

## FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: British online newspaper *The Independent* Embraces Extremism Of Faith-Breaker

Knut Holdhus  
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*Steven Hassan speaks at conference of Leo J. Ryan Education Foundation (formerly CULTinfo) 18th March 2000*

**The Independent embraces extremism of faith-breaker and lets him defame minority faith by dragging it into totally unrelated murder story**

**The**  **INDEPENDENT** The British online newspaper The Independent

published 29th March 2024 a piece of gutter journalism penned by the paper's US News Editor Rachel Sharp. The article about an American married couple turned mass murderers was titled "Did a doomsday cult really drive Lori Vallow to murder her children?" Much of the content and many of the concepts come, however, straight from the metaphysical universe of a notorious campaigner against New Religious Movements (NRMs) - 70 years old Steven Hassan. He actually makes his living of painting as black a picture as possible of as many NRMs as he is able to.

Sharp's article is blatantly defamatory against the [Family Federation](#), formerly called the [Unification Church](#), even though it has nothing to do with the tragic events of the story. One of the hallmarks of Hassan is to apply the derogatory cult label to all new religious movements. And true to his deliberately twisted sensationalist narrative, Sharp already in the subheadings echoes Hassan, calling the former [Unification Church](#) "one of America's most notorious cults". This is demeaning in itself, but becomes all the more so as it follows a headline about what is called a "doomsday cult" involved in several murders.



*Dr. Massimo Introvigne April 2023*

The derogatory term "cult" is used throughout the report. Dr. Massimo Introvigne, one of the world's leading experts on new religious movements, writes,

"at the end of the last century, the vast majority of religious scholars stopped using 'cult' and replaced it with the less ambiguous term 'new religious movements'." (["Why 'Cults' \(and 'Brainwashing'\) Do Not Exist - An appeal to avoid labels that have no accepted scientific meaning and are used as tools of discrimination"](#), an article published in the magazine Bitter Winter 27th March 2023).

Within the realm of media, there exists a scandal-driven press primarily motivated by profit rather than the pursuit of truth. Similarly, within the field of studying new religious movements, there are so-called "experts" who recognize the financial incentive in portraying such movements in a negative light.

These "experts" capitalize on the lack of nuanced understanding among many journalists regarding the diverse landscape of religious beliefs. Consequently, such "experts" can easily make sensationalized assertions, like the one Hassan does in the Sharp article by simplistically claiming that power, money, and sex is what "all cult leaders are

driven by" - "those three things in that particular order." Hassan implies that these are universal motivations for all new faith movements. Disregarding the spiritual message entirely, they propagate a narrative focused solely on power, money, and sex - a narrative tailor-made for the sensationalist media.

This narrative also aligns perfectly with Hassan's agenda. He exaggerates what he perceives as the problematic nature of new religious movements in order to maximize his own financial gain. Hassan sustains himself by disseminating disinformation and unfounded allegations about new religious movements, constantly distorting the truth to serve his own interests.

Another derogatory term used several times in the Independent article is "Moonies". Left-wing and anti-religious activists frequently employ this phrase intentionally to mock and diminish the [Family Federation](#), formerly known as the [Unification Church](#), and its adherents.



The large international news agency Reuters says in its handbook for journalists,

"'Moonie' is a pejorative term for members of the [Unification Church](#). We should not use it in copy and avoid it when possible in direct quotations." (p321)

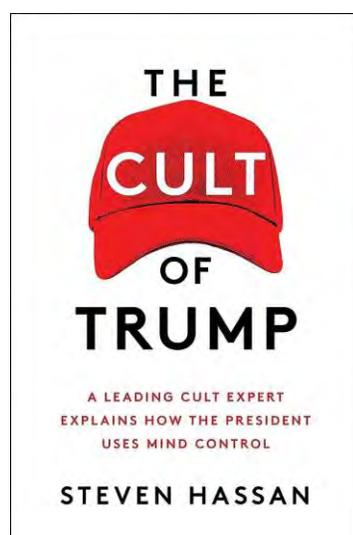
## The New York Times

Also the New York Times states in its "Manual of Style and Usage" of 2015,

"Do not use the disparaging Moonie(s)." (p466)

Steven Hassan has gained notoriety for embellishing his own background in a bid to enhance his credibility for the title of "expert." He asserts that he held a leadership position within the [Unification Church](#), but the truth is that he was a member for a brief period spanning just over two years, from 1974 to 1976. As a 21-year-old, he led a small team of six or seven young members on a fundraising mission for a few months.

From 1978 through the 1990s, Steven Hassan was affiliated with the anti-religious organization known as CAN (Cult Awareness Network), which conducted coercive deprogramming of individuals associated with new religious movements and left-wing political groups. He served as one of CAN's professional deprogrammers for an extended period.



*The front cover page of Steven Hassan's book The Cult of Trump, 2019*

The esteemed British sociologist Eileen Barker has documented numerous accounts from individuals who underwent deprogramming, detailing instances of threats with firearms, physical abuse, deprivation of sleep and sustenance, and/or sexual assault (Source: "Watching for Violence," paper by Eileen Barker, 2001).

Despite the passage of time, Steven Hassan has not relinquished his commitment to deprogramming efforts. In 2020, he authored the book "The Cult of Trump," and according to Fox News, on January 19, 2021, Hassan stated on CNN that "all of America needs deprogramming" due to the perceived negative influence of President Trump. Implicit in this assertion is the notion that deprogramming should be conducted by "experts" like Hassan.

Such sentiments could potentially empower extremist views akin to Hassan's to influence national policies, reminiscent of the situation in communist China, where authorities actively suppress religious practices.



*Dr. Eileen Barker, OBE, in 1997*

It's quite amazing that a news editor like Sharp embraces the claims of Hassan so openly and gives him so much space to market his anti-religious ideas.

Steven Hassan was one of the key witnesses whose evidence was used by the UK Attorney-general in his 1984 case to remove the charitable status from the two trusts associated with the [Unification Church](#) in the UK. It turned out, however, that his arguments did not stand up in court. That certainly contributed a lot to the unconditional withdrawal of the case three years later and the UK government paying the [Unification Church](#) the legal costs of several million dollars.

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## Collusion To Rob Minority Of Its Rights

January 22, 2024 • Knut Holdhus

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### *Japanese government in collusion with group hostile to Family Federation*

Third of six parts of Seiron report – More on [part 1](#), [part 2](#), [part 4](#), [part 5](#), [part 6](#)

The Japanese monthly opinion magazine Seiron (正論) published in its December 2023 issue a feature article on the **outrageous**



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persecution of the [Family Federation](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) in Japan.

One part of the report by Makiko Takita, well known journalist and editor-in-chief of the magazine, is an interview with Dr. Massimo Introvigne, Italian sociologist of religion and editor-in-chief of [Bitter Winter](#), the leading international online magazine on religious freedom and human rights.



The cover front page of *Monthly Seiron* December 2023.

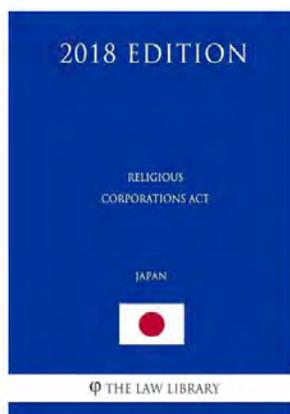
**BITTER WINTER** [Bitter Winter](#) published this part of the report of *Seiron* on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2024, as the **third of six parts** of the English version of the original Japanese article. Read the [whole Bitter Winter article](#). Read more on [article 1](#), [article 2](#), [article 4](#), [article 5](#), [article 6](#).

In the interview with Dr. Introvigne, he says he is concerned about the legal actions taken against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), formerly the [Unification Church](#), in Japan.

The sociologist of religion, famous globally for his work, expresses his worry about the Japanese government's request for a dissolution order against the [Unification Church](#), citing that the organization has not committed any crimes in Japan, a democratic country that guarantees freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). He emphasizes that, in his experience working globally to defend freedom of religion or belief, this is the **first time he has seen such a request for dissolution in a democratic country**.

"[...] and it is a great shock to me," the scholar says, expressing his concern about what he perceives as an **unusual and concerning legal action** against the [Unification Church](#) in Japan.

Introvigne draws comparisons with other countries, mentioning that even in countries where there is criticism of the [Unification Church](#), such as the United States and Italy, there is no government action to legally regulate or dissolve the organization. He also contrasts the situation with Russia and China, where religious organizations, including the [Unification Church](#), face persecution and dissolution by the government. However, he notes that China and Russia are not democratic regimes, and the criteria for what constitutes a crime differ from those in Japan.



Front page of 2018 English version of *Religious Corporations Act of Japan*.

Massimo Introvigne further discusses the situation in Japan where the government is pursuing the dissolution of the [Unification Church](#) under the *Religious Corporations Act*. He compares this to the dissolution of an organization called *Artgemeinschaft* in Germany in September 2023.

Introvigne points out that even in democracies, systems for dissolving organizations exist, but their application is typically limited to cases where a crime, punishable under the penal code, has been committed. He provides

an example of the dissolution of *Artgemeinschaft* in Germany, which he describes as a political organization rooted in Nazism rather than a religious movement. The dissolution of *Artgemeinschaft* was requested based on criminal activities, aligning with the general principle that **dissolutions in democracies are tied to criminal conduct**.

Introvigne emphasizes that the situation in Japan, where the government is seeking to dissolve the [Unification Church](#) without it having committed any criminal acts, is unique and

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unusual in a democratic country that upholds freedom of religion. He points out that the current events in Japan are being highlighted in Chinese and Russian media as a form of propaganda, drawing parallels between Japan's actions and those of China in suppressing religious groups. Introvigne explains how the **situation in Japan is being used for propaganda purposes by China and Russia,**



*Persecution in China: Tibetan Monks arrested in 2008. Photo (5th April 2008): SFT HQ (Students for a Free Tibet) / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 2.0 Gen. Cropped*

"I am the editor-in-chief of a daily web magazine called '[Bitter Winter](#),' which covers news about religious freedom violations around the world. I carefully watch the Chinese media, and every week an article about the dissolution of the [Unification Church](#) in Japan always catches my eye. The articles are full of claims that 'Japan is doing the same thing as China' 'We have been proven right,' 'Cults should be suppressed,' and so on. Similar arguments can be read in the Russian government-affiliated media, and the **current events in Japan are being used for propaganda purposes by China and Russia.** We would do well to keep this in mind."

The Seiron report provides an overview of events surrounding the [Unification Church](#) in Japan, particularly in the aftermath of the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe by an individual with a grudge against the [Unification Church](#). Introvigne expresses concerns about the way the government and certain groups have been handling the situation. Certain **important facts about the assassin seem to have been ignored completely by the media.** The general public appears to have been given a **slanted picture of the situation.** The Italian scholar points out,

"I noted that **the man [the assassin] had been interacting with journalists and other opponents of the [Unification Church](#) on social media before the incident.** Obviously, I do not believe that they encouraged him to kill Abe, but I wonder if they might have **excited his hostility** to punish the [Unification Church](#). Why did the man commit such a heinous act? I do not believe that this has been fully clarified."

And straightaway after the assassination on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2022, the *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales* (全国霊感商法対策弁護士連絡会), a group of largely leftwing activist lawyers who have been fierce opponents of the [Unification Church](#) for decades, called a press conference where they **blamed the church** for what had happened.

Dr. Introvigne describes the tactic of the network of lawyers as a **"reversal phenomenon". The perceived victim becomes the perpetrator, and the alleged perpetrator is treated as a victim.**



*Kingdom Hall in Hamburg-Alsterdorf, ten days after the killing spree on 9th March 2023: damaged door, flowers*

The scholar mentions similar cases in South

Korea and Germany

where so-called

anti-cult movements attempted to **shift blame** onto religious organizations,

*and candles. Photo: NordNordWest / Wikimedia Commons. Licence: CC BY-SA 3.0 Germany*

“Last March [2023] in Germany, a former member of the Jehovah’s Witnesses broke into a place of worship of this religion, called Kingdom Hall, and killed eight people with a gun. Then, some members of the anti-cult movement, which opposes Jehovah’s Witnesses, came forward and criticized the religion, saying that the cause of the incident was that ‘the Jehovah’s Witnesses have continued to abuse this man,’ and called for the religious organization to bear the brunt of the blame. The anti-cult movement deflected the blame from the mistakes of the authorities [who had given a license to carry weapons to a mentally disturbed man] and tried to create a campaign against the Jehovah’s Witnesses.”

Introvigne **criticizes the Japanese government for joining forces with the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales** (全国霊感商法対策弁護士連絡会) in various procedures related to a dissolution order against the **Unification Church**. He argues that such collaboration between the government and a so-called anti-cult movement is ideologically and politically strange.

The scholar says,

“Only in Japan has the **government totally jumped on the bandwagon**. In Korea and Germany, the media reports on the voices of anti-cult movements, and this can cause a lot of commotion. Sometimes there are campaigns to condemn these groups as ‘cults.’ However, there is no example of a democratic government reacting to such a campaign and moving toward the dissolution of the organization.”

Dr. Massimo Introvigne **denounces the Japanese government for all of a sudden changing its policy** and allowing cases of tortious conduct to be sufficient ground for dissolving a religious organization. He explains,

“If religious corporations can be dissolved for torts under civil law, there is **no such thing as a safe organization**. This shows that this **was not a legal decision, but a political decision**. What the Japanese government has done is a **clear violation of the principle of religious freedom**. It is a move that should be strongly condemned.”

Introvigne contends that the Japanese



*Blatant discrimination: “Colored” drinking fountain from mid-20th century with African-American drinking from water cooler in streetcar terminal, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA. Photo (1939): Russell Lee (1903-1986) / Wikimedia Commons. **Public domain** image*

government’s decision to pursue the dissolution of the **Unification Church** is a violation of the principle of religious freedom. He expresses concern that this move **may have a ripple effect and set a precedent for private entities to discriminate** against the **Unification Church**,

“and start saying, ‘We will have nothing to do with

them.' This is undeniable **religious discrimination**, which is unacceptable in light of international law, which stipulates that there shall be no discrimination based on ideology, creed, religion, or other such grounds."

Introvigne **questions the legitimacy of the government's decision**, stating that it appears to be a political decision rather than a legal one.

In fact, there have already been **instances of discriminatory incidents** in Japan, such as local governments refusing to rent public facilities to independent organizations connected with the [Family Federation](#) or passing resolutions to sever relations with such organizations in local government councils.

And what makes matters worse in Japan, is the fact that there might be **collusion between the Japanese government and the courts**. For more on that particular issue, see [Does Japan Have an Independent Judiciary?](#)

More on [part 2 of the interview](#) (part 4 of the Seiron report).

More on [article 1](#), [article 2](#), [article 4](#), [article 5](#), [article 6](#) in the Seiron report.

**Featured image** above: Dr. Massimo Introvigne in April 2023. Photo: [FOREF](#)

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