

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Example of 2 Unificationists in Public Service

Knut Holdhus
February 20, 2026



Han Sang-guk (left), ca. 1985, and Bo Hi Pak (right) in 1978



Two South Koreans blessed in Family Federation marriage show outstanding historical example of serving one's country and promoting peace

In order to understand modern South Korea, one must appreciate how deeply its national story has been shaped by war, division, ideological conflict, and rapid reconstruction. The Korean Peninsula was devastated by Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945), divided at the end of World War II, and then plunged into the [Korean War](#) (1950-1953), a brutal conflict that left millions dead and the country physically destroyed. What followed was not peace in a conventional sense, but a tense Cold War standoff between communist North Korea and capitalist South Korea. South Korea's survival depended heavily on its alliance with the United States, while its internal politics were marked by instability, military intervention, and the urgent task of economic development.

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Against this dramatic backdrop, a Korean [opinion piece](#) by religious reporter Jeong Seong-su published in the daily newspaper Segye Ilbo on 20th February reflects on the lives of two men - Han Sang-guk (한상국) and Bo Hi Pak (박보희 - 1930-2019) - who, in the author's view, represent a particular model of cooperation between religious conviction and public service.

Both men were members of the [Unification Church](#) - now called the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) - a new religious movement [founded](#) in South Korea in the 1950s. At the same time, both served as military officers and later became involved in diplomacy and international cultural outreach. The [article](#) presents their lives as examples of what it calls "church-state cooperation" (정교협력 - 政教協力): not the fusion of religious institutions with government power, but the idea that individuals motivated by faith can serve the nation in critical moments of history.

For readers unfamiliar with Korean politics of the 1960s, one key episode is especially important. In May 1961, Major General Park Chung-hee (박정희) led a military coup that overthrew South Korea's fragile civilian government. At that time, the United States - South Korea's principal ally - officially opposed military takeovers, creating uncertainty about whether Washington would support the new regime. South Korea was economically weak and militarily dependent on American assistance. If the United States refused to recognize Park's government, the consequences could have been severe.



On 14th November 1961, Chairman of the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction of Korea, Park Chung-hee (left), holds talks with U.S. President John F. Kennedy (right) at the White House. Lieutenant Colonel Han Sang-guk (center left) and Dr. Paul Crane (center right) are serving as interpreters. Seated behind them are Korean cabinet members who accompanied Chairman Park

In November 1961, Park traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet U.S. President John F. Kennedy in the Oval Office. The future of the U.S.-South Korea alliance was effectively at stake. In high-level diplomacy, especially under tense conditions, language matters enormously. Subtle shifts in tone, nuance, and emphasis can influence political outcomes. Serving as interpreter between the two leaders was Lieutenant Colonel Han Sang-kuk (한상국). [See editor's note below]

Although formally listed as a military interpreter, the [Segye Ilbo article](#) argues that Han's role went far beyond technical

translation. He was positioned between two heads of state at a delicate historical moment. According to the author, every word choice carried strategic weight. In such circumstances, the interpreter is not merely relaying language; he is mediating political meaning. The [article](#) portrays Han as someone who combined professional military discipline with personal religious conscience, suggesting that his faith strengthened his sense of responsibility.

Following this meeting, the United States effectively accepted Park's government, and American military and economic assistance continued - support that proved crucial to South Korea's later development.



Ambassador Han Sang-guk at his ambassadorial residence in Oslo, Norway in the Summer of 1978: Back from left: Viggo Jørgensen, Takeru Kamiyama, Neil Salonen, Doris Orme, Han Sang-guk, his wife Lim Byeong-sook, Ingrid Schneider Jørgensen, Ken Sudo. Front from left: Moon Ye-jin, Moon Heung-jin, Moon Un-jin

The [opinion piece](#) traces Han's later career to reinforce this theme. After his military service, according to official Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs records, he became South Korea's ambassador to Norway from June 1976 to November 1980. Later, he held leadership positions in major media organizations, including The Washington Times and [Segye Ilbo](#). While his titles changed - from soldier to diplomat to media executive - the author argues that his fundamental mission remained the same: to safeguard national interests and promote the U.S.-Korea alliance during the Cold War.

The second figure highlighted in the [column](#), Bo Hi Pak, is presented as a complementary example. Like Han, he had a military background and was affiliated with the what is now called the [Family Federation](#). Han Sang-kuk was with his wife Lim Byeong-sook one of the 33 couples who had their [marriage blessed](#) by [Father Moon](#) and [Mother Han](#) in 1961. So were Bo Hi Pak and his wife Yoon Gi-sook.

Pak's story intersects with another pivotal moment in Korean and American history: the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower.

During the 1952 U.S. presidential campaign, Eisenhower famously declared, "I shall go to Korea," signaling his determination to resolve the ongoing Korean War. After winning the election, he visited the Korean front lines before even taking office. In 1953, his administration helped bring about the [Korean Armistice Agreement](#), which halted active fighting. Later that year, the United States and South Korea signed a mutual defense treaty that formalized their long-term security alliance - an agreement that remains the cornerstone of South Korea's national defense today.



Dr. Bo Hi Pak with former U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, during the Little Angels children's ballet company's first overseas tour in September 1965

More than a decade later, in 1965, Bo Hi Pak organized a performance in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, by the "Little Angels," a Korean children's dance troupe associated with the [Family Federation](#). The performance took place at Eisenhower's home. The symbolism was powerful: children from a country once devastated by war were performing traditional Korean dance before the American leader who had helped secure the [armistice](#) and formalize the alliance. The article interprets this as a moment of "civilian diplomacy", in which cultural expression reinforced political friendship.

Bo Hi Pak continued this approach in subsequent years. He helped arrange performances by the Little Angels at the White House during Richard Nixon's presidency and before Queen Elizabeth II in the United Kingdom. Through music and dance rather than military agreements, he sought to deepen international goodwill toward South Korea. The author describes this as building a bridge of "soft power" on top of the "hard power" foundation created by military alliances and treaties.

For a non-Korean reader, the broader argument of the [opinion piece](#) centers on the relationship between religion and public life. Modern democratic systems, including South Korea's, are built on the principle of separation of church and state. Governments are not supposed to favor a particular religion, and religious institutions do not formally control political authority. The author acknowledges this principle clearly.



Dr. Bo Hi Pak with Queen Elizabeth II after a special performance for her at the Royal Court in London in November 1971.

However, the [column](#) distinguishes institutional separation from personal conviction. While the state must remain neutral, the individuals who operate within it inevitably bring their beliefs and moral frameworks to their work. The author argues that faith, in the cases of Han Sang-kuk (한상국) and Bo Hi Pak (박보희), did not undermine democracy but rather fortified their sense of duty. In this interpretation, religious belief served as an inner source of

integrity, courage, and commitment during moments of national crisis.

The [article](#) does not call for theocratic governance or the merging of religious institutions with political authority. Instead, it highlights historical episodes in which individuals shaped by religious faith played influential roles in diplomacy and cultural outreach. By revisiting these examples, the author suggests that religious values can coexist with democratic governance, provided that formal institutional boundaries are respected.

In essence, the [column](#) presents Han Sang-kuk as the "voice" of diplomacy during a decisive Cold War meeting and Bo Hi Pak as a pioneer of cultural diplomacy who expanded South Korea's international

presence through the arts. Together, they are portrayed as figures who navigated war, ideological conflict, and global politics with both military professionalism and religious conviction.

For readers outside Korea, the [piece](#) offers insight into how some Koreans interpret their nation's rise from wartime devastation to global prominence. It frames that transformation not only in terms of economic policy and military alliances, but also in terms of personal belief, moral commitment, and what the author sees as constructive cooperation between faith and public service.

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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

[Editor's note: There was a U.S. press photograph from 14th November 1961 showing "Lt. Col. Sanguk Han, Korean interpreter" seated between President John F. Kennedy and General / Chairman Park Chung-Hee during Park's visit to the White House following the May 1961 military coup. This caption appears in the archival photo record (AP / Alamy), confirming the existence of a Korean military officer by that name serving as an interpreter at that summit.]

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More Humanity Even In A Communist Prison?

February 22, 2026 • Knut Holdhus



Former Czech political prisoner under communism asks whether Mother Han is being shown less humanity in long-term detention than he was under similar circumstances

The Voice of Conscience

Reflections by PhDr. Juraj Lajda (Doctor of Philosophy), lecturer and publisher, former political prisoner under the communist regime in [Czechoslovakia](#).

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Prague, 21st February 2026 – A few hours ago, we learned that Dr. [Hak Ja Han](#), the 83-year-old leader of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), has been [returned to her detention cell](#) after a brief ten-day release for urgent medical treatment in hospital. She remains detained on what, in my view, appears to be fabricated and circumstantial evidence.



Artistic impression of [Mother Han](#) in detention cell. Illustration: Grok xAI.

[Dr. Han](#) suffers from multiple [serious health conditions](#): deteriorating eyesight, mobility limitations following knee surgery, and a severe cardiac condition – arrhythmia – for which she underwent surgery only five months ago. Given these circumstances, I am deeply disturbed by her return to detention. It is difficult to believe that her medical condition could have improved so dramatically in ten days that her life is no longer at risk.

I am profoundly shocked by the treatment of this elderly religious leader under the current South Korean administration. From my perspective – and I believe many share this concern – the decision to [return her to detention](#) raises urgent humanitarian and ethical questions.

My reaction is shaped in part by personal experience. I was myself detained long-term under a Communist regime in Eastern Europe. Even in that political system, **I was treated more humanely than what now appears to be a life-threatening detention imposed on [Dr. Han](#)** in a country that has been considered democratic since 1987.



Her

The place where [Dr. Lajda](#) was imprisoned from 1973 to 1976 – the [Palace of Justice](#) in Bratislava, Slovakia. Photo: [Laurenc Klas](#)

situation brings back memories of my imprisonment in Czechoslovakia in the early 1970s. Ironically, I was arrested for following the teachings of the South Korean religious leader [Sun Myung Moon](#). Along with [17 other young people](#) – mostly students – I was sentenced to three years and two months for “subversion of the republic” after nearly ten months of investigation before trial.

During the investigation phase, I was held in remand prison in Bratislava, where I was interrogated daily until the case file was closed and the indictment prepared. About six months into my detention, after prolonged confinement in a 2-by-3-meter cell – often shared with two or three other inmates – my longstanding atopic eczema worsened dramatically. The prison environment caused my condition to deteriorate severely.



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Mugshot of Juraj Lajda from 1973. Photo: Archive of the Prison and Judicial Guard Corps of the Slovak Republic.

When I reported this to the prison doctor, he acknowledged that he could not properly treat me under the limited conditions available. He therefore requested that I be transferred to another prison facility in Brno, where better medical care was available.

I was transported there and remained for forty days until my condition stabilized and the acute phase of the illness was brought under control.

Although I was still deprived of liberty in Brno, the conditions were adapted to medical necessity. The cell was larger, I had a bed, and my daily routine was adjusted to facilitate treatment. Each day I was taken to the infirmary, where doctors worked diligently to restore my health.

The decision regarding my hospitalization and its duration was made by a physician. Whether formal authorization from an investigator or judge was required, I do not know; if it was, it was granted. The purpose of detention was not suspended – but it was carried out with recognition that I was first and foremost a patient in need of medical care.

The doctor treated me as a human being, not as a political offender. His duty was to preserve health and life. He acted according to the ethical obligations embodied in the Hippocratic Oath – that is, he would strive to preserve human life at all costs. Political considerations did not override medical judgment. Even in a Communist prison, the principle prevailed that an accused person remains a human being deserving of care.

I come from a family of physicians; my father was a well-known surgeon. I therefore understand the professional and ethical responsibilities that accompany medical practice. In my case, medical judgment determined the course of treatment – not prosecutorial or judicial discretion.

This occurred in 1974, under the Communist regime of former Czechoslovakia.

Today, I must ask: who determines Dr. [Hak Ja Han](#)'s medical fate? Is it the attending physician – or the prosecutor, investigator, or judge? If a doctor recommends continued hospitalization, what prevents the authorities from granting it? Legal procedure should not supersede the preservation of human life.

Are medical professionals in this case able to act independently according to their ethical obligations? The Hippocratic Oath is not conditional upon political context. Physicians are entrusted with safeguarding life, irrespective of the legal status of their patients.

If medical necessity is subordinated to political considerations, the situation ceases to be lawful detention and begins to resemble deliberate endangerment. The question is not merely legal – it is moral.

My conclusion is sobering. In my own experience as a political prisoner under Communism, medical care was ultimately respected. If an elderly detainee in contemporary South Korea is denied necessary hospitalization despite grave health risks, it compels serious reflection about the direction in which that system is moving.

I am deeply shocked and profoundly concerned.

See also [Indictment Language Challenged by Defense](#)

See also [Return to Custody as Court Rejects Health Plea](#)

Featured image above: PhDr. Juraj Lajda, here in Prague, Czechia 18th April 2024. Photo: Baranov



Papyrus text:
fragment of
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