FFWPU International: Dr. Sang Hun Lee on Communism That Erased God - Part 5

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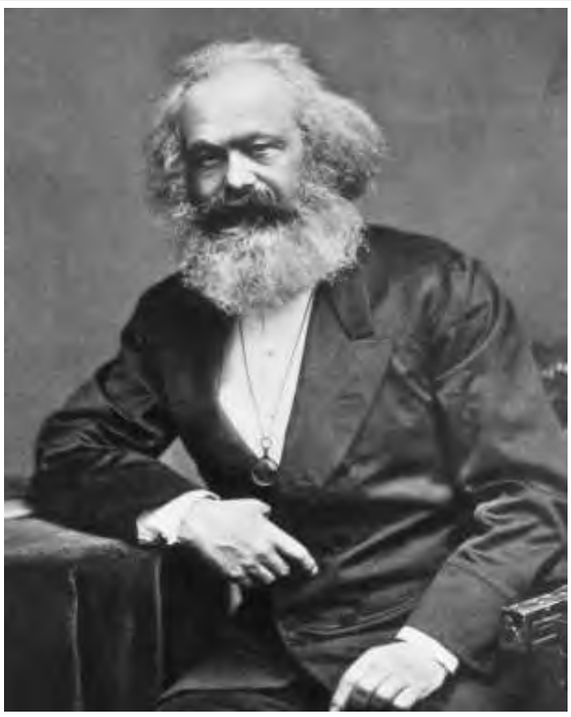

Karl Marx (1818 - 1883) was born into a Jewish family in Trier, in the western German Rhineland. His father, a lawyer, converted to Protestantism due to professional restrictions imposed on Jews at the time, and Marx was baptized in the Lutheran Church at age six. During his youth, he received an extensive Christian education - even writing an essay on the theme of "The Union of the Faithful with Christ." However, while studying law and philosophy at the University of Bonn and the University of Berlin, he was influenced by Hegelian philosophy and the Young Hegelians, gradually shifting toward religious criticism and materialism.

[Communism That Erased God: Lee Sang-hun's Ideological Journey and the Path to Human Liberation] ⑤ The Human Being Marx Was Searching For

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Exploring the Roots of Human Alienation and the True Source of Human Nature

Why did an ideology that promised to liberate humanity ultimately become a power that suppressed human conscience? To understand this contradiction, one must trace back to the original question posed by Karl Marx. He, too, sought to rescue suffering humanity. Dr. Lee Sang-hun (Sang Hun Lee) recognized that establishing a true alternative to communism required examining both its original starting point and its flawed solutions. What drew his attention was Marx's theory of human alienation (Entfremdung).

Marx was not a communist from the outset. Through philosophical inquiry and journalism, he observed the poverty and alienation suffered by workers under industrial capitalism and began seeking the causes of human misery in social structures. He was influenced by the dialectics of the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 - 1831), who viewed the world and history as progressing through contradictions and struggles, and embraced the materialism of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804 - 1872), who interpreted God as a projection of human essence. By synthesizing these with British political economy and French socialism, Marx developed his own communist theory. At its foundation lay a critical concern: reclaiming the dignified, truly human life that capitalism had stripped away.

Did Marx establish communist ideology out of a desire to destroy humanity? Dr. Lee Sang-hun did not attribute such intent to him. Marx was not indifferent to human suffering. Dr. Lee affirmed that Marx's awareness of humanity having lost its original nature was valid. What Marx sought was indeed the lost human being. Therefore, to provide an accurate critique and counterproposal to communism, one had to examine how Marx understood the human being and what he believed humanity had lost.

The Human Being Discovered in the Alienated Worker

Nineteenth-century Europe, where Marx lived, was an era of sharp contrasts between the triumphs and the dark shadows of the Industrial Revolution. Factories constantly poured out commodities, and capitalists accumulated wealth, yet laborers suffered under long working hours and meager wages. Even young children and women were forced into factories to survive. Although human labor generated increasingly vast wealth, the workers' lives remained mired in destitution. Marx exposed this fundamental contradiction.

Marx looked beyond poverty alone to diagnose this reality. He realized that workers not only failed to own the products of their labor, but were also losing themselves in the very process of working. Furthermore, the goods and wealth produced by the worker turned into an alien power that dominated them. Marx defined this state as "alienation."

Alienation refers to a condition in which something that originally belongs to oneself becomes detached and turns into an alien, hostile entity. The commodity made by a worker leaves his hands and becomes the property of the capitalist. Labor turns into a grueling ordeal endured merely for physical survival, and fellow workers become competitors. Ultimately, unable to live according to their own will, human beings

lose the very sense of being masters of their own lives.

For Marx, labor was never meant to be a mere means of physical sustenance. Through labor, human beings transform nature and actualize their inner ideas into reality. He viewed human labor as fundamentally distinct from animal activity in that humans plan what to create beforehand and cooperate with others to build a new world. Under capitalism, however, such labor became a source of human subjugation. Workers could neither decide what to produce nor why, nor could they own what they created. The purpose of labor shifted from fulfilling human needs and happiness to the self-expansion of capital; labor, commodities, and money came to dominate humanity.

The "original human being" Marx sought to recover was a being who realizes their potential through creative, uncoerced labor and harmonious cooperation with others. He viewed humanity as social beings who cannot exist in isolation, believing that individual freedom and happiness are realized only within relationships with others. He held that human beings could restore their lost humanity when they transcend relationships of mutual competition and exploitation, working instead for the whole community.

Seeing the Root of Human Alienation Differently

In this regard, Marx's underlying inquiry was not completely divorced from the questions raised by Christianity. Religion also teaches that human beings have lost their original state. Christianity teaches that through the Human Fall, humanity became separated from Heavenly Parent (God) and must restore its lost original nature. Marx likewise asserted that humanity had become alienated and must return to the true, original human being. In their diagnosis that the present state of humanity is fallen and incomplete, the two perspectives share common ground.

However, Marx and Christianity parted ways in explaining why humanity lost its original state. Christianity, as understood in Dr. Lee Sang-hun's analysis, identified the root cause in the Fall of Man - specifically, the severance of the vertical relationship with God. In contrast, Marx located the cause in the institution of private property and capitalist relations of production. He held that because capitalists own the means of production, purchase labor-power as a commodity, and appropriate the surplus produced, workers become alienated from their own labor and its products. Consequently, Marxism maintained that by abolishing private ownership of the means of production and capitalist relations of production, workers could regain control over labor and reclaim their lost humanity.

Dr. Lee Sang-hun acknowledged that Marx keenly identified the painful reality of human alienation. He did not dismiss Marx's critique that workers are dominated by the commodities they produce and that human relationships have been reduced to commercial and transactional ties. Marx's insistence that human beings have lost their original nature and must regain it reflected a genuine agony and desire to save humanity.

Yet Dr. Lee raised a far more fundamental question: To say that humanity has lost its original state, one must first clarify what the original human being (bon-yeon-ui ingan) is meant to be. There must be an absolute standard to determine what constitutes a complete, perfected human being and what constitutes an alienated one. Advocating the restoration of human nature without that standard is like embarking on a journey without a destination.

Marx understood human beings merely as a part of nature and as laboring, social beings. From the very beginning, he did not seek the essence of humanity in a transcendent Creator. Precisely here lay the fatal limitation of Marxist anthropology. In Dr. Lee's view, if the essence of humanity is sought solely within material and socio-economic relationships, it is impossible to establish an absolute standard for the original human value and ideal that humanity must attain. Whenever social structures and systems change, the understanding of human nature - as well as the standards of good and evil - inevitably shifts relative to the collective.

The True Standard for Judging the Original Human Being

For Dr. Lee Sang-hun, the original state of the human being cannot be determined by human beings themselves. The purpose of a created being cannot be separated from the Will and Heart of the Creator. Because human beings were created in the image of Heavenly Parent, the standard of the original human being must be sought in our vertical relationship with God. Human alienation did not begin merely with estrangement from labor and physical products; it originated fundamentally in the severance of our filial relationship with Heavenly Parent, the source of true love.

While Marx discovered the surface reality of human alienation, Dr. Lee Sang-hun sought its deepest root in the broken relationship with God - and at this exact junction, their paths fundamentally diverged.