kim also emphasizes the broader cultural and spiritual implications of these investigations. Religious sites are not merely physical locations - they are sacred to their communities, often viewed as houses of [God](#) and spaces of reflection, prayer, and fellowship. Raiding such sites without compelling and transparent cause, she argues, not only humiliates individuals but disrespects entire faith communities and the values they represent.

She advocates for investigative restraint, suggesting that written requests, interviews, or voluntary cooperation should be the first course of action when dealing with religious institutions. Only when there is clear and credible evidence of wrongdoing, she maintains, should authorities consider more forceful measures like raids. Even then, those actions must be conducted with sensitivity, upholding the dignity of religious leaders and respecting the role their institutions play in society.

Democracy and the Separation of Powers

The article's deeper message is rooted in the foundational principles of democracy: the rule of law, freedom of conscience, and the separation of church and state. Kim warns that if political power is allowed to infringe upon religious autonomy, even in the name of law enforcement, the country risks slipping into authoritarian patterns.

She references theologian Martin Marty's insight that religion and politics must serve as mutual checks on one another - remaining in productive tension rather than falling into alignment or opposition.



Martin Emil Marty (1928-2025), highly respected American religious scholar, historian, and Lutheran minister, best known for his work on the history of Christianity and religion in public life in the United States

In doing so, Kim draws attention to the dual dangers of religion being either co-opted by political forces or crushed under them. She acknowledges that religion must not become overly politicized or partisan. At the same time, she stresses that political power must not treat religion as an instrument to be manipulated or as an easy target for public appeasement.

A Plea for Balance and Respect

Ultimately, Professor Kim Min-ji's article is a heartfelt appeal for balance, dignity, and constitutional integrity. While she does not call for impunity or suggest that religious institutions are beyond scrutiny, she insists that investigations must be grounded in fairness, transparency, and restraint. She urges the special prosecutor's office - and by extension, the broader political and legal establishment - to reflect on whether their actions risk repeating the errors of the past, where the law was used not as a tool of justice but as a weapon of persecution.

By framing her argument around the ethical responsibilities of both religion and the state, Kim offers not only a critique of current events but a vision for a healthier democratic society. Her message resonates especially in a time of growing polarization and institutional distrust, reminding us that the strength of a democracy lies not just in its laws, but in how it treats its most vulnerable and symbolic communities.

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

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Text: Knut Holdhus

[Editor's note 1: Kim Jang-hwan serves as the Chairman of the Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC), a major Christian missionary broadcaster in South Korea. He is widely recognized as one of the country's most prominent evangelical leaders, with considerable influence within Protestant media and church networks. On 18th July 2025, special prosecutors conducting an investigation into alleged improper lobbying around the death of Marine corporal Chae carried out searches and seizures at the offices of FEBC, Kim's personal office, and other locations associated with him. Although Kim was not a formal suspect - instead designated a reference person - the raid was described as "deeply regrettable," particularly by church organizations and unions, due to its symbolic intrusion into a religious institution.

His experience supports the central argument of this article's author: that religious leaders - particularly those without strong political or corporate protections - are vulnerable to being swept up in high-visibility probes meant more for public effect than impartial justice. The raid on FEBC underlines her concern that investigative actions may be disproportionately directed at religious communities, risking reputational harm and violating core freedoms.]

[Editor's note 2: Lee Young-hoon is a prominent religious figure whose church and personal offices were searched on 18th July 2025, illustrating the writer's broader argument that investigative overreach has gravely affected religious communities. Even though Rev. Lee was not a suspect, the symbolic impact of the raid, he argues, caused reputational damage to both himself and millions of followers - exactly the kind of scenario Professor Kim urges prosecutors to avoid. His experience underscores her concern that religious spaces and leaders can become collateral in politically charged investigations intended for public effect.]

[Editor's note 3: 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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Raids As Political Spectacle And Media Trials

- July 26, 2025
- Knut Holdhus

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In his 25th July 2025 opinion piece in *The Washington Times*, Dr. Demian Dunkley, President of the *Family Federation for World Peace and*

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Reverend **Damian Dunkley**, President of the **Family Federation for World Peace and Unification** in USA. Here, speaking 19th Jan. 2025. Screenshot from **FFWPU**

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.

The Washington Times

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.



Two days after the raid: Holy Mother Han on 20th July 2025 in Gapyeong, South Korea. Screenshot from video recording by **FFWPU**

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**.

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.”



His church was also raided: Paul Yonggi Cho (1936-2021), the founder of Yoido Full Gospel Church. Photo (2015): Lidiya. J / Wikimedia Commons. License: **CC ASA 4.0 Int**

In the opinion piece, Dunkley also points out the **distorted media**

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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.

One of the most



Another persecuted new religious movement in South Korea: Shincheonji. Here, their Peace Palace near the town of Cheongpyeong in Gyeongju county. Photo: Jhcbst019 / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC BY-SA 4.0 Int

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.



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.

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

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**



Backlash against the Family Federation after his assassination in 2022: Shinzo Abe, here in 2017. Photo: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs

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.

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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.

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Featured image above: *The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer*, painting by Jean-Leon Gerome (1824-1904). Photo: Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain image](#).

[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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