FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Peter Ross on From Media Label to Religious Persecution

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Media label and religious persecution. Illustration: ChatGPT, November 2026.



How the derogatory label "Moonie" became a tool for stigmatizing an entire religious movement

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

Part 2 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.

Continued from part 1: Fighting Misconceptions for 50 Years

So who coined the term? Who coined the word "Moonie"?

Washington Monthly, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit, center-left magazine that covers U.S. politics, government, and higher education. It focuses on renewing American liberalism

Technically, it may have been the Washington Monthly in a publicized piece in February of 1974, but it was immediately seized on and co-opted by the writers and editors of none other than the Washington Post.

These early applicants of the term recognized that adding the suffix, "ie" to "Moon", created a derogatory racial register mixed with a protean undertone.

Once institutionalized by the Post, the M-word was appropriated by anyone keen to express their prejudice and their animus towards the members of this growing faith tradition, while likely knowing little to nothing about it.

Am I being unfair in my singular indictment of the Washington Post? I think not.

The Washington Post a major American daily newspaper based in Washington, D.C., renowned for its investigative political journalism and coverage of national politics. Considered left-leaning, but under new owner Jeff Bezos, from 2024 it has been noted that its opinion pages has

transitioned toward a conservative framework.

Faced with a broad and sustaining pushback by Unificationists [See editor's note 1 below] rejecting the term, the Washington Post stubbornly and arrogantly refused to reconsider its decision.

Here are at least three occasions I know of when the Post had every opportunity to do so.

In October of 1989, the Post published in its very own newspaper a full-page ad taken out by a group of primarily black clergy in the D.C. area that challenged the paper's use of the term.



Leonard Downie Jr., the executive editor at the Washington Post from 1991 to 2008, here in interview in March 2021. Screenshot by GBH. License: CC Attr 3.0 Unp



Facsimile of page 23 in the December 1989 issue of the Unification News, a monthly newspaper published by the Unification Church of USA from 1982 until 2010. The article described the attack in Harlem, New York on 26th October 1989 on Karen Smith, a believer.

The very ad copy in its own newspaper made a clear and direct comparison between the Post use of the M-word to those who use the N-word.

The Post was challenged again in November of 1997, and despite rigorous protests outside the paper's own doors by Unificationists [See editor's note 1 below] and like-minded civil rights advocates, again the Post refused to budge.

I had my own personal experience of the post's intransigence.

In 1994, after I'd written Leonard Downie Jr., the executive editor at the Post about this matter. In his reply, Mr. Downie wrote,

"We do not agree that the term is pejorative and offensive and therefore allowed its use."

So far as I'm aware, the Washington Post continues its gratuitous use of the term until this very day, either directly in its own reportage or when quoting others without qualification.

The consequences once unleashed by the Post, the M-Word was readily adopted by mass media, journalists, editors, TV anchors, radio hosts, wire services, textbook and encyclopedia publishers, etc., etc., etc.

It spread as a zombie virus, infecting the American public before going international.

It was particularly seized upon by a cadre of emerging detractors who'd begun to turn their animus of the Unification Church into their own fledgling for profit enterprises.

As many of you all here know today, in the ensuing years, Unificationists [See editor's note 1 below] were derided, mobbed and beaten by those shouting the M-word.

In New York in 1989 while sitting at a table with Unification Church literature, a 7-month pregnant Unificationist, a dear friend of mine to this day, was getting kicked and beaten by an assailant shouting the M-word. Church missionaries were murdered while conducting public outreach here in the US. Due to the toxic potency of the M-word, Unificationists [See editor's note 1 below] over time have been abducted, imprisoned, assaulted and abused.

In Brazil, the church headquarters and its staff were attacked by a mob screaming the M-word before eventually destroying the HQ.

And as Peter Zoehrer [Executive Director of FOREF Europe (Forum for Religious Freedom - Europe)] mentioned, the case of Toro Goto, abducted for 12 and a half years in Tokyo by professional deprogrammers [faith-breakers] [See editor's note 2 below] hired by his family because of his conversion to the "M-word cult".

The M-word was used to dismissively undermine any project, activity or initiative undertaken by the Reverend Moon or by the Unification community.

Called something an M such and such, and rational consideration of it became unnecessary from the highest levels of society, across every human arena and discipline, all the way to regular Joe Schmo [slang term for a completely average person] sitting at the bar.

Otherwise normal people considered themselves informed about the ominous nature of the Unification Church and so freely use the term.



The signboard of the Harlem Unification Church, outside which the attack on the pregnant believer took place on 26th October 1989. Facsimile from page 8 of the November 1989 issue of the Unification News, a monthly newspaper published by the Unification Church of USA from 1982 until 2010. Photo: FFWPU

As Dr. Martin Luther King wrote, nothing in the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.

In summary, the M-word became an accelerant on the burning fires of racism and bigotry directed against Unificationists [See editor's note 1 below] throughout the 70s, 80s, 90s, and sadly, it continues to this day.

To be continued. Part 3 coming soon.

Continued from part 1: Fighting Misconceptions for 50 Years

[Editor's note 1: A Unificationist is a member of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) a global religious movement founded by Sun Myung Moon (Father Moon) and Hak Ja Han (Mother Han) in 1996. The Family Federation is the new name given to Unification Church, founded in South Korea in 1954 by Father Moon (1920-2012).

A core element of a Unificationist's identity and beliefs is based on the Unification Principles (Divine Principle). This is the original theological text of the movement. Unificationists view it as a new revelation that interprets the Christian Bible, focusing on God's original plan for creation, the fall of humanity, and the history of restoration. With time, some of the concepts of the Unification Principles have been explained more thoroughly in new scriptures considered as holy. New terms have also been added to the original revelations.]

[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.



Members of Soka Gakkai. Here students belonging to the faith in 2001

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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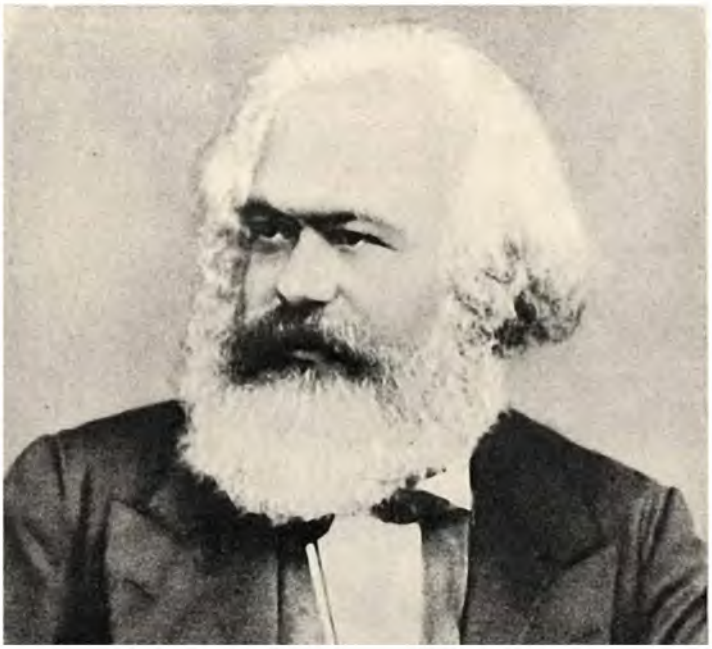

How Marx's materialism sought to overcome alienation but left fundamental questions about humanity unanswered



Religious affairs reporter Jeong

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

세계일보

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

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Seong-su (정성수). Photo (2025): Segye Ilbo

liberation.

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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.



Ludwig Feuerbach, by August Weger (1823-1892). Retouched picture. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain image. Cropped



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

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.

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.





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Adam Smith (1723–1790), Scottish philosopher. Image based on enamel paste medallion by James Tassie in 1787. Public domain image. Cropped.



David Ricardo (1772–1823), an English economist. Photo: Wikimedia Commons. Public domain image. Cropped

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.

Marx described this condition as alienation.



Portrait drawing of Henri de Saint-Simon. Image: Wikimedia Commons. Public domain image.



Portrait of Charles Fourrier (1772-1837) in 1835 by Jean Gigoux (1806-1894). Photo: Francoise Foliot (1924-2019). License: CC ASA 4.0 Int. Cropped



Louis Auguste Blanqui (1805–1881). Author (1970): Louis Bochard. Public domain image. Cropped

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

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.



An overcrowded artificial flower maker's workshop, Oxford Street. The room had far too many women working in a limited space. Wellcome Images, published 1864. License: CC Attr 4.0 Int. Cropped

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 (이상헌 –1914-1997). Photo: FFWPU

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.

See also When the Promise of Equality Turns to Control

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

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