

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Tokyo Protesters Denounce Unjust State Action Against FFWPU

Knut Holdhus
June 10, 2025



Believers of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) march through the streets of Ikebukuro during a demonstration - Afternoon of June 8, 2025, Toshima Ward



[Sekai Nippo](#)

Tokyo protesters standing for religious freedom as they demand end to state persecution, calling the authorities to revoke unjust dissolution order

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"Listen to the Voices of Truth from the Family Federation" - 750 Believers March in Demonstration in Ikebukuro, Tokyo

by the editorial department of the [Sekai Nippo](#)

On June 8, 2025, the Tokyo Citizens' Association for the Protection of Fundamental Human Rights and Freedom of Religion, composed of believers of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), held a demonstration in Toshima Ward, Tokyo. They called for the revocation of the [dissolution order](#) against the [religious organization](#).



Protesters gathering in East Ikebukuro Central Park, Tokyo on June 8, 2025 to call for the revocation of the [dissolution order](#) against the [Family Federation](#)

Starting from East Ikebukuro Central Park, the roughly 750 participants - according to organizers - marched through the surrounding areas of Ikebukuro, divided into three groups as they proceeded through

the busy streets on a holiday.



Believers of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) march through the streets of Ikebukuro, Tokyo during a demonstration on June 8, 2025

Wearing orange hats, participants carried placards at the front and sides of their groups, with messages such as:

"Please listen to the voices of truth from the believers!"

With calls from loudspeakers on campaign vehicles, in unison they chanted slogans like:

"Revoke the [dissolution order](#)!"

"The media coverage is largely distorted!"

A female believer in her 30s from Nerima Ward, who joined the march with her two children, appealed,

"My children look forward to going to church. I want to protect religious freedom for their sake."

A male believer in his 20s shared his thoughts:

"I don't know if a demonstration is the best way, but I don't want to just do nothing and let it end. I want to put my whole heart into this until the very end."

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Text: Knut Holdhus

The affidavit by Professor Bryan Wilson in the [Attorney-General's case](#) to revoke the [Unification Church's](#) charitable status (1984–1988) was of significant scholarly and legal weight. Its inclusion marked a key intervention by a leading academic expert in the sociology of religion who sought to contextualize the criticisms directed at the [Unification Church](#) within a broader historical and sociological framework. Here's how its significance can be understood:

Academic legitimization and historical contextualization

Wilson's affidavit challenged the premise that the [Unification Church](#) was uniquely harmful or fraudulent. By showing that accusations such as wealth accumulation, irrationality, brainwashing, and family breakdown had historically been leveled – often unfairly – against mainstream and now-respected religious groups (e.g., Catholicism, Methodism, the Salvation Army), Wilson provided a comparative sociological perspective that questioned the objectivity and validity of the claims against the [Unification Church](#).



The Methodist church was once persecuted fiercely. here, its founder John Wesley (1703-1791) preaching in the fields. To begin with its followers were contemptuously called Methodists. Now it is an honorable name. Illustration from 1888 by Ellen Gould Harmon White (1827-1915). Photo: from [Flickr's The Commons](#). No known copyright restrictions.

This reframed the [Unification Church](#) not as an outlier, but as part of a recurring pattern in the treatment of unpopular or minority religions. Such framing undercut the narrative that the [Unification Church's](#) practices were automatically grounds for losing charitable status.

To illustrate Wilson's reasoning, here is what he wrote in his affidavit on alleged wealth accumulation,

"The amassing of wealth has been another perennial accusation: the Catholic Church has been alleged to exploit the poor in order to support wealthy bishops...; the Salvation Army was subject in the 19th century to similar abuse, particularly in the press in Switzerland, where the movement was stereotyped as 'exploitative of minds and purses'; today, leaders of the NRMs [New Religious Movements] are frequently alleged to be exploiting their followers while amassing a fortune. Irrationality has long been a pejorative stereotype of religion:

Catholicism allegedly inculcated superstition into the young; Methodists in the 18th century were regarded as bewitching their followers; today members of NRMs are said to be 'brainwashed'. Unpopular religions have often been depicted as agencies for the kidnap and mistreatment of children: in the Middle Ages Jews were thought to kidnap Christian infants for vile Passover rites; the Protestant press in America and Britain depicted Catholic children being enticed, before the age of majority, to become nuns and priests; today the stereotype of the NRM is that it sets itself out to kidnap young people and break up families. [...]

What is remarkable about these stereotypes is that they have been recurrent in recent history and have been widely applied to quite diverse religious movements at various times."

Deconstruction of stereotypes and media influence

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Wilson emphasized that media and public discourse had historically recycled the same pejorative stereotypes against religious minorities. He cited “brainwashing”, “kidnapping”, and “deception” as examples of rhetorical devices used to demonize new religious movements (NRMs). This positioned public hysteria as a cultural phenomenon, not necessarily reflective of legal or moral wrongdoing.

This helped undermine the prosecution’s case if it relied heavily on public fear or negative publicity rather than empirical evidence of harm or fraud. Wilson’s affidavit implicitly argued that perception is not proof.

Apostate testimony: bias and reliability

Perhaps the most potent element was Wilson’s discussion of apostate testimony – the emotionally charged accounts of former members, often central to anti-cult narratives.

Citing other scholars like Anson D. Shupe (1948-2015), David G. Bromley, Donna L. Oliver, Wilson pointed out that such testimony, though rhetorically powerful, is methodologically suspect due to its tendency to be sensationalized, motivated by grievance, or shaped by anti-cult movements.

This directly challenged the credibility of key witnesses for the [Attorney-General’s case](#), whose narratives may have been pivotal. Wilson’s affidavit thus cast doubt on the evidentiary value of such testimonies, urging courts to distinguish between subjective accounts and systematic analysis.

Bryan Wilson wrote in his affidavit,

“4.10 The medium which has proven itself most effective in propagating religious stereotypes is the apostate testimony: the first-hand evidence about a new or unpopular religion which such testimonies purport to contain makes their claims hard to refute.

The phenomenon of apostate testimony has been documented by Shupe, Bromley & Oliver (The Anti-Cult Movement in America, 1984, pp. 39-43). They note that:

‘The accounts of the experience of apostates from the new religious movements of the 1970’s made dramatic reading. As a result, toward the end of the decade a number of ‘exposes’ of these various groups, written by or about ex-members in the tradition of righteously indignant apostasy appeared for public consumption.’ (pp. 39-40).”

In section 4.11 of the affidavit, he provided examples of apostate testimonies in various religions including the Catholic Church.

Implication for religious freedom and charity law

By placing the [Unification Church](#)’s situation within a broader sociological and historical continuum, Wilson raised deeper constitutional and human rights questions – namely, how the law treats minority religions and to what extent subjective cultural fears should influence legal definitions of public benefit under charity law.



David G. Bromley (1941-), Professor of Sociology at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia, and University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, specialized in sociology of religion and academic studies of new religious movements. Has written much about so-called cults, new religious movements, apostasy and the anti-cult movement.
Photo: [Bitter Winter](#)



The execution of William Tyndale (1494-1536) near Brussels in 1536. He

The execution of William Tyndale (1494-1536) near Brussels in 1536. He was a priest who translated the Bible to English. Was tried and condemned as a heretic. As he was known as a distinguished scholar, he was given the courtesy of being strangled before he was burnt at the stake. Illustration: Internet Archive Book Images. Photo: from [Flickr's The Commons](#). No known copyright restrictions.

His testimony implied that stripping charitable status based on such contested stereotypes could set a dangerous precedent – where ideological or cultural disapproval masquerades as legal reasoning.

Conclusion

Wilson's affidavit was a scholarly counterbalance to emotionally and ideologically charged narratives. It highlighted the recurrence of moral panics, propagation of stereotypes, and historical biases that accompany the emergence of new religions. Its significance lies in challenging the legitimacy of the case against the [Unification Church](#), not by defending every practice of the [movement](#) per se, but by urging the legal system to apply rigorous, evidence-based standards and to be aware of its susceptibility to prejudice.

In sum, Wilson offered not just expert testimony but a meta-commentary on how societies – and courts – understand and regulate religion.

To be continued. Part 4 coming soon.

See part 1: [England Dropped Its Case in 1988; Why Isn't Japan?](#)

See part 2: [Scholar Warns Against Revival of Stereotypes](#)

Featured image above: Pope Pius VI (1719-1789) being arrested by the French in 1798 during the French Revolutionary Wars after Napoleon's troops had captured Rome and the Papal States. The pope was taken as prisoner to France, where he died the following year, 81 years old. Pius VI had condemned the French revolution and its persecution of the Catholic Church. Illustration from 1888 by Ellen Gould Harmon White (1827-1915). Photo: from [Flickr's The Commons](#). No known copyright restrictions.

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