FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: In Japan FamilyFed is Tomorrow's Temple

Knut Holdhus
August 18, 2026

The dissolution order reaching temples. Illustration: ChatGPT

BITTER WINTER

Bitter Winter, the world's leading online magazine on religious liberty and human rights.

Buddhist priest Shindō Mizuta

Japan's religious double standard under scrutiny as Buddhist priest warns of dangerous precedent for all faiths set by today's dissolution of the Family Federation

Continued from Buddhist Priest Warns Japan 'Cult' Ban Risks All

Religion and politics: is there a double standard?

As pointed out by Dr. Massimo Introvigne in his Bitter Winter article 21st July, the question of political connections also concerns Buddhist priest Shindō Mizuta (水田真道).

See also Zen Head: "FFWPU Case A Warning to All Religions"

See also Mistrust of Religion: State Persecuting Minority

See also Large Zen Group: "Dangerous Precedent Set"

See also Japan: FFWPU Case Signals Dangerous State Power

The Family Federation has been criticized for its historical connections with politicians of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party. In a video conversation with literary critic Eitaro Ogawa (小川榮太郎), Mizuta does not deny that religious organizations and political actors can have relationships. Instead, he asks whether such relationships are being judged consistently.

He refers to an incident involving protest boats off the coast of Henoko in Nago City on the southern island of Okinawa, near a US military base. One of the boat captains was a pastor associated with the United Church of Christ in Japan, while another had previously been a candidate for the Japanese Communist Party.

For Mizuta, the question is therefore not whether religion and politics ever intersect. They plainly do. The question is whether such interaction is being treated as inherently problematic only when it involves a particular religious movement.

He worries that Buddhist priests themselves may sometimes repeat accusations against the Family Federation without sufficiently examining the principles underlying those accusations. In his view, religious leaders should be particularly careful about participating in collective condemnation.

Henoko District, Nago City, Okinawa Prefecture, Japan

What would dissolution mean for a Buddhist temple?

Perhaps the most powerful part of Mizuta's argument comes when he considers what would happen if the same kind of dissolution order were directed against Kongoji Temple, where he is chief priest.

A court-appointed liquidator could potentially take control of the temple's assets. These would not merely consist of abstract financial holdings. They could include the temple buildings, land, bank accounts, ritual clothing and ceremonial implements. Residents of the temple could potentially lose their homes.

This is particularly significant because Japanese temples are often simultaneously religious institutions and family residences. A dissolution could therefore affect not only the organization but also the priest and his family.

Mizuta explains that more than 80 percent of Kongoji's activities involve wakes and funerals conducted in the main hall. If the temple were prevented from operating normally, these religious services could no longer be performed. The priest could lose his position and become unable to carry out funerals for members of the surrounding community.

In other words, dissolution could effectively mean the destruction of the temple as a functioning religious institution.

The Kongoji Temple where Shindō Mizuta is chief priest, in Shizuoka, Japan

This thought experiment is central to Mizuta's warning. The question is not whether Kongoji is currently threatened with dissolution. It is whether a legal mechanism capable of producing such consequences for one religious community could eventually be applied to another.

A modern "Purple Robe Incident"?

Mizuta compares the present controversy with the Purple Robe Incident of the Edo period, when the shogunate in 1627 intervened in disputes concerning religious authority and the appointment and recognition of Buddhist priests. Zen master Takuan Sōhō (沢庵 宗彭 - 1573 - 1645) and others opposed the government's interference.

Literary critic Eitaro Ogawa

Mizuta sees the present situation as a possible modern equivalent - a "Purple Robe Incident" today. He therefore asks why more religious leaders are not speaking out when the state intervenes so extensively in the affairs of another religious organization.

Ogawa shares this concern. He questions whether a dissolution process should have consequences extending into such fundamental religious activities as conducting funerals. He also argues that if historical conduct can be scrutinized selectively across long periods of time, authorities could theoretically find reasons to investigate almost any religious tradition.

Both men are also concerned about the role of the media. Ogawa describes what he calls "information magic": the ability of repeated reporting to amplify certain narratives while making other perspectives almost invisible. In particular, he argues that the voices of people who identify themselves as victims can receive extensive attention, while believers who remain committed to their religious community may receive much less.

A warning that goes beyond the Family Federation

The significance of Mizuta's intervention therefore lies less in defending every action of the Family Federation than in raising a constitutional and religious-liberty question: What limits should exist on state intervention in religious organizations?

For supporters of the Family Federation, the dissolution order is naturally experienced as a direct attack on their own religious community. Mizuta asks the broader question of what happens when the same principle is normalized.

A Buddhist temple, a Christian denomination, a new religious movement or another faith community may differ radically in theology and organization. Yet all depend upon some degree of protection from arbitrary state interference if freedom of religion is to have substantive meaning.

Mizuta and Ogawa ultimately appeal to religious leaders to look beyond denominational boundaries. Their argument is that solidarity should not depend on whether one approves of another religion. Precisely because religious communities differ, they need principles that protect them all.

From this perspective, the Family Federation case is not merely about the fate of one controversial religious organization. It is also a test of how far the Japanese state may go in determining which religious communities are entitled to exist as functioning institutions - and, consequently, of what religious freedom will mean in Japan in the future.

See also part 1: Buddhist Priest Warns Japan 'Cult' Ban Risks All

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Religious families become Japan's next battleground as purge moves into family life with schools turning children against their own parents

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Continued from When Raising Children in Faith Turns Suspicious

***Patricia Duval** – Member of the Paris Bar Association, specializing in international human rights law. Has defended the rights of religious and faith minorities both in France and internationally. Screenshot from live transmission by UPF June 2025.*

In her article published by *Bitter Winter* 4th June 2026, international human-rights attorney Patricia Duval addresses school surveillance and coercive counseling as part of the orchestrated purge of believers belonging to the Family Federation – *formerly called the Unification Church* – throughout Japan.

A generation caught between home and school

Duval illustrates the

Yoshiko Nishi speaking in Geneva 26th September 2025. Screenshot from live transmission by UPF, improved resolution by Grok xAI August 2026.

potential consequences of treating school children as

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potential victims of their parents' beliefs, by referring to testimony given to the United Nations in Geneva in September 2025 by Yoshiko Nishi, a second-generation Family Federation member.

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Nishi described the experience of her teenage son after he encountered media reports portraying the Family Federation as criminal and received information about the organization at school. According to her testimony, the boy eventually came to regard his own parents as members of a criminal organization. Yoshiko Nishi stated,

> "One of the most painful moments of my life was with my fourteen-year-old son. One day, when he went to the dentist's office, he saw television reports branding our church as 'criminal.' He came home shaken. He asked me, 'Did we do something wrong?' I said no and tried to explain. But after constant exposure to hatred at school and in the media, he told me, 'If you don't abandon this church, I will cut all contact with you. You say you love us, but how can you put your children in such danger?' His fear was real. Fear of rejection. Fear of losing friends. Fear of being denied opportunities for education or work. My sweet son now lives with paranoia and shame, afraid of his own family. This campaign is not protecting society. It is destroying tens of thousands of lives and families by branding peaceful citizens as criminals."

For a parent, this represents a devastating reversal of the normal relationship between family and society.

Instead of the child receiving reassurance from parents when confronted with frightening information about their faith, the parents themselves become the source of suspicion. The child may fear that association with the family religion will lead to rejection by classmates, damage educational opportunities, or create difficulties in later employment.

The resulting psychological pressure can be enormous. A young person may feel forced to choose between loyalty to parents and acceptance by the surrounding society.

This is

The Family Federation places considerable emphasis on family relationships. Here, parents and children praying together before bed. Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image Creator, 5th November 2024.

particularly significant in Japan because the Family Federation places considerable emphasis on family relationships. Its members often regard marriage, parenthood, filial responsibility and the transmission of values between generations as central elements of religious life.

Consequently, policies that undermine trust between parents and children can have consequences extending far beyond the classroom.

From counseling to separation?

Duval's concerns become still more serious when she discusses proposals for temporary accommodation away from parents or other believers.

According to the material she cites, children considered to be experiencing difficulties connected with a religious environment could potentially be offered temporary living arrangements away from their parents, supposedly to provide an opportunity to "rebuild their lives".

For critics of the policy, this represents a fundamental shift. The question is no longer simply whether a school counselor is investigating a child's religious background. It becomes whether state-supported institutions can ultimately facilitate the physical separation of children from families because of concerns associated with their religious affiliation.

Such measures would be especially controversial where there is no independent evidence of abuse or neglect and where the principal concern is the family's religious identity.

The broader human-rights question

Duval therefore places the Japanese controversy within a much broader framework of freedom of conscience and religion.

The central issue, as she presents it, is not whether individual children should be protected when they genuinely experience abuse. Children obviously require such protection, regardless of their parents' religion.

The question is whether **membership in a disfavored religious minority itself can become a reason for surveillance, psychological intervention, or disruption of family relationships**.

For Family

Japanese parents with high-school-age daughters. Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image Creator, 5th November 2024.

Federation parents, this creates a profound dilemma. They may wish to raise their children according to their own beliefs, as religious parents in other communities routinely do. Yet if schools teach children to regard those beliefs with suspicion, ask them to disclose details about their religious upbringing, and encourage them to discuss their parents with school personnel, the parents' ability to transmit their faith is significantly weakened.

The danger, Duval argues, is that the Japanese response to the Family Federation's legal and political controversy could evolve into something broader than the dissolution of a religious organization. It could become a **social and institutional purge in which the religion's presence is gradually marginalized from family life, education, and the next generation**.

Her appeal is ultimately directed beyond Japan. She urges UN human-rights bodies to remind Japanese authorities that freedom of religion or belief, peaceful assembly, expression, privacy, and family life apply to unpopular and controversial religious minorities as well as to everyone else.

For the parents involved, the issue is intensely personal. It concerns whether they can continue to tell their children what they believe, worship together as a family, and pass their religious values to the next generation **without their children being encouraged by public institutions to regard those very beliefs – and their parents' commitment to them – as evidence of something wrong.**

See also part 1: *When Raising Children in Faith Turns Suspicious*

***Text**: Knut Holdhus, editor*

***Featured image** above: Caiught between home and school. Illustration: ChatGPT, August 2026.*

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