

Towards a Vision of Diakonia in Korea:

The Declaration of Diakonia Korea Expo 2016

1. Introduction

In a period in which there was no gospel and freedom of faith in Korea, Diakonia paved the way to the introduction of the gospel in terms of medical and educational missions. Ever since then, the Korea Church has played the roles of light and salt for this society whenever this nation has suffered, for example, from Japanese Coercive Occupation, Korean War and the ever-increasing polarization of the wealth between the rich and the poor since the recent economic development and growth.

The Korean Church has felt a need to specialize and organize the works of Diakonia in response to the rapidly changing social demands in the 21st century. Responding to the need, 'Korea Christian Society Welfare' was established in 2002, and this organization initiated a momentum to build a Diakonia network over the country beyond the level of individual churches by holding 'Christian Social Welfare Expo 2005.' Korean Diakonia, which was launched in 2007, unified with 'Korea Christian Society Welfare' in 2009 and in turn with Hope Solidarity of Korea Church in 2010 and has become a representative organization of Diakonia organizations in Korea. Its contributions are as followings:

- (1) Korean Diakonia has systematically organized the works of Christian social welfare and made Christian social welfare an academic discipline.

It published *The Comprehensive List of Christian Social Welfare in Korea* (2007) and performed surveys of the homeless (2009, 2012). It also held the Diakonia Academy of Korea Church to catalyze the solidarity of Diakonia organizations in Korean churches (2014). Korean Diakonia holds 'Christian Social Welfare Expo' every 5 years (2005, 2010).

- (2) Korean Diakonia has contributed to emergency relief works domestic and abroad.

Korean Diakonia organized 170,000 Christian volunteers in the Hebei Spirit's oil spill accident (2007), and it has also provided food relief to North Korea (2008), emergency relief to the victims of the cyclone disaster in Myanmar, to the victims of the earthquake in Sichuan Province, China (2008), to the flood victims in Philippines, to those of the earthquake in Indonesia (2009) and Haiti (2010), to the victims of the tsunami in Japan (2011), and to the refuges from Syria (2013). Further, Korean Diakonia supported the recovery of the damaged schools from the cyclone in Philippines and provided aids to Palestine, Gaza, and Jordan (2014). It also participated in the emergency relief for the victims of the earthquakes in Nepal (2015) and Ecuador (2016).

- (3) Korean Diakonia has suggested mediation in the matters of social conflicts and tried to resolve them.

Korean Diakonia suggested its mediation in the tragic disaster of YongSan redevelopment project (2009), provided the accommodations for the surviving comfort women (2010), and ran a consolation project for the victims of Sewol ferry disaster (2014).

Korean Diakonia here in Diakonia Korea Expo 2016, as the third Christian Social Welfare Expo, makes public the document, “Towards a Vision of Diakonia in Korea,” and in so doing presents the orientation of Diakonia in the Korean Church.

2. Signs of the Age

Our human civilization in the 20th century has experienced wars and genocides due to various reasons such as colonialism, the cold war, racial conflicts and so on. While the material foundation of the civilization has prospered well, the shadows of poverty, starvation, and exploitation have never retired, but they instead have kept coming back with the face of dehumanization. The destruction of the environment by selfish human greed has resulted in the ever-increasing frequency of natural disasters and the acceleration of the extinctions of various and precious natural species. The 21st century does not seem to promise us a better future, rather we just anticipate a worse reality in which the lives of the poor will be more difficult than in the 20th century. We Christians feel a great responsibility to be aware of the divine will among the signs of the age.

- (1) The neo-liberal economic globalization has maximized the profits of the privileged few over the globe and driven all societies around the world into an arena of unlimited competition. Further, the modern materialism has misled us to a false belief that the creation and accumulation of wealth are the supreme norm for human society and the only solution to various human problems, distorting values and ethics for human spirituality. The gap between the rich and the poor has been ever increasing all over the globe, and, as the traditional units of community that have served as the protection for people and citizen, such as nation, region and family have collapsed, the quality of life for people who cannot secure their own happiness and security has deteriorated. The increasing number of immigrants and refugees over the globe is its result or symptom.
- (2) There are two extreme tides in this age. There has been the strong current of secular atheism, on the one hand, and the continual increase of aggressive religious fanaticism, on the other hand. Although secularism has contributed to the de-superstition of religions, it also has played a key role in the commodification of the sacredness of life and the materialization of human relations. Religious fundamentalism based upon religious vision and identity has threatened, dominated, controlled and destroyed the peoples who do not submit to its oppressive power and agree to its identity. These extremes of religious cultures do not provide any seed of

hope for the vulnerable minority and the marginalized. They just make their lives worse than ever.

- (3) Nations and communities have used violence and war as their means to get what they want without any satisfaction.
- (4) There are millions of refugees and foreign laborers, who have fled from wars, violence, drought, famine, poverty, hunger, starvation and so on. The violation of human rights and the discrimination against them have radically increased and intensified. Moreover, economic anxiety with narrow-minded nationalism justifies and rationalizes “xenophobia” and racism.
- (5) There have been dramatically increased violence and discrimination against racial and religious minorities, victims of social caste, women and children, handicapped people and elderly people.
- (6) The global chain of life in creation has been destroyed due to the global climate change, the ecological crisis, and the exhaustion of nature. Natural disasters have been more frequent, partly due to the destruction of environments, and this in turn has raised the burden of poor people, especially in underdeveloped countries.
- (7) The Korean society now has been suffering from the increasing rate of the unemployment of the young generation, the low birth rate, the surge of the aging population, the breakdown of family and a youth problem. It means that the blind spots of the social welfare system in our society have become ever enlarged and more in number.

These signs of this age just show that our Diakonia ministry of Korean churches in the 21st century has become a more urgent and important work than ever.

3. The biblical and theological orientation of Diakonia

The Hebrew, “abad,” in the Bible basically means “to worship God,” but, at the same time, it has another meaning, “to serve” or “service.” It means that Christian worship and service cannot be separated. Our service (diaconia) is nothing but the expression of our thanks to God’s love and our practical response to the divine love. The Hebrew Bible gives the list of our neighbors Christians should serve as the poor, orphans, widows and strangers. God is the one who helps orphans (Psalm 10:14), who rescues the poor (Psalm 35:10), and who defends orphans and widows and loves the alien (Deut. 10:18; Psalm 146:9). God commanded Israelites to serve them (Isaiah 1:17, Deut. 24:17-21). What God wants is that there be no vulnerable and poor among His chosen nation, and thus God gave the chosen people the responsibility and duty of serving and helping each other. The servant of God has “to preach good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners” (Isaiah 61:1-2).

Jesus Christ came to serve human beings (Mark 10:45) and lived as a “servant” (Luke 22:27). For Jesus, the commandment “to love your neighbors as yourself” is the same as the first and greatest commandment to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:39). Jesus said to the lawyer, who was asking him the way to eternal life, “do this”, by telling him the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10: 37). He said the young man who said he kept all the commandments, “go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and ... follow me”(Mark 10:21). Also by washing the feet of his disciples, Jesus showed that the identity of faith community lies in its serving (John 13:14). Jesus’s healing ministry and his table community with sinners anticipatively showed the essence of the community in the kingdom of God. Diakonia is nothing but the way of discipleship, and it has to do with the measures of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46). By telling them, ‘take up one’s own cross and follow me,’ Jesus wants disciples to express their discipleship under the cross (Matthew 16:24).

St Paul understood Diakonia as the fulfillment of the law (Rome 13:8). He acknowledged that Diakonia cannot bring salvation, but that it can be a proof for judgment (1 Cor. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:10). Diakonia is the mission of serving, and it witnesses that the grace of God in Christ is expensive and precious. The authenticity of our faith will be decided upon whether or not one practices love (James 2:17).

Piety before God cannot be separated from Diakonia, especially in the Old Testament and the early Christian Church.

Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world (James 1: 27).

In face of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we reaffirm that Diakonia is the essential mission of the Church and the fruit of the gospel, realizing that it recovers the importance of the precious divine grace and that it plays its pivotal role in the ecumenical movement and reformation of our churches.

(1) Diakonia is the essential mission of the Church

The Church, which is called and guided by the Holy Spirit through baptism, participates in the *Missio Dei* (the mission of God) through Diakonia. Diakonia is an important way to express the divine love which discloses itself in Jesus Christ. Also, it anticipatively shows that the Kingdom of God, which is fulfilled through the gospel, is none other than a community of love. For the essence of the kingdom of God lies in our serving and loving, not in our dominating and subjugating. Thus, the Church should not remain as an exclusive or introverted community of faith, but it should manifest itself as the light and salt of the world by witnessing to the gospel and serving the others in love. Diakonia is the essential mission of the Church as well as the mission of all Christians. It means that each Christian should not content oneself with donating some money to special organizations of Diakonia as the fulfillment of one’s responsibility of serving and sharing.

(2) Diakonia is the fruit of justification through faith in the divine grace.

“The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 3:10). As a tree without fruits is useless, churches and Christians without their mission of Diakonia make the grace of Christ “cheap grace.” Diakonia is costly discipleship, and it rejects cheap grace, which lacks the love of our neighbors, and prosperity theology, which lacks the meaning of sacrifice.

(3) Diakonia is an ‘element of worship’ and thus ‘worship after worship.’

The love of God and the love of neighbors must go together in worship, and this lies in the core of true Christian piety (James 1:27). God does not accept any worship without Diakonia (Micah 6:8). For the reformers, the office of Diakonia was a necessary element for piety before and after worship. When the Korean Church abuses Diakonia as one of the programs for church growth, it is none other than disloyalty to Jesus’s commandment to love one’s neighbors as oneself. Diakonia should be accompanied with authenticity and piety together.

(4) Diakonia is a way of participating in the divine mission, in which God first works at marginalized areas.

Jesus proclaimed the Gospel of the Kingdom of God in Nazareth, Galilee. His mission had its priority for the small and the lost. However, we read, “Can anything good come from [Nazareth]?” (John 1:46). God works for and among the marginalized, and thus the center of our mission work has to be marginalized areas.

Thus, Diakonia now should be understood from the perspective of people in marginalized communities, not from the perspective of providers. Diakonia should not be an expression of paternalism, which is content with wrapping a bandage around the wound of the victim(s). Diakonia must be carried out until it will fix the root cause of the wound and the pain.

(5) Diakonia recovers the ecumenism of the Church and plays its key role in church reformation.

Diakonia is an element to unite divided churches. To recover koinonia (friendship) between the Jerusalem church and the churches of the aliens, St Paul collected donations from the churches of the aliens and paid a visit to the church of Jerusalem, risking his life. “For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings” (Romans 15:27). As the Reformation in the 16th century recovered the essence of Christian faith through the Bible, grace and belief, our reformation in the 21st century should show the power of the gospel in recovering the discipleship of Diakonia.

4. Challenges and Tasks

In 2015, the United Nations (UN) announced “Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs). The agenda consist of 17 goals, and it presents an orientation under which the world community should go forward together in its awareness of the basic situations of poverty and

environment.¹ This agenda urges the establishment of solidarity within the frames of world solidarity and the environment on the earth, and it also asks the Korea Church to participate in fulfilling the same goals. In face of these challenges and tasks, our Korea Church with its Christian conscience and moral responsibility for the world presents our vision of Diakonia as followings:

- (1) Diakonia of the Korean Church is to recover and protect the dignity of the image of God in all human beings.

All human beings have their own dignity, and they are all equal before God. God's love is to do justice for the weak, to actualize equality based on justice in community, and to achieve dignity for all forms of life. In this context, the deficiency model cannot be a right model of welfare which categorizes the socially weak as the target of welfare and understands its task as to fill the deficiency and loss. This deficiency model separates the subject from the object and alienates the weak. Diakonia sees provider and beneficiaries together as companions, and it leads them to the establishment of a healthy community.

- (2) The Diakonia of the Korean Church is to be a contribution to the common good for the society.

Diakonia must go beyond the perspective of provider, in which the world becomes the 'other' to receive our service. Our church needs to overcome a temptation to use the works of Diakonia for the expansion of the church that comes from a selfish motivation. Rather it needs to focus on its mission to deliver Christian value to the world. The Korean Church should believe in the cosmic sovereignty of God and take up its service for the Common Good, understanding itself as part of social and global communities. In order to do so, the Korean Church should extend its solidarity of Diakonia over the government and civil society, and further over the global villages. All churches and faith communities should share the awareness of Diakonia through active discussions and responses.

- (3) The Korean Church should be the subject to serve local societies through its volunteer works.

The foundation of the Korean Church is local churches. There are various areas such as local governments, local administrations, diverse organizations of welfare, non-profit organizations and civil organizations, and they are waiting for the participation of churches in their works. There are also the blind spots of welfare in local societies. Caring for those on the second-to-the-bottom economic level, emergency welfare aid and volunteer work all are the areas only

¹ The 17 goals are as followings: (1) no poverty, (2) zero hunger, (3) good health and well-being, (4) quality education, (5) gender equality, (6) clean water and sanitation, (7) affordable and clean energy, (8) decent work and economic growth, (9) industry, innovation, infrastructure, (10), reduced inequalities, (11) sustainable cities and communities, (12) responsible consumption and production, (13) climate action, (14) life below water, (15) life on land, (16) peace, justice and strong institutions, and (17) partnership's for the goals.

churches can take up. The most serious matter faced by the contemporary society is the collapse of family. Churches can serve local societies by providing educational programs for family and caring for disintegrating families.

The Korean Church is the biggest resource for volunteer work. Human resources with their commitment and the organized force of churches can be the most valuable ones for local societies. Volunteered Christians can have a chance to see this social structure through the eyes of faith. Diakonia of the Korean Church should not be left as the works of professionals. It should seek for a chance to become a channel for Christians to participate in civil society and for the society to come one step closer to the Church.

(4) Diakonia of the Korean Church should prepare for the coming age of unification.

Although South and North Korea are divided now, Korean Christians believe that the grace of God will realize the unification of these divided nations. As seen in the case of Germany, unification is not just about political unification but also about social unification. North Korea is under the condition of absolute poverty. It is not possible for this society to recover and restore human dignity and value without unconditional support from South Korea. Without this support as well as collaboration by the South, unification may turn into catastrophe, instead of blessing, for the two societies.

Thus, Diakonia of the Korean Church should prepare for the coming age of unification. It is not just about economic assistance, but it also includes a responsible role in achieving social integrity with new value, new worldview and spiritual life. Given the politically fierce conflict between the North and the South, the states cannot take on this pivotal role for the unification alone. The Church should cultivate its capability for attaining social integrity by reforming a model of society through education and service.

(5) The Korea Church should pave the way to Diakonia for the global age.

Korea has had a unique experience of growth from an aid-receiving country to an aid-giving country. In this context, Korea has been asked for a leadership in international politics, and it is time for Korea to take its responsibility, pertinent to its international status, for underdeveloped countries over the world. Thus, South Korea needs discernment and practice to contribute to the global welfare of human civilization as well as its national welfare.

This requires that Koreans have a responsible attitude towards immigrant foreigners in domestic areas. Given the reality of globalization within this society, Koreans really needs a mature attitude to give up their exclusive and alienating mind and to try to embrace and co-exist with different cultures and ethnicities.

The Korean Church benefited very much from the aids of the world church in the past. It also had a privileged experience of globalization through its international exchange and mission works with the world church. Are all these “for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14). The Korean Church has a responsibility to widen the horizon of Diakonia for an age of globalization.

(6) Diakonia of the Korean Church should be a work to make life abundant.

Under the neo-liberal economy system based upon the principle of the survival of the fittest and the law of the jungle, unlimited competition has driven to the verge of extinction all forms of life on the earth as well as the traditional structures of nation, region and family. Following Jesus who came to the earth in order to give abundant life, the Korea Church should seek for Diakonia which revives and prospers life abundantly.

Diakonia, which revives life, has to struggle against absolute poverty. The United Nations has worked for its Millennium Goal to end world poverty. As a result, the state of absolute poverty has been decreased to half, and the world now can have a hope to eliminate absolute poverty with its communal effort.

The Korean Church in its cooperation with various social and civil organizations should provide a hope to solve the matters of the extreme economic polarization of our society and its relative poverty. Social concern for people from diverse classes who dropped out after bloody competition is absolutely needed now. The right value of life should be shared with the so-called losers such as the young generation, who have been suffering from the high rate of unemployment, women who suffer from the low rate of employment and the status of underemployment, and the elderly who live under poverty and alienation. Most of all, a safety net of our society should be provided to those who live under the condition of absolute poverty.

5. Proposals

For the growth of the Diakonia calling of the Korean Church, we propose some practical tasks as follows:

- (1) Diakonia affirms that the Korean Church has a social mission to recover social trust, respect and acknowledgment.
- (2) The Church should seek for a coherence of their services to construct a Diakonia network among churches for more specialized services beyond an individual church-centered or denomination-centered approach.
- (3) It is not the spirit of Jesus Christ to force a confession of faith from the weak in need as a medium of material aid. The Church should practice the love of Christ as it is, and it should pray that the love of Christ bear its fruits in its mission.
- (4) The Church needs help from professionals to check out what kinds of help local societies need and has the responsibility to realize it with its effective and sustainable serving.
- (5) The Church puts its primary concern onto those who are excluded from the social welfare system of the state, thus those who are left at the blind spots of welfare and those who are need of better care.

- (6) Diakonia must not have any discrimination based upon nationality, language, ideology, culture and origin. All human beings have right to be served as equal persons with the image of God. Emergency relief should be preferentially given to places where famine, starvation, or earthquake occurs.
- (7) Diakonia should have its priority to rescue the lives of children under starvation and/or malnutrition, especially in the areas of North Korea and Africa.
- (8) With regard to humanitarian aid, the Church has to cooperate with governments and non-government organizations (NGOs) specialized in relief works.
- (9) The Church should accept and develop a theology of Diakonia and do its best to include the Diakonia field in the curriculum of theological education.