FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Toru Goto Wins After 12 Years Imprisoned By His Family

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Toru Goto, left, after winning the first instance case in Tokyo District Court on 28th January 2014. The poster held up says, "勝訴" - "Won the case." The verdict was upheld by Tokyo High Court on 13th November 2014, and finally by the Supreme Court on 29th September 2015



Toru Goto speaking during an online conference on 19th September 19, 2026

From a Tokyo flat to a landmark court victory, Toru Goto vows that the fight against coercive faith-breaking is not over

Part 8 (final) of "My Experience of Abduction, Confinement, and Forced Deconversion", a testimony on 19th September 2026 by Toru Goto (後藤徹), a Japanese member of the Family Federation and victim of attempted coercive faith-breaking [See editor's note below] - locked up for over 12 years in apartment turned prison. This first-hand witness account - of high relevance for the current dissolution case against the Family Federation in Japan - was delivered at a Zoom conference organized by Peace and Reconciliation Together (PnR-T), a Dutch-registered foundation focused on reconciliation, peacebuilding, dialogue, and healing historical conflicts.

Continued from part 1: Apartment Turned Prison: 12 Years to Break Faith

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The reality of faith-breaking: *Toru Goto, a member of the Family Federation, in 2008 emaciated, with medical bandages, and barely able to move after being held in forcible detention by his own family in league with professional faith-breakers for more than 12 years*



Professional faith-breaker Takashi Miyamura, responsible for hundreds of deprogrammings based on abduction and forcible detention. He is said to have been advisor to the Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP)

The staff at the headquarters helped me and took me to a hospital, where I was admitted immediately.

At the hospital, I was diagnosed with severe generalized muscle weakness, muscle atrophy, and malnutrition.

In this way, through what I experienced as God's guidance, I was rescued and safely admitted to the hospital.

This photograph (to the right) was taken three days after I was released from confinement.

After I had been admitted to the hospital, I spent time praying deeply from my bed. I thanked God for protecting and guiding me throughout those twelve years and asked what path I should take from that point onward and what God's will for me was.

As I prayed, I felt a strong prompting that I should not simply remain silent and let the matter end there, but that I should confront the injustice of abduction and confinement and fight it openly.

At first I was confused. But when I prayed again the following day, I received the same conviction.

Then a passage from the Old Testament that had come to me during my confinement once again resonated strongly in my heart:

"Be strong and courageous." (Joshua 1:9)

I understood this as a message from God to me, and I decided to confront the matter directly.

One of the teachings I have cherished is the principle of loving one's enemies. No matter how unreasonable the treatment I received during my confinement was, I resolved not to hate the people involved. I also firmly resolved never to use violence myself.

At the same time, however, I came to believe that coercive faith-breaking [See editor's note below] through abduction and confinement was an unacceptable violation of human rights.

Feeling that I had God's support, I filed a criminal complaint and subsequently brought a civil lawsuit.

The legal battle was not easy. However, in 2014, the Tokyo High Court recognized the unlawful conduct involved in my 12 years and five months of confinement and ordered the defendants to pay a total of ¥22 million [In 2014, ca. 200,000 US dollars] in damages.

Of that amount, faith-breaker Takashi Miyamura (宮村峻) was held jointly liable for ¥11 million, while another defendant, faith-breaker and pastor Yasutomo Matsunaga (松永堡智) of the Niitsu Evangelical Christian Church (新津福音キリスト教会), was held jointly liable for ¥4.4 million.

Then, in September 2015, the Supreme Court dismissed the defendants' appeal, and the High Court judgment that had recognized the unlawful confinement became final.

In Japan, more than 4,300 victims of abduction and confinement had been identified by that point.

As lawsuits accumulated and the issue received greater attention, the number of cases declined.

By 2016, the number of newly identified cases had finally fallen to zero.

However, that did not mean that the problem had completely disappeared.



Carried out a campaign of criticism, ridicule, and theological challenge in Niigata designed to break Goto's faith: Faith-breaker: pastor Yasutomo Matsunaga of the Niitsu Evangelical Christian Church

Even if the number of cases has fallen dramatically, the issue of abduction and confinement has not ended.

There are people who suffered similar harm, even if they were not confined for such a long period, and who continue to suffer from psychological trauma, damaged family relationships, and other lasting effects.

Moreover, it cannot be said that Japanese society is yet sufficiently aware of the problem of abduction, confinement, and coercive faith-breaking [See editor's note below].

We must ensure that new victims never suffer this again, and we must not forget the suffering of those who have already been victimized.

In that sense, this issue is not yet over.

Last February, I published a book about my experience, Battle for Survival - 4,536 Days in Confinement.

At the beginning, I wrote something along these lines:

"After 12 years and five months of confinement, followed by seven years of legal struggle, I began under extremely difficult circumstances. Struggling at the bottom of despair, I gradually turned the situation around, and in the end achieved a dramatic reversal and victory.

I hope that this account of my experience will be of some help to people who are quietly confronting lonely and difficult battles of their own."



The English version of Toru Goto's new book: Battle for Survival - 4536 Days in Captivity

If I were to add one thing to those words now, it would be this:

It was God, who is alive and working even today, who protected me, supported me, and guided me to the very end through that terrible ordeal.

That is why I want to share the conviction I gained from that experience with all of you who are going through trials today.

We, too, are now going through a great trial. Amid the legal proceedings concerning Mother Han and the difficult situation surrounding the Family Federation in Japan, some of you may feel that you cannot see what lies ahead, as though you are trapped in a completely dark container.

I myself experienced the deepest despair, with absolutely no idea what the future held, during those 12 years and five months of confinement. There were many times when I did not know what would happen the next day and felt that I had reached my limit.

Even so, I did not lose my faith. I held on to God's word and continued to pray.

And now, looking back, there is something of which I am certain. Even when I cannot see a way forward, God can see the way. Even when I cannot see hope, God is with me, protecting and guiding me.

Therefore, no matter how great your difficulties are, and no matter how impossible the future may seem, please do not lose hope. Protect your faith, hold firmly to God's word, and pray as you walk each day with dignity.

Through my own experience, I am convinced that the living God will surely make a way.

Let us move forward together with hope.

Thank you very much for listening.

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> **[Editor's note:** Coercive faith-breaking ("deprogramming") in Japan refers to the practice of coercively attempting to separate individuals from their religious affiliations or beliefs, typically through intervention by family members, professional faith-breakers (deprogrammers) or organizations hostile to new religious movements (NRMs). This phenomenon often targets members of such movements, e.g. relatively large faiths like the Family Federation or Jehovah's Witnesses, but also smaller groups like Happy Science (Kōfuku no Kagaku) and other newer religious movements.



Also subject to faith-breaking attempts: Members of Soka Gakkai. Here students belonging to the faith in 2001

> However, also Soka Gakkai, a Buddhist-based lay organization with more than 8 million Japanese members, and affiliated with Nichiren Buddhism, has occasionally been subject to faith-breaking attempts.
>
> The practice gained attention in the latter half of the 20th century, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Parents or concerned family members often hired faith-breakers who taught them how to abduct and forcibly detain believers. Almost all such cases involved confining the individual believer and cutting him or her off from the religious community. During the confinement, the believer was subjected to intense questioning or indoctrination designed to break his or her faith. The aim was to "rescue" the person from what the family often had been tricked by faith-breakers or lawyers to regard as harmful influence from the religious organization.
>
> Critics of forced de-conversion argue that it violates fundamental human rights, including freedom of thought, religion, and association. Reports of psychological trauma and accusations of unlawful detention have sparked debates over its ethical and legal implications. In response, some religious groups, particularly NRMs, have lobbied for greater protections against such practices.

Japanese courts have been inconsistent in addressing cases of coercive faith-breaking. While some verdicts have condemned the practice as illegal detention, others have been more lenient, citing family concerns about "mental health" or alleged "exploitation" as mitigating factors.]

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The story of the 1955 Unification Church controversy (1955년 통일교 사건) did not end when Sun Myung Moon (문선명) was acquitted. In some respects, that was when its most consequential chapter began.

See also Mother Han's Case Echoing a 1955 Religious Trial

The logo of OhmyNews (오마이뉴스). In smaller writing, reflecting the citizen journalism policy, it says, "All citizens are reporters". Public domain image

A 6th October 2026 article by **Protestant scholar Bae Deok-man** (배덕만) in *OhmyNews* presents the episode not simply as a confrontation between an established Christian majority and a controversial new movement, but as a turning point in the development of Korean Protestantism itself. The professors and students who were expelled from *Ewha Womans University* and *Yonsei University* did not simply disappear from the history of the Protestant movement. Many remained committed to their new faith, and several subsequently played important roles in its doctrinal development, missionary expansion and institutional growth.

According to Bae's article, this is one of the most revealing aspects of the historical episode.

In 1954, missionary activity among students and professors at Ewha and Yonsei had brought the Unification Church into **direct contact with highly educated members of established Protestantism**. Some of them were initially asked to **investigate the new religion** precisely because university authorities were **concerned about its influence**. Yet the investigation did not always produce the intended result.



Wolli Haeseol *(Explanation of the Principles), published in 1957 in Korean. Not translated into English. Photo: FFWPU*



*Sent by university authorities to investigate the Unification Church: **Dr. Young Oon Kim** (Kim Yeong-oon), here in the Summer of 1956 in Seoul. Photo: FFWPU, improved resolution by Grok xAI, September 2026*

Professor Kim Yeong-oon (김영운 – aka. Young Oon Kim), for example, was introduced to Sun Myung Moon (문선명) and became deeply impressed by him and by the *Explanation of the Principles* (원리해설), which was then being written as a new interpretation of the 66 books of the Bible. She subsequently became a believer and refused repeated requests to renounce her new faith.

The same pattern occurred at Yonsei. Professor Park Sang-rae (박상래) became involved with the new religious movement after being introduced through Ewha Professor Yang Yun-yeong (양윤영). Park subsequently taught its ideas to students through individual meetings and small Bible-study groups. When university authorities investigated the situation and urged her to abandon her affiliation, she refused. She was eventually dismissed, and students who likewise refused to leave the Unification Church were expelled.

From the perspective of the institutions taking disciplinary action, these measures may have appeared to be necessary to defend theological orthodoxy. From the perspective of religious liberty, however, they raised a more difficult question: **how far may a religiously affiliated educational institution go in controlling the religious convictions of its professors and students?**

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That question remains relevant in contemporary South Korea.

The 1955 controversy demonstrated that exclusion can have consequences very different from those intended by its architects. Rather than eliminating the movement of Sun Myung Moon, the dismissals and expulsions contributed to its separation from established Protestantism. Bae Deok-man (배덕만) argues that relations between the Unification Church and established Protestant denominations were subsequently severed, pushing the movement to develop as an independent new religion rather than as a current within Korean Christianity.

The expelled academics also contributed directly to that development. Kim Yeong-oon (김영운) became the first missionary sent to the United States in 1959 and played an important role in translating the English edition of the *Unification Principles*. Yang Yun-yeong (양윤영) contributed to early hymns and musical activities, while Choi Won-bok (최원복) became involved in publication, external relations, English-language publishing and translation. Park Sang-rae (박상래) worked for a period as a doctrinal researcher and theological adviser.



*Key person for translating the teachings into English: Ptofessor **Choi Won-bok**, here in the early 1960s in Seoul. Photo: FFWPU.*

The students expelled from Ewha likewise became part of the movement's early leadership. According to Bae, many remained in the Unification Church and included members of the "36 Couples" blessed in marriage in 1961. In later decades, former students assumed senior positions in educational institutions, media, business and other organizations associated with the movement.

Thus, as the OhmyNews article points out, an attempt to contain a religious movement ultimately helped provide it with intellectual, theological and organizational resources.

This historical irony deserves consideration amid today's confrontation between the South Korean authorities and the Family Federation. The present dispute is obviously not identical to the events of 1955. The contemporary allegations concern specific questions of unlawful and political conduct, while the earlier conflict centred heavily on theology, university discipline and fears about a new religion. Those differences should not be ignored.

Yet the broader principle is relevant. **A society's treatment of a persecuted religion can influence the very development of that religion.** Attempts to marginalize, stigmatize or suppress a movement may strengthen its sense of separation from the religious mainstream and create a powerful narrative of persecution.

There is another striking parallel. In the late 1950s, major Protestant denominations formally designated the Unification Church as "heresy" and instructed their members to avoid association with it. Today, religious leaders remain influential voices in debates about how the Family Federation should be treated by the state.

That makes the words of Christian leaders particularly important. When religious condemnation moves beyond theological disagreement and becomes an argument for state action against another religious organization, the distinction between **religious judgment and governmental coercion** becomes crucial.

The history of 1955 suggests why.

A movement that was expected to be defeated by dismissals, expulsions and criminal proceedings instead developed into an international religious organization. The controversy brought it unprecedented public attention, supplied some of its future leaders and accelerated its separation from established Protestantism.

Bae Deok-man's account therefore provides more than a history of an old religious controversy. It raises a question with contemporary relevance: **when established religious institutions seek the exclusion of a minority faith, do they protect society – or do they unintentionally contribute to the minority's transformation and growth?**

That question is worth asking before history is allowed to repeat itself.

See also Mother Han's Case Echoing a 1955 Religious Trial

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

***Featured image** above: Sun Myung Moon in 1954 (Photo: FFWPU, improved resolution by Grok xAI Oct. 2026) and Hak Ja Han in August 2026 (Photo: Michael Balcomb, improved resolution by ChatGPT, Sep. 2026)*

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