

Speech at IRCA 24H Around the Globe Meeting

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Op. dir. of Asia Rural Mission

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Members of IRCA, rural mission related parties, it is my pleasure to meet you. I wish Grace to your mission fields. Let me introduce myself. I am Han Kyeong Ho. I retired 2 years ago from 33 years of rural church ministry. In 2005 I hosted the world forum of Life-giving Agriculture in Korea. Since then I have been involved in the life-giving mission movement. Presently I am working as an operation director for Asia Rural Mission.

Since 2006 in Asia we have been holding the triennial life-giving international forums. Until now we met twice in Korea and once in Sri Lanka, Thailand and Indonesia respectively. In November this year the 6th forum is supposed to be held in the Philippines. Even though the situations are serious due to the pandemic we are preparing for the meeting in faith.

Today I'd like to talk about the so-called "Agro-theology", one of the Korean rural ministers' concerned subjects. In the Asia Rural Mission which I mentioned just before, there is a subdivisional Agro-theology Study Committee. 19 rural ministers and theologians are participating in this study. Established in the fall of 2019, the committee members have so far held a monthly meeting for study presentations and discussions.

Let me introduce to you the 2 discussed matters of our debates. Firstly, what kind of beings are the humans whom God created? Secondly, what are the man made civilizations built upon cities? We found clues to the questions from the bible passages which we often neglected to carefully read. One of the typical examples is Genesis chapter 2 verse 15. I will read it to you.

"The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden TO WORK IT AND TAKE CARE OF IT."(Gen 2:15, NIV)

And in the preceding verse 5 we have this word that "Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and THERE WAS NO ONE TO WORK THE GROUND"(Gen 2:5 NIV)

Through the above phrases we can notice that God created humankind as a being to work the ground. The 'work the ground' is 'abad adama' in Hebrew. 'Abad' means to serve or to work, 'adama' means the ground or soil. After creating Adam, God gave him the role of taking care of Eden. The 'taking care of' is 'Shamar' in Hebrew .

This is the first word of God that prescribes the existence of human beings in the Bible. In other words, man

was created as a being who should work the ground for his living condition and take care of the Garden of Life. To work the ground is, in short, to be engaged in farming. The man who is made of dirt should toil on the earth and protect the world full of life, which God created as a life community on the earth. Therefore we can say that men are created as farmers and life-guardians(eco-diakonia).

However we came up with a new term for who works the ground. It is homo colens in Latin. Often we call them farmers or peasants. This term contains a professional, and more often class discriminatory meaning in it. It is also a historically formed term. Several Korean words for farmers are not different in this regard. If we study the Latin words, in addition to homo colens, there is another term, homo agricola. Both 'colen' and 'cola' are derived from 'colere', whose meaning is 'to till' or 'to work'. So homo colens is a tiller whereas homo agricola a farmer. After studying these Latin words we decided to use homo colens to fully describe the nature of human beings according to the Bible. Homo colens indicates the first being or the primary human being that God intended to create in the beginning.

But what kind of lives are we human beings living? Most of us are living away from the soil and ground. The urbanization ratio is much higher in the so-called developed countries. 50 years ago Koreans were living in the countryside. These days 90% of the total population are living in the big cities. Most developing countries are going toward the same industrialization and urbanization goals. What should we think about these trends in the light of the Bible?

In this regard we have to take out our second subject, urban civilization. Let me tell you the related Bible verses.

"So Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain made love to his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch."(Gen 4:16-17, NIV).

The City of Enoch we read in the verses was the first city that men made in history. What is surprising to us here, the building of this city is closely related to the nature of human sins. Anger or wrath is the original sin of humans along with greed of Adam. After committing homicide Cain was alienated from the soil and ground, from the neighbors and even from God. He lost everything and everyone whom he can rely on. He had to manage to defend himself on his own from then on. Hence the city of Enoch, the first man-made city in history.

Look at the descendants of Cain. Who were the descendants of Cain? "Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes. Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Tubal-Cain's sister was Naamah.(Gen 4:19-22, NIV).

The urbanization process introduced the 'oppressors-oppressed' relations. The ruling class and soldier class appeared in cities. The humans who left soils became rulers. Farmers had to offer them the agricultural produce they earned from the soils. Jubal raised livestock and offered them to the rulers and soldiers of the city. Jubal, on the other hand, made musical instruments to play the sweet music to their ears. Tubal-Cain invented war weapons. This is the naked face of urban civilizations.

Ironically humans are attracted by nature to city life. We do not admit our destiny to stay in close relations with the soils. We tend to dislike it. Once the city of Enoch appeared on the earth cities became widespread at a rapid speed. The Bible says, "then the earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence"(Gen 6:11). There followed the Flood judgment of God. But humans did not realize their faults and, filled with arrogance and pride, began to build up the tower of Babel. There God confused the language of the world and scattered all humans over the face of the whole earth.

Look at the Patriarchal period. Abraham's father Terah took all his household and left the exemplary city of Mesopotamian civilization, Ur. Abraham also set out from city Haran. Here we can particularly observe that the history of salvation began with the farewell to megalopolitan cities.

Arriving in Canaan Abraham saw many cities there. The typical ones are Sodom and Gomorrah. There were always wars in the history of those cities. Abraham's nephew Lot was also plundered and kidnapped by those who lived in those cities. What kind of cities were Sodom and Gomorrah? Those were the cities brought to God's justice because there were not 10 righteous persons. Even so Lot returned there after having been saved by the help of Abraham. I'd like to define Lot as the typical character who represents our nature inclined to city life.

What is Exodus? It is an event of escape from the Egyptian urban civilizations like Pithom and Raamses to the wilderness. Likewise God's salvation history began with escape from urbanization. Settled down in Canaan, Israel also did not take this way but instead followed the same paths other nations chose to walk. The result was the fall of both northern and southern kingdoms. After living as prisoners of Babylon, the then megalopolis, they came back home to Canaan for a fresh life but in vain. They did not realize what God wanted them to do. Thereafter they came under the mighty Roman colonial rule. Jesus was born in that era and preached the good news in the Galilean rural regions standing on the opposite side against the Roman civilization.

Today I presented two points to you. One is what God gave humans when He created us and when He bestowed us our calling. And the other, man-made urban civilizations are closely related to the nature of human sins(hubris, pride, arrogance).

What does our world look like today? Typical megalopolitan cities like New York, Shanghai, Seoul can represent

our true lives? Will the comfortable and affluent city life be the life God wants to give us? The present unlimited competition and consumption introduced by the dogma of neoliberalism and supported by the petrochemical civilizations dooms us to destruction. I believe the artificial urban civilization should give way to agro-based ecological civilization unless we want to invite big crises.

We have to change our lifestyle, *modus vivendi* for the salvation of humans and our earth life communities. We find the need and ground for that change in the Bible. According to the words of Genesis we should return to the agro-life that involves toil and care for the ecosystem. As Christians we are responsible for that mission. We should take the lead in the movement. I believe this is the very same path God showed Terah, Abraham and Moses of the old days and finally through Christ Jesus for the salvation of humankind. Thank you.