

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Julian Gray on England Dropped Its Case Against FFWPU in 1988; Why Isn't Japan Dropping It?

Knut Holdhus
June 5, 2025



Facsimile from Unification News March 1988, page 1, published in New York, USA.



Julian Gray

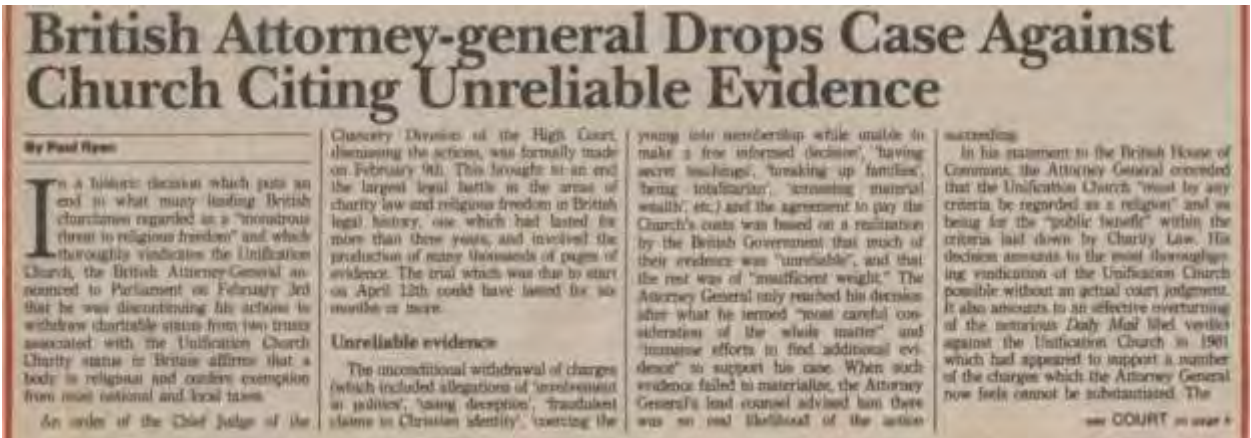
Very similar legal and evidentiary weaknesses: In England, a surprisingly relevant legal precedent exists to the dissolution order case in Japan

Part 1 of a report written 28th March 2024 by Julian Gray, former editor of the [FFWPU](#) publication Today's World, currently translator for the [Family Federation](#)'s new international administrative HQ, known as Cheon Mu Won, located in Gapyeong, South Korea. Edited version.

In 2024, the Japanese government moved to revoke the legal corporate status of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly known as the [Unification Church](#)). The case has sparked national and international debate. But a surprisingly relevant legal precedent exists - one that might influence the outcome in Japan: the 1984-1988 UK charitable status case against the [Unification Church](#). A close review of the British case may offer insights into the legal and evidentiary weaknesses now playing out in Japan.

Parallels and Lessons from the English Case

In 1984, then-Attorney-General [England's chief law officer and senior legal adviser to the government] Michael Havers (1923-1992) instigated proceedings to challenge the charitable (not-for-profit) status of the [Unification Church](#) in England. The case was significant and complex, involving claims about the [church](#)'s religious status and moral standing. But after several years of investigation and preparation, the British government suddenly dropped the case in 1988. Why?



Facsimile from Unification News March 1988, page 1, published in New York, USA

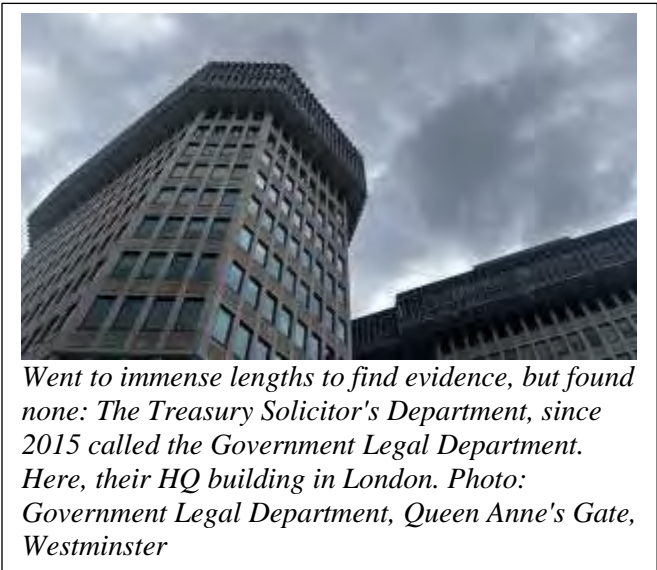
Attorney-General Patrick Mayhew (1929-2016) addressed the House of Commons on 3rd February 1988, explaining the government's decision to discontinue the proceedings. His reasoning - and the process behind it - could bear directly on how Japan's courts view the reliability of government evidence in their

current case.

The Attorney-General's Statement in Parliament

Mayhew's remarks were revealing. First, he affirmed that under English law, there is a strong presumption that a trust for the advancement of religion is charitable, regardless of how controversial the religion may be:

"Whatever view may be taken of its tenets, the [Unification Church](#) must, as a matter of law, be regarded as a religion. In English law there is a strong presumption that any trust for the advancement of any religion, without distinction, is charitable unless the contrary is proved by evidence admissible in court proceedings. Teachings that are in their very essence contrary to morality would be an example. It is for any challenger to bring forward such evidence: the burden is on him."



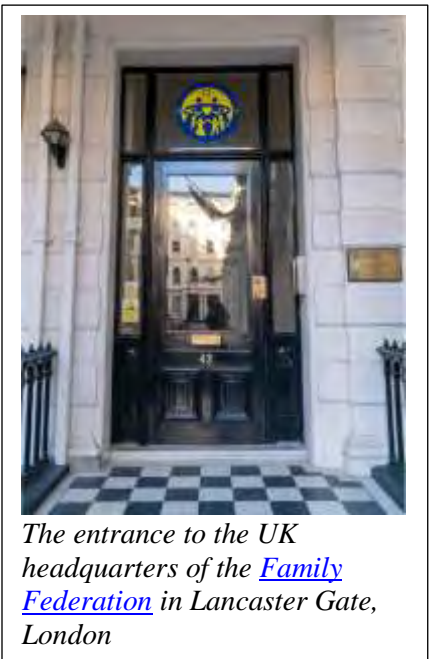
He further admitted that despite exhaustive efforts - including soliciting testimonies from former members and others involved in the [church](#) - the government failed to meet this burden of proof:

"The evidence available to my predecessor in 1984 properly led him, with the advice of leading counsel, to conclude that there were sufficient prospects of an appeal succeeding. That evidence included testimony of witnesses called for the successful defendants in a libel action against Associated Newspapers Group Ltd. tried in 1981. In addition, there were statements by former members of the [Unification Church](#) that had been offered when it came generally known that charity

proceedings in the High Court were under consideration.

Since the proceedings were begun, the Treasury Solicitor [See editor's note below] has gone to immense lengths in seeking out additional evidence from those who have been associated with the [Unification Church](#). Some further potential witnesses have approached him on their own initiative. Further statements have been taken from other persons, who had been closely involved in comparatively recent activities of the [Unification Church](#) in this country, and who had wanted to assist in the challenge to charitable status of the trusts.

The most careful analysis has now been made of the totality of the evidence available to me, set against the legal presumption to which I have referred. Some of it, when tested in the light of all the material now available, has proved to be insufficiently reliable.



The remainder, when seen in the overall context, is shown to be of insufficient weight to rebut the legal presumption. I have now been advised by leading counsel that it is most unlikely that, if the appeal proceeded to trial, I should be able to dislodge that strong legal presumption of charitable status. After the most careful consideration, I agree with that advice.

The trial is due to start on 12 April [1988]. It would last an estimated three to six months and occasion great expense. In these circumstances, I have decided to seek the court's leave to discontinue these proceedings, and the Treasury Solicitor [See editor's note below] has this morning so informed the defendants."

Attorney-General Mayhew emphasized that even after years of investigation and legal consultation, the case had little hope of success. Continuing would have cost the government a great deal in time, resources, and public credibility.

The Attorney-General here explains that because the evidence the government had gathered was shown to be unreliable or weak, he was advised to discontinue the case. He does not clarify in detail which particular evidence influenced him the most. This report examines some of the evidence, brought by the defense, that probably influenced the Attorney-General.

To be continued. Part 2 coming soon.

[Editor's note: The Treasury Solicitor was the head of the Treasury Solicitor's Department (TSol), a non-ministerial government department that provided legal services to the majority of central government departments in England and Wales. In April 2015 it became the Government Legal Department (GLD).]

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After The N-Word: Is “Cult” Next Term To Be Banned?

• June 4, 2025
• Knut Holdhus

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Words kill: Religious freedom journalist calls us to reject religious slurs like the word “cult”, just like society has largely removed racial slurs like the “n-word”


The Fragile Balance of Press Freedom and Religious Liberty

High Time to Challenge the Cult Narrative




Part 3 (final) of an article by Peter Zoehrer, journalist and Executive Director of **FOREF Europe**, originally published 7th May 2025 by **Forum for Religious Freedom Europe (FOREF)**, republished 9th May 2025 by **Human Rights Without Frontiers**, and by **Bitter Winter** on 16th May 2025.


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A digital age of echo chambers – and resistance

In our hyper-connected world, disinformation spreads fast – and stigma spreads faster.



Archway built on the occasion of the major annual Hindu religious festival Durga Puja in October 2024 in Bangladesh. Photo: [Ronju65 / Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC Attr 4.0 Int](#). Cropped

Bangladesh, a false social media post about a Quran desecration during Durga Puja in 2021 triggered deadly riots. The line between rumor and journalism collapses quickly.

Yet resistance is growing. Platforms like [“Bitter Winter”](#), [FOREF Europe](#), [CESNUR](#), [HRWF](#), and independent scholars continue to challenge false narratives, document abuse, and defend conscience.

Courts are taking note. In 2022, the *European Court of Human Rights* ruled in “Tonchev v. Bulgaria” that derogatory language by public authorities can violate religious freedom under Article 9 of the ECHR.

Recommendations

To safeguard both freedom of the press and freedom of religion or belief, the following actions are urgently needed:

1. Eliminate stigmatizing language such as “cult” or “Sekte,” unless supported by objective, legal evidence. Just as society has largely removed racial slurs like the “N-word” from responsible discourse, we must also reject religious slurs that [dehumanize](#) entire communities. Use accurate, neutral terms such as “faith community” or “new religious movement.”
2. Provide training for journalists on FoRB [Freedom of Religion or Belief] principles, religious literacy, and cultural sensitivity to prevent the spread of harmful stereotypes.
3. Ensure media accountability through ombudspersons, independent press councils, and public responses to unbalanced or defamatory content.
4. Support independent journalism and watchdog organizations that uphold both press freedom and the rights of religious minorities.
5. Urge governments and international bodies to refrain from adopting or promoting anti-cult narratives that violate international human rights norms.

As *UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief* (FoRB) Nazila Ghanea warned in 2023, “direct violence against marginalized religious communities often goes hand in hand with legally mandated discrimination” – much of it fueled by biased media.



Conclusion: A test of integrity

World Press Freedom Day is more than a tribute – it is a test. Will the press stand with the voiceless, or with the mob? Will it defend Articles 18 and 19 of the UDHR – or betray them in pursuit of sensationalism and scapegoats?

In this fragile global moment, integrity matters more than ever. We must demand a journalism rooted in truth, not tribalism; in context, not caricature. Only then can freedom of expression and freedom of belief coexist – not in conflict, but in

Sent formal UN request to Japan, but no reply: Nazila Ghanea, UN Rapporteur on Religious Freedom since February 2023. Photo: [GiovannaKa / Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC ASA 4.0 Int](#)

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of expression and freedom of belief coexist – not in conflict, but in common cause for justice.

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Peter Zoehrer is a journalist and the Executive Director of [FOREF Europe](#) (Forum for Religious Freedom – Europe), an independent Vienna-based NGO advocating for religious liberty, pluralism, and the protection of conscience across Europe and beyond.

Featured image above: From a demonstration organized by the [Family Federation](#) in the Japanese city of Koriyama 24th May 2025, against religious persecution. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

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