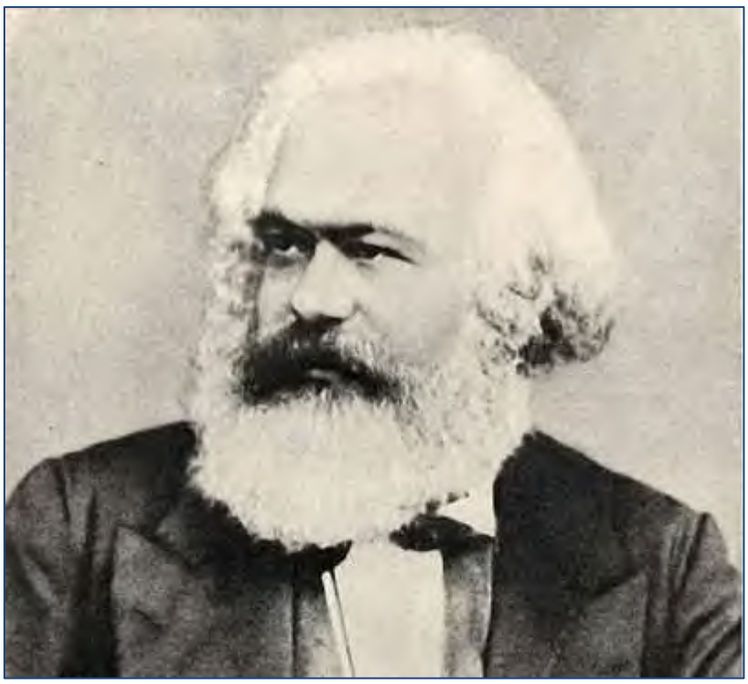
FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Can Materialism Truly Liberate Humanity?

Knut Holdhus
November 7, 2026



Karl Marx

세계일보

Segye Ilbo, one of the top 10 comprehensive daily newspapers in South Korea



Religious affairs reporter Jeong Seong-su

How Marx's materialism sought to overcome alienation but left fundamental questions about humanity unanswered

The South Korean daily Segye Ilbo carried on 5th November an opinion piece by religion correspondent Jeong Seong-su (정성수). Jeong takes a look at Marx's theory of alienation, how it emerged from his concern for exploited workers, but also how his materialist philosophy shaped his view of human nature and the possibility of liberation.

See also When the Promise of Equality Turns to Control

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In his article, Jeong asks the question how an ideology that promises to liberate humanity ends up oppressing human freedom? This question lies at the heart of a series of reflections by Jeong Seong-su on the critique by the late Korean thinker Lee Sang-heon (이상헌 - also anglicized as Sang Hun Lee) of communism and its philosophical foundations. In examining the intellectual journey of Karl Marx, Lee sought to distinguish between the legitimate concerns that inspired Marx's criticism of capitalism and the fundamental limitations of the solutions he proposed.

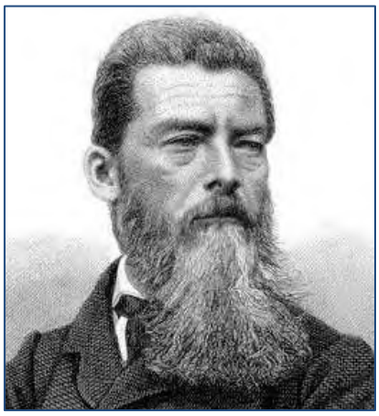
Marx (1818 - 1883) did not begin his intellectual career as a communist. Born in Trier, in western Germany, into a family of Jewish origin, he received a Christian education and was baptized into the Lutheran Church at the age of six. As a young man, he even wrote about the relationship between Christ and the believer. However, his subsequent studies of law and philosophy at the Universities of Bonn and Berlin exposed him to the ideas of Georg Hegel (1770 - 1831) and the Young Hegelians. Gradually, Marx moved away from religion and toward materialist philosophy.

His intellectual development was significantly shaped by Ludwig Feuerbach (1804 - 1872), a leading figure among the Young Hegelians. Feuerbach served as the essential intellectual bridge between the absolute idealism of Hegel and the historical materialism of Karl Marx. Feuerbach is best remembered

today for his radical critique of religion. He interpreted God as a projection of human nature.



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


Ludwig Feuerbach, by August Weger (1823-1892)


David Ricardo (1772 - 1823), an English economist

Karl Marx's economic theories were heavily shaped by the British Classical School of economics. Especially two thinkers influenced him:

the Scottish philosopher Adam Smith (1723 - 1790), called "the father of capitalism", from whom he inherited the idea that labor is the ultimate source of economic value.

David Ricardo (1772 - 1823), an English economist who formalized the Labor Theory of Value, stating that the exchange-value of commodities is determined by the labor-time required to produce them.

Jeong points out that also French socialist thinkers helped shape the thought of Marx. When he moved to Paris in 1843, he immersed himself in the ideas of the French radicals. Three key French socialist thinkers who influenced Marx were:

Henri de Saint-Simon (1760 - 1825), a radical thinker who argued that society should be run by industrial workers, scientists, and engineers rather than nobles and priests. His famous maxim - that society should organize itself to improve the conditions of the poorest class - heavily informed Marx's view of a planned economy.

Charles Fourier (1772 - 1837), an eccentric philosopher who critiqued industrial capitalism for destroying human happiness, alienating workers, and repressing natural human passions. Marx adopted Fourier's insights into how work under capitalism crushes the human spirit, which helped shape Marx's early theories on alienation.

Louis Auguste Blanqui (1805 - 1881), a hardcore, practical revolutionary who spent over half his life in prison for plotting armed uprisings. He believed that a small, highly disciplined elite group of conspirators needed to seize power on behalf of the working class. Marx was deeply influenced by Blanqui's radicalism and adapted his terminology to coin one of the most famous and controversial concepts of Marx: the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" as a necessary transitional phase to safeguard a communist revolution.

Combining these influences, Marx developed a distinctive understanding of society and history that eventually became the foundation of communist ideology.

Yet the starting point of his thinking was not a desire to destroy human freedom. Rather, Marx was deeply concerned about the conditions in which ordinary people lived during the Industrial Revolution. He believed that industrial capitalism had deprived workers of a genuinely human existence and that society needed fundamental transformation.

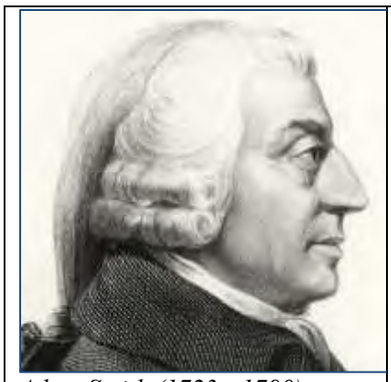
The human cost of industrial capitalism

The nineteenth century was a period of extraordinary economic expansion in Europe. Factories multiplied, industrial production increased, and capitalist entrepreneurs accumulated considerable wealth. But this prosperity came at a tremendous human cost. Workers faced exhausting hours, inadequate wages, and dangerous working conditions. Women and children were also employed in factories, often under particularly harsh circumstances.

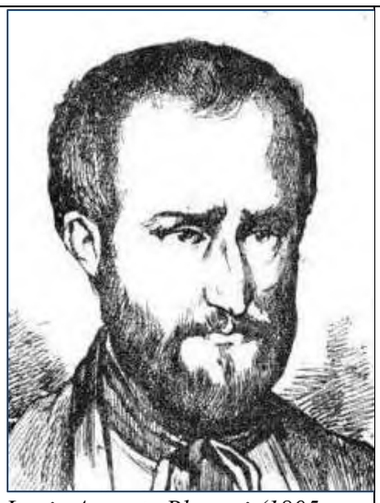
Marx saw a profound contradiction in this development. Human labor was creating unprecedented wealth, yet those who produced it remained trapped in poverty. The more productive the industrial system became, the more workers seemed to lose control over their own lives.

For Marx, however, the problem extended beyond economic exploitation. He believed that capitalism was

changing the very relationship between human beings and their work. Workers did not own the products they created, and they had little control over the production process. Their labor, rather than being an expression of their abilities and creativity, had become something they were forced to perform simply to survive.



Adam Smith (1723 - 1790), Scottish philosopher. Image based on enamel paste medallion by James Tassie in 1787



Louis Auguste Blanqui (1805 - 1881)



Charles Fourrier (1772-1837) in 1835 by Jean Gigoux (1806-1894)



Henri de Saint-Simon

Marx described this condition as alienation.

Alienation occurs when something that should belong to a person becomes separated from that person and assumes an independent, unfamiliar, or even hostile existence. Under capitalism, the products of workers' labor become the property of capitalists. The wealth created through their efforts can then be used to exercise power over them.

The same process affects human relationships. Work becomes a means of survival rather than an opportunity for personal fulfillment. Fellow workers are perceived as competitors rather than partners in a shared undertaking. Money and economic interests increasingly determine relationships between people.

In this way, Marx argued, human beings become estranged not only from the products of their labor but also from the activity of working, from one another, and ultimately from their own human potential.

Labor as an expression of human nature



An overcrowded artificial flower maker's workshop, Oxford Street. The room had far too many women working in a limited space

To understand why Marx regarded alienation as such a fundamental problem, it is important to consider

his understanding of human nature.

He did not regard labor simply as an economic necessity. For Marx, it was one of the defining characteristics of human existence. Through purposeful activity, people transform the natural world and give concrete form to their ideas. Unlike animals, human beings can envision something before creating it, plan their activities, and cooperate with others to produce things that did not previously exist.

Labor, in this sense, should be an expression of human creativity and freedom. It enables individuals to develop their abilities and contribute to a shared human world.

Capitalism, Marx argued, reverses this relationship. Instead of allowing people to express themselves through their work, it reduces labor to a commodity. Workers have little say over what they produce, how they produce it, or what happens to the results. The purpose of production becomes the accumulation of capital rather than the fulfillment of human needs.

The products of human creativity thus become forces that dominate their creators.

Marx believed that overcoming this condition required a fundamental transformation of economic relationships. The private ownership of the means of production and the capitalist system itself had to be abolished so that workers could regain control over their labor and its products.

His vision of the liberated human being was someone able to work freely, develop his or her abilities, and cooperate with others. Human beings were inherently social, he maintained, and individual freedom could only be fully realized through relationships with other people.

A society based on cooperation rather than competition and exploitation would therefore allow humanity to recover the qualities that capitalism had suppressed.

The question Marx left unresolved



Dr. Sang-hun Lee (1914-1997)

Lee Sang-heon (이상헌) acknowledged the significance of Marx's diagnosis. He considered the criticism of a system in which human beings become dominated by the wealth they produce to be an important insight. Marx had identified a genuine problem: people can lose their sense of purpose and dignity when economic relationships become more important than human relationships.

Lee also recognized the sincerity of Marx's concern for humanity. The desire to restore a lost human condition was not, in itself, misguided.

Nevertheless, Lee believed that Marx's analysis raised a deeper philosophical question. If human beings have lost their original nature, what exactly is that nature? And by what standard can we distinguish between a complete human being and an alienated one?

Marx sought the answer primarily in material conditions and social relationships. Lee believed that this approach could identify important causes of human suffering without establishing an ultimate standard for what human beings ought to become.

Changing economic structures might improve living conditions and alter relationships between people. But would such changes, by themselves, restore the full essence of humanity?

For Lee, this was the question that Marx's theory of alienation could not adequately answer. To understand why, it was necessary to look beyond the economic and social dimensions of human existence and examine the deeper foundations of human nature.

That inquiry would lead to a fundamental disagreement between Marx's materialist philosophy and Lee's understanding of humanity as a creation of God.

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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

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Fighting Misconceptions For 50 Years

November 6, 2026 • The News Desk



From hostile media coverage to derogatory labels, a history of confronting misconceptions about a religious minority

Part 1 *of a speech by Peter Ross, a New York-based attorney and former Director of Public Affairs for the Unification Church of America – now the Family Federation – delivered at an online Zoom-conference 27th October 2026 with the theme "Addressing Misconceptions about Family Federation by Reviewing the Lessons from the Past". The conference was organized by UPF USA. Slightly edited version.*

Some time back I was asked by Drs. Thomas Walsh and Thomas Ward to present my case study at a

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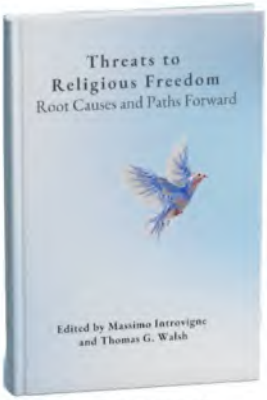
conference by the *HJ International Graduate School for Peace and Public Leadership* at the New Yorker Hotel in New York in August of last year. I was challenged by it because we're talking some years back.

The logo of HJ International Graduate School

So I headed to the garage to pull out what files I could find in addition to what I retained digitally, never mind what I retained mentally, but it was certainly a walk down memory lane.



The front cover page of "Threats to Religious Freedom: Root Causes and Paths Forward", edited by Dr. Massimo Introvigne and Dr. Thomas Walsh. Published 2026 by HJI Press in collaboration with CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions).

I titled my paper at that time "Eulogy for An Epitaph – A Lesson from Recent History", and I was honored to have that paper included in the subsequent publication by HJI of its recent book "Threats to Religious Freedom: Root Causes and Paths Forward".

Today I'm going to just present some of the key elements from that and proceed accordingly. [...]

Over the course of about 55 years, starting from the early 70s, the American Unification Church has been directed by – my estimation – about 10 presidents along with their respective administrations.

Each of those presidents during their tenure have had to deal with two core issues when presenting the institution to the American public.

One is to represent what it is, as a church and as a religious community, to present its founder, beliefs, practices and activities.

But given the circumstances, there has been a second component, namely to address the particular adverse headwinds each of those administrations, each of those presidents had to deal with during their tenure.

And I'll just take two examples.

Neil Salonen [President 1972-1980] had to address issues associated with the Fraser Congressional subcommittee hearing along with Nixon's Watergate woes, especially after Father Moon launched his prayer-inspired Forgive, Love and Unite campaign.

For his part, Mose Durst had to contend with the investigation and ultimate federal prosecution of Father Moon for alleged tax violations, while also contending with the public hue and cry fomented by the emerging faith-breaking / deprogramming [See editor's note below] industrial complex and its proxies.



Mose Durst, President of the Unification Church of USA 1980-1989. Photo (1982): FFWPU

Each administration did its level best to effectively inform the American public while contending with a mass media that was largely ill-informed, unserious, more focused on sensational infotainment, and increasingly hostile.

My work in those years straddled the latter part of the James Baughman presidency [1989-1995] into the first half of the Tyler Hendricks presidency [1995-2000].



In my few years, when I look back, I liken my beat as being a member of the Fire Department of New York's "pee and bucket brigades" [a humorous historical reference to the primitive nature of early colonial firefighting in the 1600s].

In my presentation, I'll refer to the Family

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A bucket brigade fighting a fire. Illustration: ChatGPT, 6th November 2026.

Federation as the Unification Church, as it was then called – now the Family Federation.

And I will also use the "moonie" term at the outset, but thereafter I'll only refer to the M-word.

It's important to remember from the outset, and I hope everybody on this call realizes that the term "moonie" as a reference to the Unification Church was never coined by Unificationists, as adherents of the faith are appropriately identified.

It's not a fuzzy, cute or affectionate term. It's not just a fun play on the founder's name.

Rather, it is an outright slur intended to disregard, demean and dehumanize innocent people, its ultimate objective being to summarily deny its targets the very cloak of established civil and legal protections.

The M-word joined the catalog of similar hate fringe terms that otherwise evoke disdain and hatred of nationalities, races, religions and other minority groups.

They include odious terms such as the N-word, the K-word for Jews, the C-word for Chinese, the three letter J-word for Japanese, the G-word for Vietnamese, the G-word for Italians, the S-word for Latinos, and the F-word for homosexuals.

While almost all of these pejorative terms have largely been – at least by reasonable people – consigned to the pained graveyard of history, the pernicious exploitation of the M-word by haters and fomenters yet continues without impunity, postponing any final eulogy.

To be continued. Part 2 coming soon.

Featured image *above: Peter Ross, attorney from New York, speaking at online conference on 27th October 2026. Screenshot from video by UPF USA, resolution improved by Grok xAI, 6th November 2026.*

[***Editor's note***: **Coercive faith-breaking** ("deprogramming") 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). In Japan, 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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