

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Holy Mother Han in Danger of Guilty by Position

Knut Holdhus
July 13, 2026



Lady Justice with Socrates and a scene from the French Revolution. Illustration: ChatGPT

세계일보

[Segye Ilbo](#)

Religious affairs reporter Jeong Seong-su (2025)

History's lessons from Socrates to the Reign of Terror show the dangers of justice by suspicion in Mother Han's case

In an [opinion column](#) published by the South Korean daily [Segye Ilbo](#) on 12th July 2026, religion correspondent Jeong Seong-su (정성수) argues that criminal justice must remain firmly anchored in demonstrable evidence rather than assumptions arising from a person's position, prominence, or public influence. Writing in response to the special prosecutor's recommendation that [Family Federation](#) President [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자) [receive a thirteen-year prison sentence](#), Jeong presents the case as an opportunity to reflect on broader principles of criminal law and the historical dangers that arise when legal systems become influenced by symbolism or political narratives instead of concrete proof.

See also [Mother Han: Beyond One Trial - the Wider Stakes](#)

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The [column](#) begins by observing that the [recommended sentence](#) is unusually severe by South Korean standards and has had a profound emotional impact not only on [Hak Ja Han](#) - also called [Mother Han](#) - herself but also on members of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) around the world.

Jeong notes that the [movement](#)'s co-founder, [Sun Myung Moon](#) (문선명), likewise experienced [imprisonment](#) under the communist regime in North Korea decades earlier. Although Jeong emphasizes that the historical circumstances are entirely different, he argues that democratic legal systems distinguish themselves precisely by ensuring that controversial public or religious figures receive judgments based solely on evidence and legal reasoning rather than prejudice or public sentiment.

A central point of the [article](#) concerns the distinction between a prosecutor's sentencing recommendation and a judicial verdict. Under South Korea's legal system, prosecutors merely present their interpretation

of the evidence and recommend an appropriate sentence if guilt is established. The court independently evaluates both the prosecution's arguments and the defense's responses before determining whether the charges have been proven beyond the applicable legal standard and, if so, what sentence is appropriate. Jeong therefore cautions readers against treating the prosecution's request as though it were already a judicial finding.



[Sun Myung Moon](#) praying in a concentration camp in Hungnam, North Korea in 1948 while fellow prisoners were sleeping. Illustration

The author further questions whether the prosecution has publicly demonstrated sufficient direct evidence to justify such a lengthy recommended sentence. According to the [column](#), investigators spent roughly two years conducting an extensive investigation involving searches, financial inquiries, communications analysis, and numerous witness interviews. Yet Jeong argues that, based on what became public during the closing arguments, it remains unclear what specific evidence directly establishes that [Mother Han](#) personally instructed, coordinated, or knowingly participated in the alleged criminal acts involving political funding or gifts.



The Death of Socrates, extract from painting by Jacques-Louis David

From this perspective, the [article](#) criticizes what it characterizes as an approach based primarily on organizational hierarchy rather than individual conduct. Jeong contends that modern criminal law is founded upon the principle that individuals are punished for actions they personally commit, authorize, or knowingly participate in - not simply because they occupy positions of authority. While leaders may under certain legal circumstances bear responsibility for the acts of subordinates, criminal liability

generally requires proof connecting the accused to the alleged conduct. The [column](#) warns against allowing broad concepts such as "ultimate beneficiary" or "final decision-maker" to substitute for evidence demonstrating actual criminal involvement.

To illustrate this concern, Jeong turns to one of the most famous judicial proceedings in Western history: the trial of Socrates in Athens in 399 BCE. Socrates, the philosopher whose teachings profoundly shaped Western philosophy through his students, including Plato, was formally charged with impiety and with corrupting the city's youth. Although the historical record - preserved primarily through Plato's *Apology* - remains subject to scholarly interpretation, many historians regard the prosecution as reflecting broader political and cultural anxieties in Athens following the Peloponnesian War rather than solely the legal accusations themselves.

Athens had recently experienced military defeat, political instability, and periods of oligarchic rule involving several individuals who had once associated with Socrates. In that atmosphere, his habit of publicly questioning conventional wisdom and exposing weaknesses in accepted beliefs may have appeared threatening to many citizens. His accuser, Meletus, argued that Socrates undermined traditional religion and exerted a harmful influence upon young Athenians. Socrates defended himself vigorously but ultimately refused to abandon his philosophical mission or seek exile, and he was sentenced to death by drinking hemlock. Over subsequent centuries, his trial has frequently been interpreted as a cautionary example of how legal institutions may sometimes punish an individual's perceived influence or symbolic significance rather than demonstrable unlawful conduct.



The beheading of Maximilien Robespierre July 28, 1794, signifying the end of the Reign of Terror

Jeong also invokes another historical example: the Law of Suspects enacted during the French Revolution's Reign of Terror in 1793.

Following the overthrow of the monarchy, revolutionary France faced foreign invasion, internal rebellion, and intense political conflict. Under these circumstances, revolutionary leaders adopted increasingly severe measures intended to protect the Republic. The Law of Suspects greatly expanded the categories of people who could be arrested, including those whose conduct, relationships, social background, or political attitudes merely aroused suspicion of insufficient loyalty to the Revolution.

Rather than requiring conventional standards of criminal proof, authorities often relied upon perceived intentions, reputation, or association. Combined with the operation of Revolutionary Tribunals, the law contributed to thousands of executions before the Terror eventually ended with the fall of Maximilien Robespierre in 1794. Historians frequently cite the episode as illustrating how fear, ideology, and emergency powers can weaken procedural safeguards within the justice system.

Drawing upon these historical parallels, Jeong argues that legal systems must resist allowing abstract political concepts or moral judgments to replace careful proof of individual criminal acts. His point is not that historical events are identical, but that history repeatedly demonstrates the importance of maintaining the distinction between suspicion and evidence, status and conduct, symbolism and legally provable facts.

The [column](#) concludes by acknowledging that [Mother Han](#) remains a controversial figure whose legacy will continue to be viewed very differently by supporters and critics alike. Regardless of those differing assessments, Jeong argues that courts should base their decisions exclusively on evidence presented according to established legal principles. He notes [Mother Han](#)'s closing statement to the court, in which she maintained that she had devoted her life to promoting peace and the ideal of one human family, denied seeking political power through money, expressed regret that trusted associates had contributed to the present circumstances, and reaffirmed her intention to continue working for peace.

Ultimately, [Jeong's essay](#) is less an attempt to determine Hak Ja Han's guilt or innocence than a broader reflection on the philosophy of criminal justice. By invoking both the trial of Socrates and the Law of Suspects during the French Revolution, he argues that democratic legal systems best preserve their legitimacy when they judge individuals according to proven actions rather than reputation, prominence, or symbolic significance. Or as Jeong puts it,

"Throughout the history of law, whenever suspicion has been allowed to outweigh proof, the result has invariably been one of justice's darkest chapters."

See also [Mother Han: Beyond One Trial - the Wider Stakes](#)

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The South Korean news agency [Yonhap News](#) (연합뉴스) reported on 10th July on the final hearing in the court case against [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자), co-founder of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) – in Korea also known as [Unificationism](#) (통일교). The [article](#) by Lee Yeong-seop (이영섭) mentions that prosecutors reiterated their request that the religious leader – also called [Mother Han](#) – be sentenced to a total of 13 years in prison for charges related to alleged political-religious collusion (정교유착) involving the Yoon Suk-yeol (윤석열) administration. The *Seoul Central District Court* is expected to deliver its judgment on 31st August.

See also [Mother Han: The Dangers of Guilt by Position](#)

The [Yonhap report](#) describes how in their closing arguments, [Mother Han](#)'s legal team firmly rejected the prosecution's case, maintaining that all of the alleged wrongdoing was carried out independently by former executive [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호). According to the defense, [Mother Han](#) neither authorized nor participated in the alleged criminal acts. Her lawyers argued that the prosecution's case relies almost entirely on [Yoon](#)'s testimony, while noting that he declined to answer many questions concerning the alleged conspiracy and that the statements he did provide were inconsistent and contradictory.



Yoon Yeong-ho, former director general of the international headquarters of the [Family Federation](#), here 11th February 2022. Screenshot from live transmission by [FFWPU](#)

The [Yonhap article](#) points out that [Mother Han](#)'s attorneys further asserted that [Yoon](#) himself conceived, organized, and executed the relevant activities, occasionally directing other individuals without [Mother Han](#)'s knowledge. According to the defense, [Yoon](#) frequently acted on his own initiative in order to enhance his personal standing within the [religious organization](#) and only informed [Mother Han](#) afterward when his efforts proved successful. They contended that he is now attempting to transfer responsibility for his own actions onto her.

The defense also challenged the legality of the prosecution itself. It argued that several of the allegations exceeded the statutory authority granted to the special prosecutor. In this context, the claim means that the defense believes the special prosecutor investigated offenses that were outside the specific mandate established by law or by the appointment order creating the special investigation. If accepted by the court, evidence relating to those matters could potentially be excluded or the corresponding charges dismissed because the prosecutor allegedly acted beyond the scope of the authorized investigation.

In addition, the defense asserted that some of the prosecution's evidence had been obtained unlawfully. This refers to the argument that investigators may have collected evidence in violation of procedural safeguards – for example, through searches, seizures, or other investigative measures that allegedly failed to comply with legal requirements. Under South Korean criminal procedure, evidence found to have been obtained illegally may, in certain circumstances, be ruled inadmissible at trial.

According to [Yonhap News](#), in her final statement, [Mother Han](#) said,



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“I am deeply saddened that the person I trusted and entrusted with everything has brought about today's situation.”

The news agency also quotes her as saying,

“As the leader of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), I sincerely apologize for having unintentionally caused public controversy.”

[Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호) rejected the defense's portrayal of events, insisting that no amount of distortion or criticism could obscure the truth. He further accused [Unificationism](#) leaders of coordinating testimony and attempting to shield the [organization](#) by placing sole responsibility on him.

A



Lee Myung-bak (이명박) – President of South Korea 2008–2013. Photo (2010): Government of Chile. License: [CC Attr 2.0 Gen](#). Cropped



Park Geun-hye (박근혜) – President of South Korea 2013–2017. Photo (2013): Foreign and Commonwealth Office / Wikimedia Commons. License: [OGL v1.0](#). Cropped

review of South Korea's democratic history shows that religion has periodically intersected with politics under several administrations. During the presidency of Lee Myung-bak (이명박, 2008-2013), the government faced accusations of favoring Protestant Christianity. Under Park Geun-hye (박근혜, 2013-2017), the extraordinary influence of a religiously connected confidante became a central element of the corruption scandal that ultimately led to her impeachment.

What distinguishes the current left-leaning administration of Lee Jae-myung (이재명) is the convergence of several developments: multiple simultaneous investigations involving different religious organizations, allegations that these groups sought to influence party politics and elections in systematic ways, and an administration that has made the eradication of alleged political-religious collusion a major enforcement priority.



Prominent politician in governing party cleared: Jeon Jae-soo (전재수). Photo (2023): [이데일리TV / Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC Attr 3.0 Unp](#). Cropped

Critics contend, however, that one notable feature of this campaign is that it has focused almost exclusively on religious organizations perceived as conservative and on conservative politicians. They point to the case of Jeon Jae-soo (전재수), a prominent member of President Lee's Democratic Party, whose [case was closed](#) without charges being filed.

Conservative critics, particularly within the *People Power Party*, argue that this pattern reflects unequal treatment. They contend that ruling-party figures benefit from

prosecutorial discretion, while opposition politicians are subjected to more aggressive investigations. Following the

subjected to more aggressive investigations. Following the [closure of Jeon's case](#), complaints alleging misconduct by the joint investigation team were also filed.

Regardless of whether these allegations ultimately prove justified, it is difficult to dispute that the politically most consequential ongoing investigations have disproportionately involved conservative politicians and organizations.

Further intensifying the controversy is the Lee administration's proposal to amend the Civil Act through legislation officially titled the *Partial Amendment to the Civil Act*, but referred to by critics as the *Religious Organization Dissolution Act* or the *Church Dissolution Act*.

About the proposed new law: [Vague New Law, Broad Powers: Concerns Mount](#)

According to the administration, the amendment is intended to curb what it describes as “systemic political intervention” by religious organizations. If enacted, it would grant administrative authorities broad powers to audit religious organizations, suspend their activities, revoke their legal status, and transfer their assets to the national treasury if they are found to have violated the constitutional principle of the separation of religion and state.

Under such a framework, a finding of political-religious collusion could potentially result in the dissolution of an entire [religious organization](#). For that reason, critics argue that the case against [Mother Han](#) extends well beyond its immediate legal issues. In their view, it has become a test case for a broader strategy of using legal proceedings to weaken or eliminate politically disfavored religious organizations – a perspective that has led an increasing number of observers to describe the case as an example of “lawfare”.

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Text: *Knut Holdhus, editor*

Featured image above: *Mother Han being wheelchaired to court. Illustration: ChatGPT, 12th July 2026.*

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