

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: David Carlson's Why Unification Thought Matters in 2026

Knut Holdhus
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AI-generated illustration used for the first part of the article of Dr. David Carlson published April 27, 2026



Dr. David Carlson, here in 1997



[New Essentials of Unification Thought](#), published in 2006, the latest version of [Unification Thought](#)

A warning about the direction of modern society: Today's world through the lens of Unification Thought

An opinion piece titled "[Are We Truly Prepared in Our Current World Situation?](#)" written by Dr. David Carlson was published 27th April 2026, on the [website of the international headquarters](#) of the [Family Federation](#). In the first part, Carlson delves into why [Unification Thought](#) [See editor's note below] is more urgently needed for thought and life than ever.

See also [Movement Promoting Family as National Solution](#)

As introduction, the American educator and author - with over 30 years of experience teaching world religions, philosophy, and [family values](#) - explains that writing the piece was personally difficult because he believes the ideas it contains may be controversial, even among fellow [Unificationists](#). Through his study of culture and modern society, he has become convinced that major ideological and moral struggles are shaping the modern world in dangerous ways. Although some readers may disagree with his conclusions, he argues that these developments cannot be ignored.

Carlson refers to Karl Marx's statement that philosophers should not merely interpret the world but change it. He warns that ideas and philosophies have enormous power to reshape societies, for better or worse. In his view, [Unification Thought](#) [See editor's note below] is not simply an academic philosophy for discussion among scholars. Rather, it is intended to guide humanity in solving urgent social, moral, and cultural crises. He argues that today's world is not morally neutral, but a place where competing value systems are actively struggling for influence.

The first part seeks to explain the historical and philosophical foundation behind Dr. Carlson's argument. To understand his perspective, it is important to understand how [Unification Thought](#) [See editor's note below] interprets the development of modern history, especially the rise of opposing worldviews over the last several centuries.

Carlson begins by referring to the explanation of history of the [Unification Principles](#) (the Divine Principle), particularly the period known as the "preparation for the Second Advent". According to this interpretation, the last five hundred years were not simply a sequence of political events or intellectual movements. Rather, they represented a providential period in which humanity gradually developed two fundamentally different ways of understanding life, society, morality, and human purpose.



*Edward Herbert (1583-1648), the "father of English Deism". Scanned from Hearn, Karen, ed. *Dynasties: Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England 1530-1630*. New York: Rizzoli, 1995*



Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) in 1810. Drawn by Hugo Bürkner (1818-1897)

During the years between 1648 and 1789, Europe experienced major intellectual changes. Philosophical movements such as rationalism and empiricism emerged and strongly influenced modern thought. Rationalism emphasized the power of human reason, while empiricism stressed knowledge gained through experience and observation. These ideas contributed greatly to scientific and social progress, but in Carlson's interpretation, they also encouraged many people to rely increasingly on human intellect rather than on [God](#).

From the perspective of [Unification Thought](#) [See editor's note below], this gradual shift away from a [God](#)-centered worldview contributed to the development of what is called the "Cain-type" view of life. In the biblical story of Cain and Abel, Cain symbolizes separation from [God](#) and conflict rooted in self-centeredness. Carlson argues that certain philosophical trends in modern history reflected this same movement away from spiritual foundations.

He points to thinkers such as Edward Herbert, associated with deism, as well as philosophers and intellectuals like G. W. F. Hegel, David Friedrich Strauss, and Ludwig Feuerbach. In different ways, these figures questioned or reinterpreted traditional religious beliefs. According to Carlson's framework, their ideas eventually influenced the development of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and helped form the ideological basis for Marxism and communism.

Carlson views Marxism as more than an economic or political theory. He sees it as the culmination of a broader intellectual movement that placed human-centered materialism above spiritual or [God](#)-centered values. According to the [Unification Principles](#), this became the ideological foundation of the communist world.

At the same time, Carlson explains that another stream of history was developing alongside it. This was the "Abel-type" view of life, associated with democracy and societies that sought to preserve religious faith, moral responsibility, and freedom rooted in belief in [God](#). In the biblical story, Abel represents the side that remains closer to [God](#) and seeks reconciliation and restoration.

According to this historical interpretation, the modern world gradually divided into two competing global systems: the democratic world and the communist world. These two systems were not merely political rivals; they reflected two opposing understandings of human nature, morality, freedom, and the purpose of society.

Carlson then explains why this division is important within [Unification Thought](#) [See editor's note below]. According to the understanding of restoration history presented in the [Unification Principles](#), Abel was meant to "win over" Cain, not through hatred or destruction, but by restoring unity centered on [God](#). Applied to world history, Carlson argues that democratic societies must ultimately overcome or transform communist and anti-[God](#)-centered systems in order to establish the conditions for a peaceful and ideal world.

For this reason, he believes the philosophical developments of the last five centuries are highly significant. They shaped the ideological struggle that still influences the modern world today. Carlson argues that understanding this historical process is not enough by itself. The more important question is what people should do now in response to these developments.

This is where he believes [Unification Thought](#) [See editor's note below] becomes especially important. In his view, it offers not only an explanation of history but also guidance for how humanity should move

forward. He argues that societies rooted in democratic principles and religious faith have produced remarkable achievements, including freedom, prosperity, and opportunities for human development.



To illustrate this point, Carlson refers to historical figures and communities that he believes were guided by strong faith in [God](#). He mentions the Puritans and George Washington as examples of people who sought to build societies centered on religious conviction and moral responsibility.

Carlson also includes comments from Rev. [Sun Myung Moon](#), who praised the faith of the Pilgrim Fathers and interpreted the founding of America as part of [God's providential](#) work in history. According to this perspective, America's development and survival were connected to the determination of leaders who believed their nation should exist "under [God](#)".

However, Carlson's main concern is not simply to praise the democratic world. His central focus is the continuing influence of what he calls "Cain-type" forces in modern society. He argues that even within democratic nations, ideologies and cultural movements opposed to [God](#)-centered values continue to grow and spread.

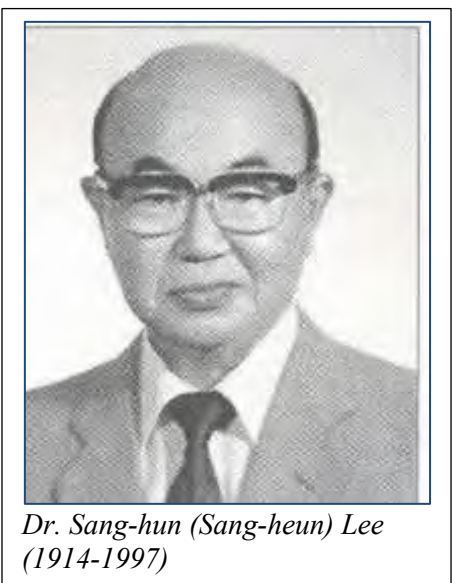
Because of this, Carlson believes people must become more aware of the philosophical and cultural conflicts shaping the present age. He argues that many people living in democratic societies enjoy freedom and prosperity without fully recognizing the ideological struggles taking place beneath the surface.

Ultimately, the first part of Dr. Carlson's [opinion piece](#) prepares readers for his larger argument: that the modern world is engaged in a profound conflict between competing visions of humanity and society. In his view, understanding this conflict is essential if people hope to build a peaceful and morally grounded future.

See also [Movement Promoting Family as National Solution](#)

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

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.



[Editor's note: Unification Thought is a philosophical system developed by Sang-hun Lee (1914-1997) from the teachings of [Sun Myung Moon](#) (1920-2012). It was designed as a comprehensive worldview that integrates religion, philosophy, science, ethics, and social theory into a single framework centered on [God's](#) purpose for creation.

At its core, [Unification Thought](#) argues that reality reflects the nature of [God](#), understood as a being of "dual characteristics": internal character and external form, as well as masculinity and femininity in harmonious unity. Human beings, according to this view, are created to embody divine love through mature relationships, family life, creativity, and moral responsibility.

The system places strong emphasis on purpose and relationality. Everything exists through "[give-and-take action](#)", a dynamic process of interaction that produces harmony, growth, and development. Human history is interpreted as a [providential](#)

process aimed at restoring the ideal world originally intended by [God](#), overcoming alienation, conflict, and selfishness caused by the human fall.

[Unification Thought](#) also attempts to respond to modern ideologies. It criticizes both materialistic

Marxism and purely secular humanism while also seeking to modernize traditional religious thinking. Its ethical and political applications include theories of education, art, economics, and social organization grounded in family-centered ethics and mutual cooperation. The philosophical system can be regarded as a synthesis of Eastern and Western thought, religion and science.]

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of compassion in action



Religious affairs reporter Jeong Seong-su (정성수). Photo (2025): Segye Ilbo

On 29th April 2026, South Korean religion journalist Jeong Seong-su (정성수) published a reflective column in the newspaper Segye Ilbo commemorating the life of Barbara Jean Harrington (1938-2026), an American missionary supporter whose decades of service in Africa left a profound impression on communities across the continent.

Written in a deeply elegiac and devotional tone, the article with the headline “Carrying Love in Hamburgers, the Saintry Barbara Who Embraced Africa”, portrays Barbara not merely as a charitable worker or entrepreneur, but as a figure of sacrificial faith whose life embodied quiet service, humility, and total dedication to others.

The column opens with an observation about the rarity of a single individual's death producing grief that transcends national borders and personal relationships. According to the writer, the passing of Barbara Harrington at the age of eighty-eight on 21st April triggered mourning in many African countries, revealing the extraordinary scope of her influence.

The article notes that even former Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan offered words of tribute, an indication that her impact had reached not only ordinary families and missionaries but also prominent public figures. Jeong frames this widespread sorrow as evidence that Barbara's life had become something larger than a private biography; it had entered the realm of moral and spiritual history.



Official portrait of Goodluck Jonathan, President of Nigeria 2010-2015. Photo: National Library of Nigeria / Wikimedia Commons. Public domain image

The article then traces Barbara's early years in the United States. Born in Missouri and raised in a devout Catholic family, she is described as someone for whom religion and compassion were intertwined from childhood onward. After completing high school, she entered nursing school at Jewish Hospital in St. Louis, Missouri and later worked in a maternity ward assisting mothers during childbirth. Jeong presents these experiences as formative, suggesting that her later humanitarian work in Africa was rooted in habits of care and sacrifice learned through nursing. The profession trained her not only to alleviate physical suffering but also to recognize dignity in vulnerable people, qualities that would later define her missionary support work.

A major turning point in Barbara's life came in 1969, when she and her younger sister Kathy Rigney joined the movement that was then called the Unification Church – now the Family Federation for World Peace and

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from the [family relocation for Korea's 1998 and Unification](#). In the [article's](#) interpretation, this decision sharpened Barbara's sense of religious purpose and redirected her ambitions away from personal comfort toward service for a broader spiritual mission. Several years later, in 1975, Kathy Rigney was assigned as a [Unification Church](#) missionary to remote regions of Africa. Jeong emphasizes that Barbara did not regard her sister's mission as an individual undertaking. Instead, she viewed it as a collective responsibility demanding practical support as well as spiritual commitment.



An historical relocation. Illustration: ChatGPT, May 2026

By 1981, Barbara herself had relocated to Côte d'Ivoire in order to help sustain missionary activities there. The article underscores the severe financial challenges faced by missionaries operating in impoverished regions. Rather than limiting herself to prayer or symbolic encouragement, Barbara sought a concrete economic solution. Her answer was unexpectedly simple: she established an American-style restaurant called “Hamburger House”, intending to use its profits to fund missionary and humanitarian activities.

Jeong highlights the improbability of this venture. Barbara reportedly had no prior experience in the restaurant industry, yet she proceeded with determination. The columnist presents this decision as an example of practical faith in action. While some people contribute through preaching or direct evangelism, Barbara chose to support religious work through entrepreneurship. What began as a modest business in Côte d'Ivoire gradually expanded into several African countries, including Togo, Ghana, Senegal, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Later, additional restaurants were established in Lagos, Nigeria, creating a stable financial infrastructure that supported missionary outreach and charitable initiatives.

However, the [article](#) insists that Barbara's significance cannot be measured by commercial success alone. Jeong repeatedly stresses her refusal to treat the businesses or their profits as personal property. According to the [column](#), the income generated by the restaurants was continually redirected toward educational assistance, medical care, missionary activities, and support for impoverished communities. Even after health problems forced her to withdraw from active work in 2001, she reportedly retained little for herself. The article contrasts worldly standards of success – often defined by accumulation of wealth – with what it describes as a more spiritual measure based on generosity and self-sacrifice.

In his [article](#), Jeong also broadens the discussion into a reflection on the meaning of missionary work in poor regions of Africa. The [article](#) argues that genuine ministry involves more than religious teaching. Hungry children require food before doctrine; families trapped in despair require hope and practical assistance before abstract theological instruction. Within this framework, Barbara's hamburger restaurants become symbolic. The food sold there represented tuition for students, medicine for the sick, and logistical support enabling missionaries to continue their activities. For that reason, many people

reportedly referred to her as “the Mother of Africa”, a title meant to recognize both her material generosity and emotional care.

Another theme emphasized throughout the article is Barbara’s humility. Jeong praises her for avoiding self-promotion and refusing public recognition. In an age characterized, in his view, by performative charity and self-advertisement, Barbara is portrayed as someone who preferred hidden service over visibility. Her achievements were expressed through sustained action rather than rhetoric or personal branding.

The [column](#) concludes with an account of Barbara’s final illness. Despite suffering from advanced cancer, she reportedly maintained strong spiritual resolve. Jeong writes that one of her final wishes was to see [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자) – also called [Mother Han](#) – regain freedom and continue her religious mission. This detail is presented as evidence that Barbara remained focused on the future of her faith community even while confronting death herself.

In its final lines, the [article](#) elevates Barbara Harrington into an almost saintly figure. Jeong compares her compassion to that of Mother Teresa and suggests that her memory will continue inspiring people across Africa. The piece ultimately serves both as a memorial tribute and as a broader meditation on sacrifice, faith, humility, and service to humanity.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: Barbara Jean Harrington (1938-2026). Photo: [FFWPU](#)

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