

Antagonists or Partners

Rural and urban people are dependent on each other in a healthy society ...

Frequently “rural” and “urban” are seen to be at odds with each other. Rural folks often feel decisions about our social, economic and political systems are made by urbanites who don’t understand who we are.

Ellen Davis, in her book about the central place of agriculture in the Old Testament, suggests the two societies don’t have to be antagonistic.

Ideally, a city should provide for all within its walls and the region around it. Here rural people find a market for their produce, protection from invaders, access to work and a “social location for the landless”. Furthermore, the city’s health depends directly on the health of its hinterland. In chapter 1, Isaiah refers to Zion as “a faithful city, filled with justice. Righteousness would lodge in her.” This is intended to reflect a “holy, healing image”.

But cities that are controlled by political or religious authorities and used for their own ends are parasites to the rural area around them. They are forced to pay high taxes, provide supplies for the government stores and for trade, and give cheap labour. Amos, Hosea and Micah all railed against cities that functioned in this way.

We see the same extremes today. Davis reminds us the key factor is food supply. In healthy situations the hinterland supplies food at reasonable cost, while administration, education, development of the arts, etc emerges from the centre.

Cheap transportation takes away from the city’s dependency on the hinterland. Furthermore, in this industrial age, hinterland becomes the dumping grounds for toxic waste. The viability of the countryside is degraded.

However, there are ways we can look positively at the relationships between rural and urban, as can be seen in many heavily populated areas. For example, they have found agricultural ways to break down the toxins in city waste.

(written by Joyce Sasse, 2010)

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