

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Modern Society, Deep Moral and Spiritual Crisis

Knut Holdhus
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David Carlson (1997)

American academic discusses spiritual conflict behind rapid cultural transformation and moral decline as we face ominous ideological battle over modern society's moral direction

In the third installment of his four-part opinion series, Are We Truly Prepared in Our Current World Situation?, published on 12th May 2026 on the [website of the international headquarters](#) of the [Family Federation](#), Dr. David Carlson reflects on what he perceives as a profound transformation occurring within modern society.

The section entitled "[The World is Changing: What We \(Desperately\) Need Now](#)" presents a strongly ideological and religious interpretation of contemporary cultural, political, and moral developments. Drawing heavily upon the [Unification Principles](#) and the teachings of [Sun Myung Moon](#) - also called [Father Moon](#) - Carlson argues that history

does not unfold randomly or passively, but rather through an intense spiritual struggle over the direction of civilization.

The [section](#) opens by contrasting two very different visions of social change. Carlson references Karl Marx's famous statement that philosophers should not merely interpret the world but seek to change it. He suggests that this revolutionary impulse is visible in contemporary society, though in forms he regards as spiritually dangerous and morally destabilizing. In contrast, he cites [Father Moon](#)'s vision of building an ideal world centered on [God](#)'s original purpose for humanity. For Carlson, the key issue is therefore not whether society is changing, but what moral and spiritual forces are guiding that change.

Throughout [this section](#) of his essay, Carlson emphasizes the importance of moral leadership. Referring to concepts found in the [Unification Principles](#) and Unification Thought [See editor's note 1 below], he argues that historical transformation requires individuals and leaders committed to righteousness and goodness. He presents [True Parents](#) and the teachings of Unification Thought [See editor's note 1 below] as central to that mission. In his view, history progresses when individuals actively resist evil influences and work to promote moral values.

Carlson also expresses concern that many people are spiritually and morally inattentive to the changes taking place around them. He writes,

"Changes are happening all around us, but today many people are 'asleep' (in a Buddhist 'unaware'-sense), that is to say, they are not fully 'aware' of what is happening around them, the

reality around them. Many people are oblivious to the real nature of what is happening in the world. We are too self-indulgent in our physical needs, and immediate desires, not to mention our 'fallen natures'."



Karl Marx (1818-1883)

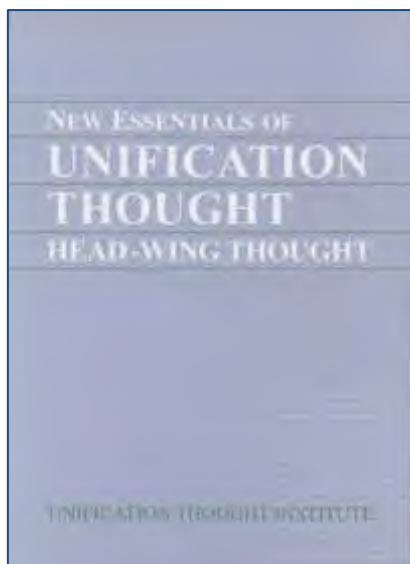
Dr. Carlson argues that modern life, material comforts, and self-centered desires have distracted people from recognizing deeper cultural and ethical shifts. Borrowing imagery associated with spiritual awakening, he calls for individuals to become more aware of what he sees as the moral direction of society and to take active responsibility for defending what they believe to be enduring values.

A major theme in the [section](#) is the belief that contemporary cultural change is not neutral. The American academic explains,

"The world is not merely (passively) changing, but it is being changed, in an active manner, and often by forces which do not have our best interests in mind. Unfortunately, it is being changed, in many cases, by the most malicious forces imaginable, and in a way which any normal, moral, rational person would not appreciate and certainly would not want."

Carlson contends that powerful ideological movements are reshaping institutions, media, education, and social norms. He interprets these developments through a spiritual framework, arguing that many modern trends reflect a broader struggle between good and evil. While he strongly criticizes a range of political and cultural movements, his deeper concern is the erosion of what he understands as absolute moral values and the increasing dominance of relativism and secularism.

The [essay](#) also reflects anxieties common within conservative religious circles regarding the role of media, universities, entertainment culture, and political institutions in shaping public morality. Carlson argues that these institutions often normalize ideas and lifestyles that conflict with traditional religious teachings. He portrays modern culture as increasingly detached from transcendent or [God](#)-centered values and warns that such developments could fundamentally alter the moral fabric of society.



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

At the same time, Carlson calls upon members of the Unification movement to become more engaged rather than passive. He argues that philosophical and theological systems such as Unification Thought [See editor's note 1 below] must move beyond abstract theory and actively address social problems. In his view, moral and spiritual renewal cannot be delegated solely to politicians, scientists, economists, or public figures; rather, it requires individuals who are willing to advocate openly for their convictions and participate in shaping culture.

Underlying the entire section is Carlson's conviction that history is ultimately spiritual in nature. He describes contemporary ideological conflicts as manifestations of deeper unseen influences that affect human thought, institutions, and collective behavior. Drawing on theological language from the [Unification Principles](#), he interprets these influences in terms of spiritual warfare and the ongoing struggle between forces aligned with [God](#) and those opposed to divine truth. Carlson writes,

"This demonic force, about which I have been speaking, has had, from the very beginning, the purpose of creating a kingdom of evil, which today manifests in many ways, and forms the social

context in which we live. This demonic force is determined to transform this world into a world completely without [God](#), and devoid of all values.

This 'kingdom' of evil, which is very highly developed today, is present and working very actively through what might be called '[cultural communism](#)' [See editor's note 2 below], or perhaps a better term: 'cultural demonization', and it is important to realize that it has been, and is currently, very successful. It has been more successful than many people would care to admit. Cultural demonization is, indeed, as Marx stated, changing the world."

In rephrased form, Carlson's argument can be summarized as follows:

According to Carlson, modern society is experiencing rapid and far-reaching transformation, affecting politics, morality, culture, education, and personal identity. While change itself is unavoidable, the crucial question concerns the direction in which society is moving and the values shaping that movement. He believes that positive transformation requires principled leadership grounded in spiritual truth and moral responsibility.

Carlson argues that many people today are disconnected from deeper moral awareness because contemporary culture encourages distraction, self-indulgence, and moral relativism. As a result, he believes individuals often fail to recognize broader cultural shifts that are influencing society's ethical foundations. He therefore calls for a renewed sense of spiritual alertness and moral engagement.

He further contends that modern ideological movements and cultural trends are not isolated phenomena, but interconnected expressions of a larger worldview that rejects transcendence, objective morality, and divine authority. In his interpretation, secularism, radical individualism, and certain political or cultural ideologies contribute to a society increasingly detached from religious and moral traditions.



Ann Coulter, here speaking at the 2013 CPAC in Washington D.C. on March 16, 2013

Carlson expresses particular concern over the influence of media, entertainment, academia, and political institutions, which he believes shape public opinion in ways that weaken traditional values. He argues that these institutions frequently celebrate or normalize ideas that religious conservatives perceive as harmful or destabilizing. Consequently, he sees contemporary cultural conflicts not simply as political disagreements, but as manifestations of a deeper spiritual struggle over the future character of civilization. Dr. Carlson points out,

"Especially can this demonic influence be found in the realms of philosophy and thought in general. This same demonic spirit is found in universities, in the media, in the court system, in politics, in the entertainment world, etc. It is pervasive as an (invisible) 'kingdom' of evil, and it influences individuals in all of these areas.

[Divine Principle](#) identifies this demonic spirit as originating with the Archangel Lucifer. Interestingly enough, in her recent book, *Demonic*, the conservative American pundit, Ann Coulter includes a chapter on Lucifer, whom she calls 'the ultimate mob boss'. Her book is tellingly subtitled: 'How the Liberal Mob is Endangering America'."

At the center of Carlson's argument is the belief that people of faith should not remain passive observers. Instead, Dr. Carlson urges individuals to take active roles in promoting moral values, defending religious principles, and guiding society toward what he understands as a more [God](#)-centered future. He believes that philosophical and theological traditions must offer practical guidance capable of addressing social disorder, moral confusion, and cultural fragmentation.

Although Carlson's language reflects a specific theological worldview, the broader concern underlying the [section](#) is the question of how societies maintain moral coherence during periods of rapid cultural change. His [essay](#) reflects fears about social disintegration, the weakening of shared values, and the perceived loss of spiritual direction in modern life. At the same time, it demonstrates how religious frameworks continue to shape interpretations of politics, culture, and historical change in the contemporary world.

Ultimately, "[The World is Changing: What We \(Desperately\) Need Now](#)" is both a warning and a call to action. Carlson argues that history is being actively shaped by competing moral and spiritual visions, and that individuals must consciously choose which values and principles they will support. Whether one agrees with his conclusions or not, the [section](#) illustrates the intensity with which questions of morality, identity, culture, and religion continue to influence public discourse and ideological conflict in the twenty-first century.

Disclaimer: The views expressed are those of the author.

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

[Editor's note 1: 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.]

[Editor's note 2: The phrase "cultural Marxism" or "cultural communism" originally referred to a school of thought influenced by Marxist theory, especially the Frankfurt School (e.g., Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse). These thinkers [adapted Marxist analysis of power](#) and oppression to culture rather than just economics.

Instead of focusing only on workers vs. capitalists, they examined how culture, media, education, and ideology reproduce social hierarchies (class, race, gender, etc.).

In academia it developed into critical theory, cultural studies, and post-Marxist thought.]

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Linking Extremism To Broader Spiritual Conflict

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Dr. David Carlson, here in 1997. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

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 [Modern Society: Deep Moral and Spiritual Crisis](#)

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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.



The “Four Great Saints” monument in front of the Family Federation place of worship known as the Cheonbok Temple (천복궁) 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”. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

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

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a serious and meaningful religious tradition.

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. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

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 27th Feb. – 2nd Mar. 2003. Photo: Screenshot

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.

Disclaimer: The views expressed are those of the author.

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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

Featured image above: Dr. David Carlson on extremism.
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