

# FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Linking Extremism to Broader Spiritual Conflict

Knut Holdhus  
May 23, 2026

**Islam, Extremism, and Spiritual Conflict**  
A Unificationist Perspective by Dr. David Carlson

**THE ABEL SIDE**  
Noble, Sincere, God-Centered

- Sincere worship of God
- Moral, family-centered lives
- Respect for life and dignity
- Contribution to society
- Seeks peace, justice and compassion

**THE CAIN SIDE**  
Corrupted, Violent, Anti-God

- Terrorism and murder
- Honor killings, abuse, brutality
- Oppression of women and children
- Forced marriage, sexual abuse
- Ideological fanaticism and hatred

**CAIN AND ABEL**  
Two Sides Within Every Religion

Religions contain both constructive and destructive tendencies. The challenge is to support what is good, confront what is evil, and work for a world aligned with God.

"World history is a struggle between forces aligned with God and forces opposed to God. Our task is to stand with Abel and overcome the works of Cain."  
- Dr. David Carlson

**FORCES ALIGNED WITH GOD** | **SPIRITUAL CONFLICT** | **FORCES OPPOSED TO GOD**

**RESPECTED IN UNIFICATIONISM**  
Rev. Sun Myung Moon taught that Muhammad, Jesus, Buddha, and Confucius are great spiritual teachers who guided humanity toward God.

**DR. CARLSON'S EXPERIENCE**  
Through years of teaching comparative religion and visiting mosques, Dr. Carlson came to appreciate Islam as a serious and meaningful faith with a rich spiritual tradition.

**BEYOND POLITICS - A SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE**  
Violent extremism is not only a political or social problem but part of a larger spiritual war shaping human history. Unseen spiritual forces influence ideologies, institutions, and cultures throughout the world.

**OUR RESPONSIBILITY**  
Reject violence and hatred in all its forms. Protect the innocent and defend human dignity. Build families and communities centered on God's love, truth, and peace. Work together for a world of genuine harmony.

**SPIRITUAL SOURCE OF EVIL**  
According to Unificationism, the root of destructive ideologies—whether communism, totalitarianism, or violent extremism—is a demonic spiritual influence opposed to God.

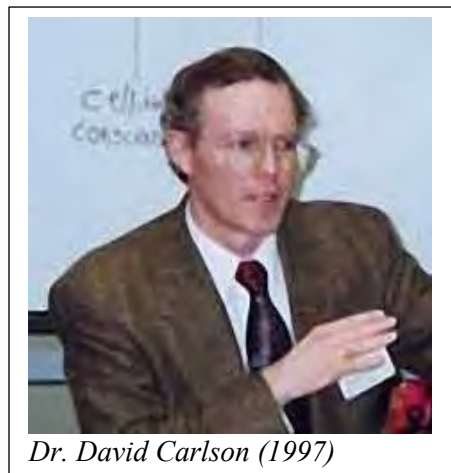
**THE CAIN SIDE OF ISLAM**  
Radical jihadist movements distort religion and commit evil acts. These are the expressions of the Cain side of spiritual corruption and violence.

"We must pray, discern, and act to support the Abel side, eliminate the Cain side, and build a world of true peace under God."  
- Dr. David Carlson

ONE HUMAN FAMILY UNDER GOD \* FAITH, CONSCIENCE, AND COURAGE \* OVERCOMING EVIL WITH GOOD

Dr. David Carlson on extremism. Illustration: ChatGPT

## Distinguishing faith from extremism: Academic separates mainstream Islam from violent radicalism using "Abel and Cain" Framework



Dr. David Carlson (1997)

Published on 8th May on the [website of the international headquarters](#) of the [Family Federation](#), the second installment of Dr. David Carlson's 2026 opinion series, [Are We Truly Prepared in Our Current World Situation?](#), looks at the relationship between religion, ideology, and spiritual conflict in the modern world. In sections four and five of the essay, he focuses specifically on Islam and radical Islamic extremism, presenting a theological interpretation rooted in [Unificationism](#) and in the broader religious worldview shaped by the teachings of [Sun Myung Moon](#) and [Hak Ja Han](#).

See also [The Rebirth of Communism in New Forms Today](#)

See also [Why Unification Thought Matters in 2026](#)

Carlson's argument proceeds from the assumption that religious traditions contain both constructive and destructive tendencies. Using the biblical symbolism of "Abel" and "Cain", he proposes that Islam, like other world religions, possesses a noble and spiritually sincere dimension while also containing movements that, in his view, have become corrupted by violence, extremism, and hatred. His analysis is not intended as a rejection of Islam as a whole; rather, he distinguishes between ordinary believers who seek [God](#) and live moral family-centered lives, and radicalized factions that embrace terrorism, brutality, and ideological fanaticism.

According to Carlson, the "Abel side" of Islam consists of devout Muslims who sincerely worship [God](#), raise families, and contribute positively to society. He notes that within [Unificationism](#) there has long been recognition of Islam as one of the world's significant religious traditions. He references statements attributed to [Rev. Moon](#) that regard Muhammad, Jesus, Buddha, and Confucius as major spiritual figures who each transmitted teachings intended to guide humanity toward [God](#). Carlson also refers to his own academic background teaching comparative religion and "Paths of Faith" courses, emphasizing that his

study of Islam led him to regard it as a serious and meaningful religious tradition.



*The "Four Great Saints" monument in front of the Family Federation place of worship known as the Cheonbok Temple in Cheongpa-dong, Yongsan-gu, Seoul. The figures represent Confucius, Buddha, Jesus, and Islam - symbolized by the Quran on a pedestal rather than a human figure, consistent with Islamic tradition. The monument was erected in 2011 dedicated to "harmony among religions and the realization of a peaceful world"*

At the same time, Carlson argues that extremist movements operating in the name of Islam represent what he calls the "Cain side" of the religion. He describes radical jihadist violence as morally corrupt and spiritually destructive, citing acts such as terrorism, honor killings, sexual abuse, and mistreatment of women as evidence of what he sees as a profound distortion of religion. His discussion repeatedly frames such violence not merely as political or social behavior, but as the manifestation of deeper spiritual evil.

A central element of Carlson's interpretation is his belief that destructive ideologies throughout history have been animated by a common spiritual force. Drawing on [Unificationism](#) concepts concerning spiritual influence, he argues that communism, totalitarianism, and violent extremism are not isolated phenomena but expressions of a broader anti-divine power

operating throughout human history. He insists that the ultimate source of evil is not individual political leaders such as Marx, Lenin, Mao, or contemporary extremists themselves, but rather what he calls "Satan" - understood not necessarily as a single being, but as a category of destructive spiritual influence.

Carlson therefore situates radical Islamic extremism within a larger theological framework in which unseen spiritual forces shape human institutions, ideologies, and historical movements. In his interpretation, violent jihadism is one modern expression of the same anti-[God](#) impulse that earlier manifested itself through communism and authoritarian political systems. He warns that these destructive forces continue to influence contemporary societies through various ideological and cultural forms.

Dr. Carlson writes that Islam has been discussed extensively in modern political and religious debate, especially in connection with terrorism and radical jihadist movements. However, based on his own study of religion, he believes Islam must be understood in a more nuanced way. In his view, Islam contains both positive and negative dimensions, which he symbolically describes as its "Abel" and "Cain" sides.



*From one of many interreligious conferences and rallies for peace in the Middle East organized by [Unificationism](#), this one in Jerusalem in September 2004*

The "Abel side" of Islam, according to Carlson, represents sincere faith and genuine spiritual devotion. He regards many Muslims as honest believers who seek [God](#), value family life, and attempt to live morally responsible lives. He notes that leaders and scholars within the Unification tradition have often spoken respectfully about Islam as one of the world's important religious traditions.

Carlson points out that figures such as Jesus, Muhammad, Buddha, and Confucius have all been regarded within [Unificationism](#) as major spiritual teachers who guided humanity toward divine truth. Dr. Carlson further explains that his own academic experience teaching comparative religion gave him direct exposure to Islamic belief and practice. Through educational programs and visits to mosques and

other religious communities, he came to appreciate Islam as a serious and meaningful faith tradition.

Nevertheless, Carlson strongly distinguishes mainstream Islam from extremist forms of radical jihadism. He argues that violent extremist movements represent a deeply corrupted version of religion. In his view, terrorism, murder, cruelty toward women, forced marriage, and acts of ideological violence are not merely social problems but manifestations of moral and spiritual evil.

Carlson emphasizes that he does not believe the problem is confined to Islam alone. Rather, he argues that a destructive spiritual force has operated throughout history through many different ideologies and systems. Drawing from the teachings of [Rev. Moon](#), he associates this influence with what he calls the "communist spirit", though he clarifies that the true source is not communism itself or any particular

political leader.

Instead, Carlson identifies the ultimate cause as a demonic or satanic influence that acts through human beings and institutions. He describes "Satan" not simply as an individual entity, but as a broader category referring to evil spiritual forces that oppose [God](#) and corrupt human society. According to his interpretation, this same force inspired destructive political systems in the twentieth century and now operates through violent extremist movements in the modern world.

To illustrate his concerns, Carlson references reports of honor killings, terrorism, suicide bombings, and sexual abuse associated with extremist interpretations of Islamic law and culture. He argues that such acts should never be treated as honorable or religiously justified. For him, violence against innocent people, abuse within families, and the exploitation of women are fundamentally evil regardless of cultural or ideological justification.

Carlson also discusses controversial interpretations of passages from the Quran that he believes have historically been used to justify child marriage and patriarchal practices. He interprets such examples as evidence that extremist and literalist forms of religion can become dangerous when detached from moral conscience and spiritual responsibility.



*A vision for peace in the Middle East: From an interreligious conference on peace in the Middle East, held in Washington DC Feb. 27 - Mar. 2, 2003*

Despite these criticisms, Carlson reiterates that he does not reject Islam as a whole. He maintains that an honorable and spiritually sincere form of Islam does exist and deserves recognition and respect. However, he warns that radicalized forms of religion, when combined with ideological extremism and spiritual corruption, can become destructive forces within global society.

Ultimately, Carlson's argument is theological rather than merely political. He views world history as a continuing struggle between forces aligned with [God](#) and forces opposed to [God](#). In this framework, violent extremism is interpreted not only as a social or geopolitical problem but also as part of a larger spiritual conflict shaping the modern age.

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Disclaimer: The views expressed are those of the author.

See also [The Rebirth of Communism in New Forms Today](#)

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Dr. David Carlson is an educator and author with over 30 years of experience teaching world religions, philosophy, and family values. He holds a Ph.D. from Claremont Graduate University and spent more than a decade in South Korea as a professor of Korean history and culture. Until his retirement in 2014, Dr. Carlson served on the faculty of the Cheongshim Graduate School of Theology. His published works include *Sunrise on Christology* and *The Dawning of a New Culture*, as well as serving as co-editor of *Explorations in Unificationism*. Having held both academic and pastoral positions throughout his career, he currently resides in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

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# expressing extreme anti-religious viewpoints

In a pointed and alarming [article](#) published in the Japanese digital magazine BEST TIMES on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2026, Professor Masaki Nakamasa (仲正昌樹) argues that Japan's handling of the dissolution case against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) – formerly the [Unification Church](#) – represents a profound crisis for constitutional government, judicial neutrality, and religious liberty. The [article](#) centers on allegations concerning Supreme Court Justice Masami Okino (沖野眞巳), a member of the *Third Petty Bench* of the Japanese Supreme Court, which is currently reviewing the [Family Federation's special appeal](#) against the [dissolution order](#) issued by the *Tokyo High Court*.

See also [Japan's Treatment of Faith Headed to The Hague?](#)

Nakamasa presents the issue not merely as a dispute over a persecuted [religious organization](#), but as a test case for the integrity of the Japanese legal system itself. In his view, the state's treatment of the [Family Federation](#) has moved beyond ordinary legal adjudication into something resembling ideological persecution. He argues that the central danger lies not only in the [dissolution order](#) itself, but in the emergence of legal arguments that characterize the very act of propagating religious doctrine as inherently unlawful.

The background to the controversy is the Japanese government's effort to dissolve the [Family Federation](#), following an extensive wave of persecution after the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) in 2022. Activist leftwing lawyers from *National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales* (Zenkoku Benren) have campaigned to have the [religious organization](#) dissolved since 1987. Fundamentally, it is because of its clear anti-communist stand.

The network of lawyers and media supporting them have accused the [Family Federation](#) by using classical anti-cult concepts like “manipulative fundraising practices”, “mind-control” [[See editor's note 1 below](#)], and “harmful forms of religious influence”. Supporters and defenders of the [religious organization](#), however, argue that the government response has evolved into a politically driven campaign that threatens basic constitutional protections for freedom of religion.

According to Nakamasa, the current phase of the legal battle became especially alarming after revelations concerning Justice Okino. The professor writes,

“According to the motion, she attended the seminar titled ‘34th Japan Federation of Bar Associations Summer Consumer Seminar: Understanding the Reality of Spiritual Sales and Considering Relief and Prevention,’ held in July 2025, as one of the keynote speakers, where she made remarks completely condemning the [Unification Church](#).”



AI-illustration of Justice Masami Okino (沖野眞巳).  
Image: Grok xAI, 22nd May 2026

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In his [article](#), Nakamasa stresses that the concern is not simply that Justice Okino attended the event. Rather, he argues that her remarks there demonstrated a substantive alignment with activist legal positions hostile to the [religious organization](#). He focuses in particular on statements in which she reportedly argued that evangelism and religious instruction connected to the [Family Federation](#) were “fundamentally problematic acts”, extending beyond ordinary solicitation into conduct that could violate an individual’s freedom of religion or even affect the person’s entire psychological autonomy.

For



**Freedom of religion includes the right to preach publicly:** Here, a Japanese member of the [Family Federation](#) spreading the word on 15th March 2026, even though the [religious organization](#) had been dissolved by the authorities 11 days earlier. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

Nakamasa, this formulation is extraordinarily dangerous because it reverses the conventional understanding of religious liberty. In liberal constitutional systems, religious freedom normally includes not only the right to hold beliefs privately but also the right to persuade others, preach publicly, and seek converts. By contrast, the position attributed to Okino implies that successful religious persuasion may itself constitute a form of coercion. Nakamasa interprets this as a theory under which missionary activity becomes inherently suspect whenever critics believe a religion exerts strong psychological influence.

He argues that this line of reasoning effectively collapses the distinction between persuasion and coercion. If communicating doctrine is treated as “mind control” [[See editor’s note 1 below](#)], then any intense or transformative religious experience could potentially be reclassified as a legal harm. Nakamasa warns that such a framework could justify state suppression not only of the [Family Federation](#) but of many forms of committed religious activity more broadly.



The [article](#) also highlights the role of attorney Masaki Gōro (郷路行記) described as



Activist attorney Masaki Gōro (郷路征記).  
Illustration: Grok xAI, 22nd May 2026.

Gōro (郷路征記), described as a leading anti-Family Federation activist associated with Zenkoku Benren. Nakamasa portrays Gōro as advocating an extreme theory according to which adherence to the religious organization itself amounts to a violation of religious freedom. Nakamasa further criticizes arguments allegedly used to justify coercive faith-breaking [See editor's note 2 below]

practices, pointing out that activist attorney Gōro “argues that kidnapping and confinement intended to force believers to renounce their faith are not illegal.”

Professor Nakamasa adds more about the seminar,

“The coordinator was attorney Akihito Katsumata (勝俣彰仁), a core member of Zenkoku Benren. In substance, it was an anti-Unification Church seminar organized by Zenkoku Benren.”

Nakamasa contends that the overlap between these activist positions and Justice Okino's seminar remarks creates an appearance of bias incompatible with judicial neutrality. He therefore supports the Family Federation's motion seeking her recusal from the Supreme Court proceedings.

A major theme running throughout the article is the distinction between legal procedure and political passion. Nakamasa repeatedly argues that courts in a constitutional democracy must preserve impartiality, especially in cases involving unpopular groups. The legitimacy of the judiciary, he suggests, depends precisely on its willingness to uphold procedural fairness even when public opinion strongly favors punishment.

The professor spells it out clearly,

“Is entrusting deliberation in such an important case to a justice aligned with forces hostile to the appellant something a proper nation governed by the rule of law would do? Is the Supreme Court not ashamed of what it is doing? Legal professionals and legal scholars who view trials not merely as power games but as forums for pursuing fairness should be outraged by this situation.”

In this respect, he compares the current atmosphere surrounding the Family Federation to a form of modern-day “inquisition”. Referring to an earlier article he wrote criticizing the Tokyo High Court decision, Nakamasa claims that judges have gone beyond evaluating concrete unlawful acts and have instead begun evaluating the truth, value, and psychological effects of religious doctrine itself. He considers this a dramatic and dangerous expansion of judicial authority into areas protected by constitutional guarantees.

Nakamasa confronts what he sees as flagrant injustice and questions whether the Supreme Court administration knowingly assigned the appeal to a bench including one of the justices most openly hostile to the religious organization. He expresses disbelief that neither the justice herself nor the court bureaucracy recognized the appearance of partiality this situation would create. Professor Nakamasa asks,

“Did they think something like this? ‘The Unification Church side including its lawyers

Unification Church case, increasing its targets, are fools and won't notice anyway. The media are anti-[Unification Church](#), so they won't object no matter what methods are used to crush it. The public doesn't think deeply about these matters, so if we say there's no problem, they'll easily believe us.”

He also accuses the Japanese media of functioning as a largely one-sided anti-[Family Federation](#) force unwilling to scrutinize procedural abuses if the target is sufficiently unpopular. Public opinion, he suggests, has become emotionally conditioned to accept extraordinary legal measures against the [minority faith](#) without reflecting on the wider implications for civil liberties.



*Demonstration at Shibuya Mark City in Tokyo against the religious persecution members of the [Family Federation](#) suffer in Japan. Photo: [FFWPU](#)*

Underlying Nakamasa's argument is a broader philosophical concern about the nature of the rule of law. In his view, a genuine legal order cannot be defined merely by the existence of courts or formal procedures. Rather, it depends on the principled application of universal standards, including equal treatment before the law and meaningful protections for unpopular minorities.

He warns that once a society accepts the idea that certain religious teachings are so dangerous that their dissemination can itself be prohibited, constitutional protections become contingent on political fashion rather than legal principle. At that point, he argues, the state no longer acts as a neutral guarantor of liberty but as an ideological actor deciding which beliefs may legitimately exist in public life.

Whether one agrees with Nakamasa's conclusions or not, the article represents a forceful intervention in one of the most controversial legal and religious disputes in contemporary Japan. It combines constitutional argument, criticism of judicial ethics, and broader reflections on freedom of belief into a sweeping indictment of what Nakamasa sees as the politicization of the Japanese legal system.

The [article](#) therefore functions not only as a defense of the [Family Federation](#)'s procedural rights, but also as a warning about the fragility of civil liberties during periods of moral panic and political consensus. For Nakamasa, the central issue is ultimately larger than the fate of a single [religious organization](#): it is whether Japan's legal institutions remain committed to the liberal constitutional principles they are supposed to uphold.

*See also [Japan's Treatment of Faith Headed to The Hague?](#)*

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

**Featured image** above: **Masaki Nakamasa** – Born in 1963 in Kure City, Hiroshima Prefecture. Received his PhD from the University of Tokyo in 1996. Currently a professor of law at Kanazawa University specializing in the history of political thought and social philosophy. Major works include *Postmodern Nihilism (Sakuhinsha)* and *Beyond Hegel (Kodansha)*. Photo: Here on 26th March 2026. Photo: *Tsuyoshi Toyoda / Sekai Nippo*

**[Editor's note 1:** In Japan, the **“mind-control” myth** has been a powerful tool used to stigmatize and suppress new religious movements (NRMs), particularly since the 1980s. The concept suggests that NRMs manipulate or “brainwash” their followers, depriving them of free will and rational thought. This narrative gained traction after the 1995 Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas attack, when public fear of dangerous cults intensified. Although Aum was an extreme and violent exception, the incident cast suspicion on all NRMs, allowing critics, media, and the government to label diverse groups as manipulative or psychologically coercive.

The “mind-control” myth serves multiple social and political functions. It simplifies complex questions of belief, making it easier to portray converts as victims rather than as individuals exercising spiritual agency. This framing justifies legal and social intervention, including the coercive **“deprogramming”** of believers – sometimes involving confinement or psychological pressure to force renunciation of faith. Lawyers, ex-member groups, and certain media outlets have used the idea of mind control to construct NRMs as threats to family stability and national order, reinforcing social conformity and Japan's preference for established, non-controversial religions such as Buddhism and Shinto.

In recent years, the myth resurfaced following the 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose attacker cited resentment toward the **Family Federation**. A public outrage largely created by media reignited scrutiny of NRMs, and politicians and journalists revived “mind-control” rhetoric to explain fundraising and recruitment practices. Critics argue that this framing discourages genuine religious tolerance and critical examination of Japan's restrictive religious climate. Overall, the “mind-control” myth functions less as a scientific or psychological concept and more as a moral panic – a cultural weapon used to delegitimize minority faiths and to reaffirm mainstream social norms about religion, obedience, and the boundaries of acceptable belief.]

**[Editor's note 2: 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. Photo: Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 3.0 Unp. Cropped*

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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