CHRISTIANITY IN KOREA

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In the course of the last five years, the Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium in the Korean Humanities at The George Washington University has invited distinguished scholars to speak about various aspects of Korean arts, literature, history, language, and culture. In previous gatherings, we have discussed Shamanism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, and a colloquium on reconciliation drew our attention to concepts of forgiveness, common values, and ethics. One special conference reflected on women and creativity in the Korean humanities. Several of the meetings, however, have in some way or another focused on religion. So when the 7th colloquium on the subject of Christianity in Korea took place on October 21, 2000, we had come full circle to describe the major religions of Korea.

Although the emphasis on religion appeared to us to have occurred quite by accident, we were unintentionally making a statement about the major forces that have defined Korean history. Indeed, three times over the last two thousand years, Korea has undergone a radical transformation of its dominant beliefs and values. 1,500 years ago, Buddhism entered Korea from China and superseded shamanism as the preferred provider of beliefs and rituals promising protection from bothersome spirits and relief from the uncertainties of life. Korean Buddhism, the state religion for 865 years (527-1392), made seminal contributions to the development of major schools in East Asian Mahāyāna Buddhism (Lee 1993: xix-xx). One thousand years later, Neo-Confucianism challenged the Buddhist hegemony and provided a new set of philosophical assumptions and ethical principles around which both state and society were reorganized. And Koreans came to boast of being "the bulwark of orthodox Neo-Confucianism" (Kalton 1994: xv). The most recent transforming force has been Christianity.

Christianity first appeared on the Korean peninsula a little more than two centuries ago. Its long-term impact on Korean society is still being assessed. However, it is abundantly clear that Christian influence on Korean society, culture and polity (in East Asia as well as in the United States) is worthy of serious academic analysis. There is a more immediate relevance. Two of George Washington University’s most honored Korean graduates, Syngman Rhee and Sŏ Jae P’il (Philip Jaisohn), were Protestant Christians. Korea’s current President and the Nobel Laureate for Peace in 2000, Kim Dae Jung, is a Catholic, as was Premier Chang Myŏn, who held his abbreviated tenure in the early 1960s.
As a whole, the texts included in this volume, by eminent scholars of religion and history, Chai-sik Chung, Donald Baker, Harry Yeide and Bonnie Oh, explore both the early and contemporary influence of Christianity in Korea in novel ways. Chung’s essay focuses on the uneasy relationship between Christianity as the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in everyday life, and Christianity as a mechanism for individual consolation and the achievement of worldly goals, such as economic and social advancement. He expresses serious concerns that Christianity in Korea has lost its moral compass in favor of modern Western values of egotistic individualism, private interest, and a global capitalist culture. Chung focuses his historical eye on the character of the history of Pentecostal-evangelical Christianity. However, the paper is also a careful examination of the attitudes of late 19th century and early 20th century enlightenment or kaehwa thinkers, such as Kim Ok-kyun, Pak Yong-hyo, and Sŏ Chae P’il, all of whom in one way or another linked Christianity with modernization. Chung also echoes many Koreans’ discomfort with a Korean version of Christianity as a kind of supercilious power haughtily contemptuous of indigenous Korean culture. He wants to show how Protestantism, in particular, was and continues to be a contested and problematic set of religious and social movements in Korea with political, economic, and cultural implications that reach far beyond declared beliefs, accustomed or accepted rituals, and established organizations.

In her commentary, Bonnie Oh commends Chung for his candor in describing the problems of moral direction in South Korea and affirms the view that not long after missionaries arrived in Korea Koreans appropriated Christianity as a way to progress. She notes, “Korean Protestantism became localized and focused on private and personal interest even before the fledgling early church became viable and had an opportunity to send a message of its transcendental characteristics of reform, transformation, development and improvement of the resources found in local culture.” Oh argues that from early on, local, indigenous belief systems were strong enough to prevent Christianity from becoming a major catalyst for spiritual and social transformation. For his part, Harry Yeide views the rise of Christianity in a far more positive light than Chung does. Based on the evidence of the ideas and actions of Protestant churches and followers, Yeide advances a view that the data would support and that would differ significantly from that of Chung. In his view, the growth of Bible study and Bible literacy, the development of theological perspectives, the idea of separating church activities from political participation, and the emphasis on social services, can potentially counterbalance Chung’s focus on the defects of Korean Protestantism.

Donald Baker’s essay draws our attention to the close, albeit unintentional, relationship between Catholicism and democratization in Korea. Submitting the proposition that Christianity facilitated the rise of civil
Preface

society in Korea, he is arguing against the received view among Korean historians that civil society was the result of elite scholars whose work began in private academies as early as the 16th century. As Baker admits, a debate about civil society, democratization, and Christianity, and scholarship depends largely on one's definitions of these terms. However, Baker's purpose is less to completely turn an older theory on its head than to write about a factor neglected by historians, to fill in a gap in Korean religious history. He demonstrates that beginning as early as the late 18th century and extending into the present day, Korean Christians, and Catholics in particular, have exerted a powerful influence on civil movements to check state authority, promote voluntary organizations, religious and political freedoms. Baker's essay effectively warns us not to forget that the roots of political activism lie at least partly in a history of two centuries of Korean Catholic activism.

Oh counters that the Catholic Church was seldom activist until the 1960s, and she offers arguments against Baker's examples of voluntary organizations aimed at reducing state authority. Oh wishes instead to draw our attention to the activism of the last four decades, for she remains critical about the passivity of the Catholic Church during its infancy in Korea. Yeide, on the other hand, finds much in the history of the Catholic Church to support a view that the Church has long directed its teachings toward political participation among its followers. Yet, like Oh, Yeide questions whether the rise of civil society and democratization owes any more to Catholicism than to other factors, including nationalist, progressive, and a variety of religious movements.

Together, these scholars give us a provocative set of perspectives on Christianity in Korea and make a substantial contribution to our knowledge of religion in particular and the Korean humanities more generally. Hahn Moo-Sook was herself involved in the world of religions, at both the level of her everyday life and in her fiction. Her interest in the religious, philosophical, ethical, and historical force of religion is reflected in this unique scholarly encounter.

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References


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UNEXPECTED FRUIT:
CATHOLICISM AND THE RISE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN KOREA

DON BAKER

If you were taking a word association test and heard the words "Roman Catholicism," it is unlikely that "democracy" would be the first word to come to mind. After all, the Pope is not elected, and neither are his bishops. In fact, Catholics can not even select their own pastors. Moreover, for most of its history, the Roman Catholic Church, as an authoritarian institution itself, has been a supporter of monarchies and other authoritarian forms of government, and has usually been suspicious of popular uprisings against such governments. That is why few observers have paid much attention to local Catholic communities when studying the fall of dictatorships and the growth of political freedom around the world in the second half of the twentieth century. There are exceptions, of course. Cardinal Sin is widely recognized for his contribution to the democratization of the Philippines. And Catholic organizations are given some of the credit for the collapse of communism in Poland and other Eastern European nations with sizable Catholic populations. Nevertheless, historians have tended to view the Roman Catholic Church overall as more of a hindrance than a help to the rise of democratic societies.

That, however, has not been the case in Korea. Quite the contrary. On that northeast Asian peninsula far removed from the traditional strongholds of Catholicism, the birth of a Korean Catholic church over two hundred years ago sent ripples through Korea’s political culture, ripples which eventually grew strong enough to undermine the foundations of the traditional authoritarian Korean state. Those first Korean Catholics unintentionally introduced one of the conceptual building blocks out of which the edifice of democracy has been erected.

Democracy can exist only with the support of a civil society, a society in which barriers have been erected to limit the reach of state authority. Such barriers define arenas for citizens to fill with voluntary organizations operating independently of, and sometimes against, the government. When the Catholic Church appeared on Korean soil in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and encountered violent resistance from the Confucian officials of the Chosön dynasty, it began to demand a sanctuary from government interference. Eventually, after a long and bloody struggle, that demand was granted, creating a zone of autonomy in which a Korean civil society could eventually sprout. Though the first Catholics in Korea did not talk of civil society, and would not have understood that term if they had heard it used by
others, they inadvertently laid the foundations for its later emergence.

I recognize that this is not a widely accepted proposition. In fact, in a recent series of articles in the Korea Journal debating the origins of civil society in Korea, the early Catholic Church was hardly mentioned. David Steinberg, Han Sangjin, and Kim Sunhyuk argue that a civil society is a rather recent phenomenon in Korea, since there can be no civil society until differences of opinion are tolerated and those differences can be articulated in a public arena. Under both the Choson dynasty and Japanese colonial rule, dissent was not allowed and Koreans were not allowed to form private organizations in opposition to government policies. Therefore, they conclude, we can not speak of a civil society emerging until the 1960s at the earliest.¹

Cho Hein and JaHyun Kim Haboush disagree. Cho and Haboush both locate the origins, or at least the forerunner, of Korea’s civil society in the private academies established by literati outside of Seoul, starting in the 16th century. Cho asserts that Confucian scholars who lived in the countryside and did not hold any government posts constituted a “self-governing society of ‘spiritual’ leaders” which enjoyed “a considerable degree of autonomy and influence vis-à-vis the state.”² Haboush is somewhat more cautious. She admits that “Choson Confucians did not have a perception of society as multiple and independent organizations.” Nevertheless, she argues, the private academies they created and led served as intermediary bodies, standing between the state and the people, and thus created space for the public sphere essential to a civil society to emerge.³

There is some merit in both positions. A true civil society, in which certain areas of society are off-bounds to state control, and citizens are therefore able to form voluntary private organizations, which can then exert public pressure on the government to change its policies, is a recent phenomenon in the southern half of the peninsula and has yet to emerge in the north. In that sense, Steinberg, Han, and Kim are correct. However, the conditions which allowed a civil society to emerge in the south did not themselves appear overnight. Seeds of the mature civil society we have seen in recent South Korean elections can be identified in the soil of the Choson dynasty, which ended in 1910. In that sense, Cho and Haboush are correct.

However, I am not as willing as Cho and Haboush are to see literati-run private academies as truly autonomous. After all, those academies were chartered by the state and, as we saw when the Taewon’gun ran

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Korea in the 1870s, they could be shut down by the state. Moreover, the literati, whether in-office or out-of-office, accepted the Confucian premise that there were no theoretical boundaries to the reach of the state. Where literati disagreed, they disagreed over the goals of government intervention in society, not over whether such intervention in itself was justified.

There are probably as many definitions of civil society as there are scholars discussing it. However, one common element in all of the various definitions scholars wield is that a civil society is a society free from government control. That is possible only when the state has retreated from total hegemony over society, creating a power vacuum men and women can rush into and fill with voluntary associations. In Western history, growing commercial activity, and the merchant’s associations that generates, is often given credit for erecting the first barriers to the power of the state. Since Korean merchants remained under the thumb of the state until recent years, if we look for the origins of civil society in the merchant community, we can not trace its origins back more than a few decades. That is why both Cho and Haboush has turned to literati, and the academies they established, to see if there are any older ancestors of today’s Korean civil society.

However, they have overlooked another segment of the Choson dynasty population which fought harder than literati ever did against the hegemonic reach of state power. Unlike the literati, Korean converts to Catholicism in the late 18th and early nineteenth century rejected the theoretical right of the state to reach into every corner of society and force the people there to abide by every directive issued by the government. Korea’s first Catholics insisted instead that the power of the state was not absolute, that there were limits to how much the state could interfere in what those subject to its authority believed and did. They did not raise those objections to total state authority under a banner of civil society or democracy, since those terms were not only foreign to them, they were alien to the Catholic teachings they had accepted. Nevertheless, when they asked that their government recognize their right to practice their faith without interference or harassment, they had taken the first step toward carving out an arena in which civil society could emerge.

They did not win such religious freedom right away, of course. When they followed the dictates of their pope and refused to erect the spirit tablet essential to proper Confucian mourning ritual, they violated the laws governing ritual in Choson Korea. That made them criminals in the eyes of the government, since traditional Korean governments had never allowed personal religious convictions to stand in the way of a subject’s obligations to society.4 The Catholic refusal to grant the state authority over the rituals Catholics used to mourn their dead led to a century of deadly persecution, with thousands dying at the hands of Choson dynasty officials in 1801, 1839, 1846, and 1866 through 1869. Nevertheless, by insisting publicly and repeatedly that the

state does not have absolute authority over every aspect of its subjects' lives, they introduced the inhabitants of the peninsula to a defining characteristic of a civil society. In 1899, when France forced the Korean government to grant Korean Catholics legal guarantees of freedom of worship, that cornerstone of a civil society gained new respectability. By signing that treaty, the state formally abandoned its claim to total authority over the religious and ritual lives of every single one of its subjects. Limits were thus placed on the power a government could exercise over those under its control. Once in place, those limits could not easily be removed or ignored. Though in the decades ahead there would be many challenges to religious freedom, and to other freedoms essential to a civil society, the conceptual foundations of Korean politics had been permanently altered. The relationship between a Korean government and those it governed would never be the same again.

The Catholic Church in Korea did not immediately take advantage of its new legalized autonomy to carve out an even larger sphere for civil society to operate within, however. Instead, the Church, as though fearful of losing the gains it had already made if it pushed for more, operated under the assumption that there should be a clear dividing line separating church from state. From the last decades of the nineteenth century into the second half of the twentieth century, Korea's bishops and church hierarchy tended to grant the state sole responsibility for political issues, and avoided involvement in secular affairs. The lack of much Catholic participation in the Enlightenment movement at the end of the nineteenth century, or in the nationalistic protests against Japanese colonial rule in the first half of the twentieth century, for example, is as striking as is the central role of Korean Protestants in both such movements. Rather than speaking out on larger issues, up until the 1960s the Korean Catholic Church tended to look inward and focus on its own needs, building additional churches for Korean Catholics to worship in as well as schools for Catholic children to study in and medical clinics for ill Catholics to be treated in.

By the late 1960s, however, the Korean Catholic Church had begun to move beyond that rather passive concept of a civil society and adopt a more active stance. After over a century and a half on the Korean peninsula, the Korean Catholic Church, for the first time, began as an institution to assert the right of Catholics and other Koreans, following the dictates of their own consciences or in pursuit of their own self-interest, to organize pressure groups to bring about changes in society at large. Catholics were not the first Koreans to form non-governmental organizations in order to promote changes in government policies. However, once the Catholic Church put the power of its numbers and its prestige behind this shift from a negative to a positive concept of a civil society, the state was forced to retreat farther and faster than it might otherwise have. Once the Church began arguing that not only should the state grant Catholics religious freedom, it should also grant Catholics and all other citizens of the Republic of Korea political freedom and economic justice as well, civil society was strengthened and democracy was brought closer to realization. A church which has
not generally been known as a progressive force in recent world history has, in Korea, played an important role in bringing South Korea into the modern world.

The Catholic Church was able to play such an important role in fostering the growth of a civil society on Korean soil because the Catholic missionary publications which introduced Catholicism to Korea included an understanding of the nature of religion, and of the relationship between church and state, which challenged the traditional range of state authority. Before Korea encountered the modern world, the word "chonggyo" [religion] did not exist in the Korean language. Until the end of the nineteenth century, Koreans did not look upon religion as a separate and distinct sphere of human activity meriting a term of its own. Religious groups were granted no privileges that political, economic, or social groups did not share. All such groups were viewed as a part of society rather than apart from society and were expected to recognize that the locus of ultimate authority was the state. In other words, there was no such thing as freedom of religion, nor could pre-modern Korean society be deemed a civil society in which certain types of community activity were beyond the theoretical reach of state power.5

Ritual, Religion, and Restraints on the Authority of the State

That began to change when Catholicism appeared on the Korean peninsula at the end of the eighteenth century. Korea's first Catholics were homegrown. The Korean Catholic Church was founded by Koreans, not by foreign missionaries. Moreover, its leadership was in non-Korean hands for most of its first half-century. A few young men, their curiosity aroused by Jesuit missionary publications from China, had sought out Catholic priests and publications in China and brought that new religion back into Korea themselves. Though those founders of the Korean Catholic Church were scions of the staunchly Confucian yangban elite, they refused to accept the traditional subordinate role Confucianism assigned religions in East Asia.

That refusal signaled a rejection of a political principle which had first been articulated in China over two thousand years earlier and had defined political authority in both China and Korea ever since. That principle, that both ritual and war are the responsibility of the state, was totally contrary to the post-Renaissance separation of civil ritual and authority from religious ritual and authority which was the norm in most of Europe in the eighteenth century. Acting in accordance with that imported European norm, those pioneer Christians refused to honor state control of ritual. They refused to let the state determine what rituals they could

5 Cho, p. 34, argues that Confucian scholars in the second half of the Choson dynasty created a civil society which "not only enjoyed a high degree of autonomy but also sought to influence [the state's] policies through its nationwide networks of communication." For a persuasive refutation of Cho's argument, see Steinberg

celebrate, when and how they could celebrate them, and who would officiate. The Pope, not the Korean King, determined how Catholics should honor their dead. Similarly, the dictates of the Church, not the laws of the state, determined who could be a priest and when those priests could offer mass.

Those first Catholics not only insisted on holding their own rituals even without state approval, they also insisted they could not be forced to follow strict state regulations concerning such rituals as chesa, the Confucian ancestor memorial ceremony. Their refusal to privilege the ritual demands of the state over the moral code of their particular religious community constituted a fundamental challenge to the traditional relationship in Korea between a government and those it governed and laid the foundation for a radical new notion in Korean political culture: the notion of religious freedom. Out of that notion of religious freedom grew the notion that there are limits to the authority the state has over its subjects. It is precisely just such an assertion that the state is not almighty that constitutes a defining characteristic of a civil society.

The Korean Catholic Church began its long fight to place restraints on the reach of the state in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when beleaguered believers tried to escape immediate martyrdom by arguing with government officials over the legitimacy of their demands that Catholics grant supreme moral and ritual authority to the state. One of the most eloquent of those martyrs was Paul Ch'ong Hasang (1795-1839).

In a memorial to the throne he wrote in expectation of persecution, Ch'ong asked, "Why are we Catholics denied the tolerance granted to Buddhists and shamanists? Does Catholicism harm the family? Does it harm the state? Look at what we Catholics do, study our behavior, and you will see what kind of people we are and what kind of teachings we follow. Catholics are not rebels. Catholics do not engage in lewd activities or murder." 9

Ch'ong Hasang missed a key point in his attempt to win for Catholics the same tolerance which had been granted Buddhists and shamanists. He was right that both Buddhism and shamanism were considered idam, beliefs and practices unacceptable to the Neo-Confucians who ruled Korea. He was also right that, nonetheless, Buddhists were allowed to read their sutras and pray in their temples,

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7 The first confrontation between Korea's Catholics and their government occurred in 1785 when a policeman discovered a group of Confucian students engaging in their version of Catholic ritual. Yi Man'ae, ed. Pyöng'yon [A collection of documents attacking heterodoxy and defending orthodoxy] (Seoul: Yûnhwadang, 1971), pp. 105-106.

8 The Korean Catholic refusal to perform chesa (sometimes called "ancestor worship" and thus idolatry in Catholic eyes) in the prescribed manner is based on rulings made by the Vatican in the much broader rites controversy in China. See David E. Mungello, ed., The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning (San Francisco: The Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History, 1994).

and shamans were allowed to hold *kut*, despite the fact that such activities were heterodox. What he did not realize is that the Buddhists and the shamans were able to pursue their *idan* practices because they accepted the ultimate authority of the state over their actions. They did not try to hide what they were doing from the government. They did not give themselves unapproved titles. They did not challenge the authority of the government to determine which rituals could be performed, who could perform them, and where and when they could be performed. Buddhist monks or shamans did not form secret organizations or maintain contact with foreigners beyond Korea's borders.\(^10\)

Catholics, unfortunately, did all those things which Buddhists and shamans did not do. Catholics, even before Catholicism was explicitly outlawed, met secretly to read Christian books. They created an unauthorized organization and gave unauthorized titles, such as "sinbu" [priest] and "koju" [bishop], to its leaders. They refused to perform rituals such as chesa in the manner the government told them to perform them. Moreover, they performed their own rituals, such as baptism and the mass, which the government had not given them permission to perform. And, worse of all, they looked to the Pope in Rome and his representatives in Beijing rather than to the King of Korea for guidance on their moral and ritual obligations. This was a departure from the traditional relationship between the state and religious communities which the Korean government could not tolerate.

In an even more dangerous departure from the traditional relationship between the Korean government and those it governed, the persecuted Korean Catholic community sometimes went beyond mere verbal appeals to reason and fairness. Some of Korea's first Catholics wanted to resort to arms, European arms, to force the Chosön government to leave them alone. For example, Hwang Sayöng (1752-1801), the husband of one of Paul Chong's cousins, attempted to smuggle a message out of Korea to the Bishop of Beijing, begging him to arrange for French military intervention to force the Korean government to leave Catholics alone. In his famous Silk Letter, he asked the bishop to,

> "Dispatch a fleet of several hundred ships, filled with fifty or sixty thousand of the best troops, along with lots of cannons and other deadly weaponry. At the same time, drop off three or four shrewd and persuasive Chinese scholars along the coast so that they can deliver a letter to the king of Korea. That letter should say, 'We have sailed here on European ships to tell you about our religion. We are not here to steal your sons, your women or your riches. We are here because we have received orders from our religious superiors to come here and save souls in this remote corner of the world. If you will allow a Catholic missionary to enter your kingdom and proselytize freely, then we will ask nothing more of you. If you cooperate with us, we promise that we will not fire our cannons and arrows at you. In fact, we promise that we will not disturb one speck of dirt or one blade of grass in your land. After a brief celebration to honor our joining"

hands in eternal friendship, we will sail away.

However, if you refuse to permit this messenger of the Lord of Heaven to come ashore, then we will have to inflict the punishment of the Lord on you. In no time at all, you will all be dead. Would it not be better to save your entire country by offering a warm welcome to this one man? Would you rather turn this man away and, by so doing, bring destruction on your kingdom? It is your choice, Your Majesty.\textsuperscript{11}

The Korean government was aware of how serious this Catholic threat was. That is why the Chosón court persecuted Catholics off-and-on for almost a full century. Chosón officials knew that the implications of the Catholic challenge went far beyond the simple refusal to perform 
\textit{chosa}, or even the threat of attacks by French naval forces. They recognized the Catholic challenge for what it really was—an unprecedented attempt to place restrictions on the exercise of state power and carve out autonomous zones of community activity. For example, in the decree justifying the persecution of 1839, the \textit{chöksa yunüm}, Catholics were condemned in the following words: "They use terms such as 'emperor of our religion' [the pope] and 'leader of our religion' [bishop]. Not only do they want to usurp the power which barbarian chieftains and bandit chiefs wield over commoners, they want to usurp the power wielded by government officials as well. They want to make themselves beyond the reach of the moral transforming power of our government and exempt themselves from our laws. What could be more likely to cause civil unrest and create disastrous situations than this?\textsuperscript{12}

I am well aware that most scholars of Korean history do not agree with my explanation of why the Chosón dynasty reacted so violently to the birth of a Catholic community within its borders. Two of the more popular explanations are that the persecution of Catholics was part of a much larger on-going factional struggle, and that Catholics were persecuted because they wanted to modernize Korea and threatened the dominance of the literati class by preaching the equality of all God’s human creatures.

Factionalism clearly was involved in the decision to attack Catholics. However, any attempt to dismiss the bloody century-long persecution of the Korean Catholic Church as motivated primarily by factional interest or by a selfish desire to protect literati privileges underestimates the depth of the challenge Catholicism posed to the Confucian state.

Most of the literati leadership of the Korean Catholic Church in its first decade sympathized with a group of officials now known as the \textit{sip'a} ("expedient faction") for their support of King Chôngjo and his plans to strengthen royal authority at the expense of literati officials. Most of those who instigated the first large-scale anti-Catholic persecution, in 1801, were members of the group of officials now known as the \textit{pyŏkp'a} ("hardline faction") for their continuing distrust of King

\textsuperscript{11} Hwang Sayông paekso [The silk letter of Hwang Sayông], edited and translated into modern Korean by Yun Chaeyŏng (Seoul: Chŏng'umsa, 1975, p. 107, as translated in Sourcebook of Korean Civilization, II, pp. 149-150.

\textsuperscript{12} Yi Manch'ae, pp. 423-424.
Ch'ŏngjo because of the sins of his father. That much is true, and therefore it is not unreasonable to say that the sip'a flirtation with Catholicism gave the pyŏkp'a an excuse, once they held the reins of power, to attack many sip'a literati and officials as dangerous heretics.

However, sip'a/pyŏkp'a rivalry does not explain why the first attacks on Catholic converts were launched by men who had been associated with the sip'a rather than the pyŏ kp'a camp. Nor does it explain why so many commoners and women who had played no role in factional disputes at court lost their lives in the anti-Catholic persecution, nor why that persecution continued on and off for another seventy years, long after the sip'a/pyŏkp'a dispute had become irrelevant. No other factional dispute in all the five centuries of the Chosŏn dynasty cost as many lives or involved people from such a wide range of social classes. That indicates to me that much more than factional competition was behind the vigor and venom with which anti-Catholics tortured and executed Catholics.

The assertion that Catholics were attacked because they threatened the privileged status of the literati holds even less water. There is not one shred of evidence that Catholics in Korea in any way intended to undermine the traditional agricultural economy or hierarchical social structure of the Chosŏn dynasty. They were more interested in going to heaven after they died than in transforming the society in which they lived. Korea's first Catholics, unlike many of Korea's first Protestants a century later, were not self-conscious modernizers.

Moreover, though Catholic writings taught that all men and women were equal in the eyes of God, Catholics in 19th century Korea did not treat men and women as equal in the eyes of human beings. Although most of those who gave their lives for their new faith were women, the leadership of the church remained firmly in male hands. There were no women priests. In addition, the vast majority of that male leadership, clerical or otherwise, came from the literati and technician (chung'in) classes which had always occupied the top rungs of the Korean social order. The few exceptions were usually the descendants of revered martyrs, showing the continuing importance of hereditary status in Korean Catholic society. In other words, Catholics did not challenge the pre-modern Korean patriarchal hierarchical social structure, they imitated it.

To find out why the persecution of Catholics went on much longer and was much more bloody than any mere factional struggle, and why Catholics were persecuted with much more venom than were those who challenged the traditional social order by calling for better treatment for slaves, peasants, or the sons of concubines, we have to return to the traditional relationship between religion and government in Korea, and how the rise of Catholicism on the peninsula challenged that tradition.

As noted earlier, before the term chonggyo was imported from Japan, there was no word for “religion” in Korea. Instead what we now call religions were called by a variety of different terms, such as kyo (teachings), to (a way), pŏp (laws, methods), hak (scholarship, ways of
thinking), and even sul (techniques, practices). It is important to note here is that none of these terms referred to beliefs or practices, which could claim freedom from interference by the government. In fact, it was assumed in traditional Korea that the government had a moral obligation to interfere in matters we would now call "religious" in order to ensure that its subjects did what they were supposed to do, and did not do what they were not supposed to do.

Religious communities, in other words, were compelled to accept the supremacy of the state on basic moral issues. Ethical demands generated by specific religious traditions were not allowed to override the behavioral demands of the political community. Rather than serving as a primary, or even an alternative, source of moral guidance, as it had in the West, religion in traditional Korea accepted the subordinate role of lending support to the state's moral code. As long as it was confined to such a role, religion could not carve out those autonomous spheres of activity from which civil society could sprout.

However, Korea's first Catholics refused to accept such a limited role. When their government tried to force them to abandon their demands for religious autonomy, thousands of them refused and paid with their lives for their defiance of tradition and state power. Others fled into remote mountain valleys, where they established autonomous communities out of sight of the government.\(^\text{13}\) These kyouch'on ("village of fellow believers") can not exactly be called outposts of civil society, since they tried to keep their interaction with the outside world to a minimum. Nevertheless, they kept alive on Korean soil the concept that there were limits to the legitimate exercise of governmental authority. In doing so, they contributed to the eventual birth of civil society in Korea.

A major step toward that civil society came when the Choson government reluctantly (and indirectly) granted legal recognition of religious freedom for Catholics. In 1886 France had forced the Korean government to sign a treaty which included a clause allowing free travel for French missionaries (though they were identified only as "Frenchmen") in Korea and another clause which permitted French citizens to teach in Korea, though exactly what they could teach was not specified. Korea's native Catholics did not gain clear legal protection of their right to practice their faith as they saw fit until the very end of the 19th century, in 1899. That year, the bishop of Seoul, Gustav Charles Mutel of France, negotiated an agreement with Ch'ong Chun-si, the director of the Regional Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. That agreement, without stating specifically that Korea recognized freedom of religion, protected Korean Catholics against the adoption of anti-Catholic measures by local officials.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{13}\) For more information on the Kyouch'on, see the 1990 Harvard M.A. thesis of Alan Pate, "Catholic Persecution and Catholic Survival: The Korean

\(^{14}\) Ch'oe Chong-ko, Kukka wa chonggyo [State and Religion] (Seoul: Hyŏndaesasangsa, 1983), pp. 160-163; Yi Won-sun, "Han.Pul choyak kwa chonggyo chayu ū i munje [Treaties between Korea and
battle Korea's Catholics had waged for more than a century to gain that protection planted a revolutionary notion in Korean soil: that there can exist within a society organizations with a certain degree of autonomy and that there are some areas of human life which should be free of government control.

Separation of Church and State

The Korean Catholic Church did not, as an institution, join in the battle for the next stage of civil society until decades later. Instead, savoring the fruits of the religious freedom they had fought so hard, and suffered so much, to gain, the Church in the first half of the twentieth century preserved the tradition it had begun in its kyoouch'on and concentrated on its own community of believers, almost ignoring the larger society surrounding it.

"Ignore" is probably too strong a word. A better description of Korean Catholic behavior in the first half of the twentieth century is that Catholics tried not to make waves, tried not to antagonize those wielding secular authority, whether they were Korean or Japanese. In other words, they tried to live in accordance with the Biblical injunction to "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."15

The relative lack of attention paid to the secular affairs on the peninsula during this period may be partially due to the fact that foreigners rather than Koreans dominated the leadership of the Korean Catholic Church. Bishop Mutel from France was overall head of the Church hierarchy in Korea from 1891 until 1933, when he was replaced by another Frenchman, Adrien Larribreau. There were no Korean bishops on Korean soil until 1942. Moreover, Catholic priests in Korea were more likely to be French, German, American or Irish than Korean until the early 1940s, when most foreign missionaries were expelled by the Japanese.

This foreign-led church did not devote much of its resources to educational outreach, unlike the Protestant churches which, soon after the first Protestant missionaries arrived in 1884, began establishing schools which quickly made significant contributions to Korea's first strides toward modernity. The first Christian school in Korea was not a Protestant school but a Catholic seminary established by French missionaries in a potters' village (a kyoouch'on) in 1855. However, that seminary was shut down in the persecution which began in 1866 and took the lives of thousands of Korean Catholics as well as of nine of their twelve French priests (the other three fled the country to safety in China).

After the persecution of French missionaries ended with the signing of the treaty between France and Korea in 1886, French missionaries, who had been operating underground to escape the persecution which had earlier taken the lives of twelve of their compatriots, came out from underground and began establishing schools in Seoul and elsewhere. However, not only did they open schools at a much slower rate than their Protestant competition did, they focused more on

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orphanages, night schools, and vocational schools and on religious education for Catholic children than on introducing the latest knowledge from the West which Korea needed for its modernization. The priests from France were more concerned with producing devout Catholics than with educating the future leaders of a modern Korean society. In fact, Bishop Mutel even went so far as to explicitly reject a suggestion by a devout Korean Catholic activist, An Chung-gün (1879-1910), that the Church establish a university in Korea. According to An, the Bishop told him that higher education would be detrimental to the faith of Korea’s Catholic. As a result, the Catholic Church in Korea failed to establish the private secondary and post-secondary schools, which generate some of the unofficial personal networks out of which civil society is formed.

The Catholic Church in first half of the twentieth century also missed an opportunity to contribute to the emergence of civil society when it refused to support private political activity, particularly activity resisting Japanese imperialism. In fact, many of the statements and actions of the leaders of the Korean Catholic Church seem to have actually hindered the emergence of civil society by condemning political activity not authorized by the government in power. At least, that was the Catholic position Koreans could infer from the editorial stance of the Catholic newspaper Kyônghyang simmun in the years leading up to Japan’s annexation of Korea in 1910, and from the stance the Catholic Church adopted in the 1930s toward the Japanese demand that Koreans participate in Shinto rituals honoring the Japanese emperor.

The Kyônghyang simmun began publishing in 1906, at a time when Korea’s very existence as an independent nation was in mortal danger. Nevertheless, this Korean newspaper, whose official editor-in-chief was Fr. Florian Demange of the Paris Society for the Foreign Missions, did not encourage its readers to resist encroaching Japanese imperialism. Quite the contrary. Its editorials, reflecting the official Catholic position that Catholics should obey the directives of legally constituted governments, explicitly condemned the righteous armies which rebelled against Japanese encroachment, labeling their resistance to the Japanese seizure of political power on the peninsula not only ineffective but also improper. Despite this pro-government stance, the Kyônghyang simmun did not survive the annexation. The Japanese colonial government forced it to cease operation on December 30, 1910.

Though the French hierarchy of the Korean Catholic Church was willing to work with colonial authorities, many Korean Catholics were not. Separation of...

16 No Kil-myông, Katt’olik kwa Chosôn bugi saboe pyöndong [The Catholic Church and social change in the latter half of the Chosôn dynasty] (Seoul: Seoul: Koryô taehakkyo minjok munhwa yön’guso, 1988), pp.223-228; Ch’oe Sŏk-u, Han’guk Ch’’onjukkyohoe t’’i yóksa [The History of the Catholic Church in Korea], (Seoul: Han’guk kyohoesa yön’guso, 1982), pp. 347-351.


church and state for those nationalistic Catholics meant that they did not have to obey the dictates of their spiritual leaders in political affairs. One such nationalist was An Chung-gun. On October 26, 1909, ignoring the warnings of his spiritual advisors to avoid excessive involvement in secular affairs, An shot and killed Ito Hirobumi, one of the founders of the Japanese empire. Bishop Mutul pronounced An a murderer, excommunicated him, and even attempted to keep An from meeting with a priest to confess his sins before he was executed by the Japanese. Other Catholic nationalists were not deterred, however. One of the 105 men charged in 1912 with conspiring to assassinate Governor-General Terauchi was Yi Ki-dang, a devout Catholic. After his release from prison, Yi fled to Manchuria where he devoted himself to organizing armed resistance to the Japanese. However, like An, Yi was excommunicated from his church for attempting the violent overthrow of a colonial government the Korean Catholic Church officially recognized as legitimate.

21 Those displays of official Church disapproval of anti-government activism did not stop some of the young Korean men studying to be priests from joining the March 1st demonstrations for Korean independence in 1919. However, they were expelled from the seminary for their actions.

The activism of those few Catholic nationalists does not seem to have contributed much to the growth of civil society in Korea, since they received little support from their church. Most of Korea's Catholics appear to have sided more with the apolitical stance of their priests and bishops than with the anti-Japanese stance adopted by An, Yi, and the demonstrating seminarians. When Protestant and Ch'ondogyo leaders declared Korea's independence from Japanese rule on March 1, 1919, there were no Catholics among the singers of that declaration and relatively few Catholics (no more than 53) among the thousands arrested for demonstrating in support of that declaration. During the decades Korea was suffering under Japanese colonial rule, the Korean Catholic Church, particularly its hierarchy, appeared satisfied with the space it had carved out for autonomy in religious affairs. It saw no need to risk conflict with secular authorities by expanding on that autonomy and taking an active role in

20 Pae Se-yong (Marcel Pelisse), "Han'gukses Pali woebang chon'gyo ui son'gyo Pangch'im," [The proselytizing strategy of the Paris Society for the Foreign Missions in Korea] Han'guk Kyohoea nonnum chip, 1, pp. 761-62. On August 21, 1993, Cardinal Kim Su-hwan revoked An's excommunication and reinstated him in the Catholic Church, declaring that the assassination of Ito Hirobumi was not a sin but was instead a righteous expression of love of country. KOREA NEWREVIEW, vol. 22, no. 35 (August 28, 1993), pp.32.
21 Ch'oe Sok-u, Han'guk Ch'onjungyohoe ui yǒksa [The history of the Korean Catholic Church] (Seoul: Han'guk kyohoea yǒn'guso, 1982), p. 363.
22 Ch'oe Sok-u, Han'guk Ch'onjungyohoe ui yǒksa, p. 365.
23 Ch'oe Sok-u, Han'guk Ch'onjungyohoe ui yǒksa, p.366.
society at large, whether as educators or as anti-imperialists. This was a period in the history of the Roman Catholic Church when Rome stressed accommodation rather than confrontation with non-Christian cultures. Though less than a century and a half earlier Korea’s first Catholics had suffered martyrdom for their refusal to conform to the ritual demands of their government, in the 1930s Korea’s Catholics were told by the Pope that not only could they show respect for their ancestors with the traditional chesa ritual, they were also permitted to engage in a Shinto ritual which the Church defined as a secular ceremonial display of respect for the Japanese emperor. This policy of accommodation to secular authority meant that Catholic contributions to the creation of a civil society during the Japanese colonial rule were minimal.

Nor was there much change in this passive stance when Japanese overlords were replaced by American administrators and then by Syngman Rhee and his minions. Even the brief rise of the devout Catholic layman John Chang Myŏn (1899-1966) to the prime ministership in 1960 did not produce a shift toward a more active involvement by the church in social issues. However, in the 1960s, as Korea began its transformation from an agrarian rural society into an industrial urban society, the Catholic attitude toward Korean society began to change as well. The first evidence of that change came in 1958, when a Young Catholic Workers’ Association was established on the initiative of a visiting bishop, Bishop Joseph Cardign. In 1966, another organization, the Korean Catholic Rural Youth Movement, was created to concentrate on the problems of young farmers. The next year, 1967, the Korean Bishops’ Conference established the Korean Catholic Justice and Peace Commission as a further sign that Korea’s Catholic Church was awakening to the social gospel. At first, these three organizations did not have much impact outside of church circles, perhaps because the dominant figure in the Korean Church until he retired in 1968 was the relatively passive Bishop Paul Ro Ki-nam, a man who had become bishop of Seoul when the Japanese expelled his French predecessor. Bishop Ro’s replacement as the archbishop of the Seoul archdiocese was Kim Suhwan, a man more comfortable with church involvement in political, social, and economic issues. Bishop Kim (he was elevated to Cardinal Kim in 1969) led the church down a new path, one which brought the Church back into the battle to create a civil society.

The Church and the expansion of civil society


25 Kim Mal-ying, "Hyŏndaeha Han'guk Ch'ŏngjongyohoe wa nodong undong," [The Korean Catholic Church and the labor movement], Han'guk kyohoea nommun ch'ip, 1, pp. 317-334; Ch'ŏng Ho-kyŏng, "Hyŏndaeha Han'guk Ch'ŏngjongyohoe wa nongmin undong" [The Korean Catholic Church and the farmers’ movement], ibid., pp. 335-361; Han Yong-hŭi, "Hyŏndaeha Han'guk Ch'ŏngjongyohoe ŭi changgi-in'gwŏn undongsa" [A history of the movement for justice and human rights] and the Korean Catholic Church today], ibid., pp. 363-430.
Cardinal Kim had been the pastoral director of the Young Catholic Workers' Organization, so it is perhaps not surprising that the first Catholic challenge to entrenched power in the modern era arose from a labor dispute. In 1967 workers at a textiles plant on Kanghwa island organized a labor union, only to meet resistance from their employer. They were successful in winning formal recognition for their union only after the Korean Catholic Bishops' Conference issued a public statement in 1968 supporting the right of workers to organize. Though it did carve out some space for civil society on the factory floor, that was a relatively moderate action, especially compared to the activities of Bishop Chi Hak-sun of Wŏnju and other more radical Catholic clerics and laymen in the 1970s.

In 1971 Bishop Chi began using his pulpit to condemn political corruption and demand social justice. After the 1972 "revitalizing reforms" of Park Chung-hee, which gave President Park dictatorial powers, Bishop Chi grew more outspoken and may have even financially supported a student movement to overthrow the Park dictatorship. At least, that is what the Park government claimed when they jailed Bishop Chi in July, 1974, convicted him of crimes against the state, and kept him in prison until February of 1975. The arrest of Bishop Chi reminded Catholics of the persecution their church had endured during the Chosŏn dynasty and convinced many of them that they were facing the greatest challenge to religious freedom the Catholic Church in Korea had confronted since the late nineteenth century. Even those who did not agree with Bishop Chi's politics believed that they had to defend his right to speak and act as his conscience dictated. They held special masses and prayer meetings throughout the country to call for the release of the bishop and for a more just society and government. Activist priests went further and formed their own Korean Priests' Association for the Realization of Justice to wage their own battle for social justice and democracy, free of the relative restraint of the Korean Catholic Justice and Peace Commission which was under the control of moderate bishops. The Catholic lay community also rallied to the defense of the defense of one of their own, the poet Kim Chi-ha, who was jailed along with Bishop Chi, accused of being a communist revolutionary, and condemned to death.

The Korean Catholic church, or at least a highly visible part of its clergy and laity, began more openly and more frequently to actively intervene on the side of workers, farmers, students and others who were fighting against the Park dictatorship and its violations of human rights. The Catholic Church had grown to be a million strong by 1974. By throwing the weight of that membership behind the struggle for democracy, the church strengthened the movement to restrict the power of the government and expand the range of civil society. For example, in 1975 the Catholics Church joined many other individuals and organizations in openly supporting the Tonga Ilbo newspaper in its fight for freedom of the press. And on

26 Han, pp.373-374.

March 1, 1976, Cardinal Kim’s Myŏngdong Cathedral was the site of a joint Protestant-Catholic Declaration for National Salvation, which called for the Park regime to accept responsibility for human rights abuses and resign. That March 1 declaration established a precedent: the cathedral came to be seen as a visible symbol of civil society, as a sanctuary from which dissident groups (whether they had any formal connection with the Catholic Church or not) could mount challenges to government authority in relative safety. (The police were reluctant to enter the cathedral grounds to arrest demonstrators without the permission of church authorities, although there was no explicit legal barrier to doing so.)

Korean Catholic activism intensified in the 1980s, stimulated by the Kwangju massacre of May 1980 which solidified the seizure of the government by General, later president, Chun Doohwan. Korean Catholics were, of course, not the only ones horrified by that attack by South Korean Special Forces on the peninsula’s fifth largest city. However, Catholic activists were responsible for smuggling out of that unfortunate city many of the eyewitness accounts which let the rest of Korea, and the rest of the world, know the details of the tragic events which occurred there. The Japanese Catholic Council for Justice and Peace, translating into English material it received from Korea, became a major source of information about Kwangju during the early 1980s, when it was dangerous for anyone in South Korea to discuss openly how many had died and how they had been killed. Moreover, in a

clear sign that the Korean Catholic church had grown concerned with much more than narrow issues of religious freedom, in 1982 Catholic churches throughout the peninsula began observing the second Sunday in Advent as "Human Rights Sunday." And when the Pope made his historic visit to Korea in May of 1984 (no pope had ever visited Korea before), Kwangju was one of the few cities he visited.

The Kwangju massacre is just one of many political issues the Korean Catholic Church has spoken out on since the early 1980s. For example, Catholic organizations were among the founding members of the United Minjung Movement for Democracy and Unification, an umbrella organization established in 1985 to right the wrongs of the Chun Doohwan regime. And hunger strikes by Catholic priests helped galvanize public sentiment against Chun’s stonewalling of constitutional reform in April 1987. One sign of the new political activism of the Korean Catholic Church is that Myŏngdong Cathedral was one of the major staging grounds for the demonstrations demanding free elections and a democratic constitution in 1987. Moreover, both priests and nuns were visible in the front lines of the demonstrating crowds, which filled the streets of Seoul and other South Korean

28 Han, pp. 385-388; Kang, p. 113.

cities that June. That is quite a contrast with the behavior of Catholic lay people as well as priests and nuns in the demonstrations of March 1, 1919.

With this change in how it saw its relationship with the state and in how it viewed active involvement with secular issues, the Roman Catholic Church in Korea began once again to contribute to the emergence of civil society on the Korean peninsula. By supporting organizations of young Catholic workers and farmers, and by speaking out against government policies it considered unacceptable, it helped provide legitimacy for all citizens' organizations which acted independently of, and sometimes against, the government. Though the first Catholic missionaries came to Korea to save souls, not to introduce democracy, by declaring publicly and repeatedly that there were limits to state authority, they helped pave the way for a more limited and a more responsive government. When more recent generations of Catholic leaders began arguing that restrictions on the power of the state should be matched by an expansion of the rights of citizens, they helped foster the growth of a civil society in the space vacated by the retreat of state power. Joining hands with students, workers, farmers, intellectuals, and Protestant activists, the Korean Catholic Church has helped bring about the modernization of Korean political life. The civil society of South Korea today has its origins in the struggle of Catholics two centuries ago to follow their religious convictions without political interference. And the success of civil society over the last decade in forcing the government to pay attention to the voices of those it governs is partially a result of the struggle of Catholics to voice their political convictions despite government attempts to silence them.32 A church with a reputation for being more authoritarian than democratic has, in South Korea at least, proven to be a powerful promoter of human rights and a major factor behind the birth of civil society and the democracy which accompanies it.

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32 One Catholic layman who had been particularly persistent in demanding that government be accountable to those it governs is now the president of South Korea. Kim Dae-jung's election in December, 1997, marked an historic turning point in the democratization of Korea, since not only was he the first opposition leader to assume the reins of government in a peaceful transfer of power, he had to survive assassination attempts in the 1970s as well as several months on death row in the early 1980s to do so. Though he did not run as the official candidate of the Catholic Church (in fact, his leading challenger was also a Catholic), his victory provides one more piece of evidence that Korean Catholics have made major contributions to the rise of civil society and the realization of democracy on the southern half of the Korean peninsula.
**WHICH CHRISTIANITY?**

**THE GOSPEL, CULTURE, AND THE PROBLEM OF CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION IN KOREA**

CHAI-SIK CHUNG

The rapid expansion of Christianity in Korea in the last half of the twentieth century has been a remarkable phenomenon in the recent history of Christianity. This expansion is especially notable because, with its shamanistic, Taoist, Buddhist, and Confucian legacies, Korea was for many years a country culturally quite remote from the West. Until the 1880s, the fact that Korea was the last remaining Confucian society more orthodox than China was the pride of the country. Because it was tucked away from oceanic trade routes, Korea was more belatedly exposed to Christianity than China and Japan, but since the initial contact, Christianity has had a far greater impact in Korea than in China or Japan. What can we make of this remarkable phenomenon looking at it from a long-range, holistic perspective? In delineating the broad outlines of the expansion of Christianity in Korean society, the central question I ask is whether Korean Christianity has manifested the authentic principle of Christian transcendence, and whether all is well on the much touted front of thriving expansion. This is to ask whether, beneath outward impressions of phenomenal growth, Korean Christianity is infected with some problems that adversely impact the quality of witness to the authentic truth of Christianity.

**The Faith of the Pioneer Christian Leaders**

The Pioneer Protestant missionaries – American Methodists and Presbyterians – first arrived in Korea in 1884, whereas Catholicism (called Chönjahak or Teaching of the Heavenly Lord) was introduced in 1784 when Yi Sùng-hun (1756-1801) brought the new faith to his country after being baptized in Peking. When Catholicism arrived in Korea (then known as the “Hermit Kingdom” because of its age-old seclusion policy), the alien religion immediately became embroiled in a collision course with the Confucian state and was condemned as a “barbarous” and “heterodox” religion allied with a foreign force that threatened the state and the family. Unlike the inauspicious timing of the arrival of Catholicism, Protestantism (called Yesugyo, Teaching of Jesus) came to Korea when the country had been increasingly exposed to foreign demands for diplomatic and trade relations and a handful of progressive leaders and high government officials had begun to transform the hackneyed Korean tradition by accommodating Western civilization.
By this time the Korean people were just beginning to learn that the Protestant missionaries were the “American teacher[s]” who represented the “American religion” (American Protestantism), which was different from Catholicism.33

To avoid the sad experience of Catholicism’s arrival involving the factional politics of the country, the Protestant missionaries went out of their way to market their public image as those who came to aid the Korean people. In a way, Catholicism had “in many respects done a preliminary work” for the Protestant missionaries by showing the difficulties involved in moving into Korea.34 Through services such as medicine, nursing, and education rather than “distinctly religious teaching,” the missionaries managed to convince the Koreans of their “philanthropic motive.”35

To avoid giving the impression that they were forerunners of Western imperialism, as was the case in so many other places in the world, they refrained from resorting to diplomatic force and treaty enforcement as much as possible. Thanks to such cordial attitudes, a law-abiding spirit, and an unobtrusive way, the missionaries managed by 1888 to impress the Koreans that they were “the only friends” Koreans had in their own land.36

From the 1880s, the first decade of the Protestant movement, to the eventful period that culminated in Japan’s conquest of Korea in 1910, the yangban elite were divided between the various progressive reformers and the rigid traditionalists on the question of how they should cope with the rapidly changing world. First, the recalcitrant conservative voice that defended the social order at any cost was muffled by the progressives’ battle cry for power and wealth. Much like the Chinese “Self-Strengtheners” and the Japanese “Civilization and Enlightenment” advocates, these reformers advocated the accepting of merely workable functional means such as science and technology from the West (sŏgi) that were compatible with Confucian values and institutions (tongdo). But in time, enlightenment or kuehwa advocates came to discover that the West’s superiority really lay in its education, science, and technology, which, in turn, rested upon the cultural foundation of Western culture, namely, Christianity. Among others, such men as Kim Ok-kyun (1851-1893), Pak Yong-hyo 1861-1939), Sŏ Kwang-bôm (1859-?), and Sŏ Chae-p’il (Philip Jaisohn in English, 1864-1951) were most famous among those who were inclined to accommodate Christianity because it offered a convenient means for modernization.37 The missionaries’

33 S. F. Moore, Seoul, to F. F. Ellinwood, no. 21 (3 May 1894), Archives of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America, New York, N.Y. (hereafter cited as “P. USA”).
34 D.L. Gifford, Seoul, to Ellinwood, no. 60 (November 2, 1892), P. USA.
35 Allen, Legation to Korea, Washington, D.C., to Ellinwood, no. 30 (11 June 1888), P. USA.
36 ibid., Allen, Yokohama, Japan, to Ellinwood, no. 58 (20 December 1889), P. USA; H.N. Allen, Seoul, to Ellinwood, no. 58 (October 24, 1892), P. USA.
37 Chai-sik Chung, “Tradition and Ideology: Korea’s Initial Response to Christianity from a Religious and Sociological Perspective,” Asia
primary goal, however, was to proclaim “the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” They were eager for the conversion of heathens. The missionaries opened schools, orphanages, and hospitals, and other useful undertakings in Korea, all of which were geared to help achieve the “evangelization of the natives.”

The missionaries were uncomfortable with the Korean enlightenment leaders’ pragmatic perception of and motive to accommodate Christianity, which was incompatible with the consecrated principles and motives of the missionaries. Despite their willingness to appear interested in philanthropy, the fundamental policy of American foreign missions in the 19th century was focused upon the gospel alone, regarding social development merely as a by-product of evangelization. This was evident in the stances taken by Rufus Anderson (1796-1880) and his followers such as Robert E. Speer and John L. Nevius, who were critical of the paternalist, cultural imperialist attitude of identifying the spread of Christian civilization with world evangelization. They emphasized evangelism and the policy of encouraging local autonomy. While this was a laudable policy, unwittingly it was liable to neglect the dimension of social justice and social concerns that is integral to the gospel. Also, despite the declaration of the Methodist missionaries that “we preach not medical skills, nor English, nor Western learning, but Christ Jesus and Him crucified,” the missionaries were the unwitting bearers of American culture, social institutions, and political ideas. Thanks to the general trend of thought characteristic of their time, they themselves proudly associated Western civilization and progress with Christian beliefs. Because of its cultural identification with the West, the early Christian movement in Korea changed its course as national feelings toward things Western either rose or fell. An especially important variable was the fluctuation of the direct influence or presence of the West (particularly the United States vis-à-vis Japanese, Russian and Chinese influences) in the country. For example, church growth during the period between 1945 and 1961 was facilitated by the presence of the American military force and the military government, which was associated by Koreans as a power

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38 Minutes of the Ninth Annual Meeting of the Korean Mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church, held at Seoul, August 31, September 8, 1893, ed. George Heber Jones (Seoul: Trilingual Press, 1893), p. 36.
39 F. Ohlinger, Seoul, to A.B. Leonard, 1889, Archives of the Methodist Episcopal Church, ed., George Heber Jones, p. 36.
40 W. W. Rockhill to Bayard, no. 58 (5 February 1887), IV, Korea Dispatches, The United States Department of State National Archives.
41 David J. Bosch, Transforming Mission (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), pp. 298-302; Ok Sung-duk [Oak Sung Deuk], “Han’guk changno kyohoei ch’ogi sŏn’gyo Ch’ŏngch’ae’l (1884-1903) [The early missionary policy of the Korean Presbyterian Church], Han’guk kidokkyo wa yŏksa [Korean Christianity and history] (The Institute of Korean Church History Publication Series vol. 9) (Seoul: Han’guk kidokkyo yŏksa yŏnguso, 1998), pp. 117-123.
42 Minutes of the Ninth Annual Meeting of the Korean Mission, p. 36.
friendly to Christianity. It was also during the period of rule by the Methodist President Syngman Rhee since 1948 and the subsequent brief tenure of the Roman Catholic premier John Chang Myun, who was ousted by the military coup d'état of 1961, that Christianity found a climate quite favorable to growth. The story of the decline and fall of the Christian church in North Korea under Soviet influence and North Korean communist rule is too self-evident to reiterate here.

The definite turn of the tide for Christianity was the decline of the Chinese influence on Korea in the wake of the Sino-Japanese war and the aborted attempts of the Tonghak (Eastern Learning) movement to challenge the old order, both of which had paved the way for the so-called Kabo Reform Movement (1894-1896). The missionaries did not operate in isolation but happened to be involved with the pro-American progressive leaders, reformist high government officials, and American diplomats; such mutually expedient relations helped the marvelous success of the initial Protestant missions in Korea. But the price they paid was the danger of politicization and an image they displayed that “the Christians are partisans of the West and of Western civilization, and are not true Koreans any more.” Since the end of the nineteenth century, has persisted the image that Christian communities are segmented ghettos of imported Western cultures standing in sharp contrast to hackneyed but mainline ways of life associated with shamanism, Buddhism, and Confucianism.

Anti-Christian critics reviled Christianity as a barbarian religion and Christian converts as dependents of a foreign power who lost their independence. In reality, however, many of them converted to Christianity because they believed Christian faith could help them find a dynamic and refreshing alternative to their moribund religious tradition and a true way to a new strong Korea. They were nationalists who were eager to emulate but not subject themselves to the West. The evidence of the political character of conversion of early nationalistic Korean Protestant leaders and their followers is plentiful. Among the best-known Protestant worthies were Sŏ Chae-p’il, Yun Ch’i-ho (1865-1945), and Yi Sung-man (Syngman Rhee, 1875-1965), who were all educated in America and played leading roles in the Independence Club. Despite their early education in Confucian classics, all these men attacked Chu Hsi Confucian orthodoxy and the old Confucian society as passé and turned to Protestantism, apparently in an attempt to find an alternative means to revitalize and modernize their beloved country.

First, let us look at Sŏ Chae-p’il, the founder of the Independence Club (Tongnip hyŏphoe, 1896-1898), a modern

44 Young Ick Loe, Kabo kyŏngjang yŏn’gu [Studies of the Kabo Reform Movement] (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1999), Chap. 1, 2, 4, 5; Allen to Ellinwood, Seoul, no. 35 (19 July 1883), P. USA.
46 See the Enlightenment (Kaebwa) Party’s view of Protestantism in Yi Kwang-nin (Lee Kwang-nin) in Han’guk kaebwa sanang yŏn’gu [Studies on Korean enlightenment thought] (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1979), pp. 199-238.
movement which promoted the ideas of independence, self-strengthening, and democracy. In becoming a Christian Sô believed that “the Protestant form of Christianity” would be “best suited for the development of the moral and spiritual initiatives of the Korean people” and for inculcating a new civic morality and love of freedom, justice, and rights among his people. This came from Sô’s conviction that Christianity had played a crucial role in the historical evolution of Western civilization. Accordingly, exposing the Korean folly of pursuing merely the branches (i.e., Western functional means) by forsaking the roots, that is, Christianity, which was the foundation of Western civilization, Sô made a plea to his compatriots to strive to accept Christianity as the new ideological foundation of the nation.47

For Yun Ch’i-ho, the prominent Christian lay leader, educator, and modernizer, and the first baptized Korean Methodist (in 1887), America represented the height of Protestantism and forces associated with modernity such as capitalism, science, technology, education, and civil society. Perhaps he was the foremost of the reformers in consciously following a Western model. Establishing easy continuities between Protestantism and modernization, Yun could not distinguish the authentic Christian message, or the “kernel,” from the “husk” of Western cultural accretions. The question of de-Westernization — extracting the kernel of the Christian message from the husk of Western culture by translating the essential message into his inherited language, culture, and society — was not a problem for him. His ultimate concern was to introduce “peaceful self-reformation” and “internal revolution” in corrupt government and decrepit social institutions by dialectically confronting his inherited tradition, particularly fossilized Confucianism,48 which he condemned as “powerless and therefore useless.”49 “Only Protestantism,” not the corrupt government, he declared, was fit to assume the task of “restoring the moral fibre of the people.”50 Yun found in particular the Confucian teaching of “the inferiority of women, of the absolute submission to kings, of its everlasting ‘go-backism’” and the oppressive moral obligations based on the hierarchical traditional status society distasteful and outmoded.51

Yun lashed out at the lack of interest in “public spirit” (res publica) and “altruism” in Confucianism where such spirit is confined to the “supreme” duties of

47 Philip Jaisohn, My Days in Korea and Other Essays, ed. Sun-pyo Hong (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1999), p. 207; see also pp. 180, 184, 259-270; idem, “What Korea needs most,” The Korea Repository 3, March 1896; “Nonsol,” Tongnip sinmun, 12 September 1899.


49 12 December 1893 in vol. 3 of Yun Ch’i-ho ilgi [Yun Ch’i-ho’s diary] (Han’guk saryo ch’ongso, no. 25), 7 vols. (Seoul: Kuksa P’y’onch’’an wiwonhoe, 1973-86).

50 30 March 1889 in vol. 1. Ibid. See also, 24 September 1893 in vol. 3, Ibid.

51 12 December 1893 in vol. 3, 14 February 1890 in vol. 2; 11 March 1894 in vol. 3; 27 May 1904 in vol. 6, Ibid.
the Five Relations “within the four walls of one’s house.”52 Yun also condemned Confucian morality for admittedly no “vox
populi” [the voice of the people] and because “the Korean [Confucian] officials barter away the dearest interest of their
country just to enrich their dirty selves.”53 When he thus criticized Confucianism and the Korean religious tradition for their
prevalent tendency to privatize religion by submerging social consciousness, he was in
effect introducing a new awareness of sin in its Western historical context, alternative
worldviews and values, and a new concept of political theology. In the soul of this
pioneer leader we find not only the conflict between the inherited past and the learned
new values, but also the problem of balancing the virtue of cultural continuity and the virtue of liberating the people from
oppression and injustice. These twin questions would challenge the creativity of modern theological thinking in the years to
come and continue so to do.

Syngman Rhee, the first President of the Republic of Korea and a committed
lifelong nationalist leader, was baptized in 1905 just before his matriculation into The
George Washington University in

America. At about this time young Rhee made his pledge that he would devote
himself to spreading Christian education “to raise the moral standard of the Korean
people.” 54 He believed that with its “dynamism for reform (pyonhyoek banin
him) Christianity would help his people to gain “a power to do new things out of their
own accord” so that his country might regain independence.55 Like his seniors Sŏ
and Yun, Rhee found in the new dynamic
reformist spirit inherent in Christianity symbolic resources which would help
shape new values and attitudes needed for the reconstruction of the Korean nation.
With a strong faith in the non-violent, evolutionary philosophy of progress, growth, and becoming, he believed in the
power of education to reform the moral condition of his people. Rhee, as other
pioneer Christian nationalist leaders, determined that building an independent and modern Korea and answering the
question of individual self-reform through Christianity were tandem concerns that
could not be thought of or resolved in isolation from one another.

These Protestant cultural reformers lived in times of tremendous change and
unrest marked by uncertainties and anxieties, but they tried to keep their faith

52 18 and 27 September 1894 in vol. 3, Ibid. It is interesting that as late as 1909 in its editorial The
Hwangssŏng sinman [The Capital Gazette, 23 March
praising the spirit of public service, universal philanthropy, and mutual help which some
American Protestant missionaries had exemplified in their lives, it criticized that East Asian
Confucians merely paid lip service to the Confucian morality of humanity and righteousness without
actually putting them into practice.
53 6 April 1902 in vol. 5; 11 March 1894 and 27
September 1894 in vol. 3, Ibid.
54 Yi Sŏngman, Ch'ôngnyŏn Yi Sŏng-man chasŏjon
[The autobiography of young man Syngman Rhee],
trans. with notes by Yi Chŏng-sik (Lee Chong-sik),
in Sin Tong'ŏ (September 1965): 425-426. Quoted in
Yu Yong-ik (Lew Young-ick), Yi Sŏng-man ui sam
kwa kkum [Syngman Rhee's life and dream] (Seoul:
55 Yi Sŏng-man (Syngman Rhee), “Yesugyo ka
taehan changnae uk kicho’” [Christianity is the
foundation of Korea’s future], Sinbak wŏlbo (August
in the future of their country and in the formative power of religion and education to assist the gradual but steady progress of their society. They thought such an approach was more becoming to their Christian understanding of human beings and history than resorting to either violent military resistance or suffering a courageous martyrdom for faith. As Yi Kwang-su (1892-?), a prominent intellectual and writer in modern Korea, declared, “Christianity brought to Korea the dawning light of [Western or modern] civilization.” For him, especially noteworthy were Christianity’s promotion of civil morality and of democratic education, its uplifting of women’s position, and its discovery of the usefulness of the vernacular han’gul. The Protestant reformers were certainly the harbingers of the dawn of hope, and they committed themselves to forging a new path in the wilderness of their modern history. To these men who recognized that “the one hope of the country lies in the power of Christianity and Christian education,” Christianity was “essentially an emancipating religion” that “leads inevitably to the desire for free government and pure and popular institutions.”

Which Christianity?: A Tale of Two Christian Ways

Has the promising Christian beginning in Korea had a happy ending? Has Korean Protestantism been able to reach the promised land after wandering in the wilderness for a century? Have Protestants realized their dreams of applying the “principle of reform” that they had discovered in Christianity? It appears at this time that a good ending is more difficult than a good beginning and that it is hard to find the convincing evidence of the fulfillment of the early dreams. So, what went wrong?

In delineating with a large brush the structural forces that have impacted the development of Christianity in Korea, we are sure to miss their subtle shades. Yet, it is helpful to look into the way in which the patterned cultural ways and social institutions influence present cultural and social patterns. First, let us look at the inherited cultural and social characteristics. Take the case of Neo-Confucianism, the state ideology of the Choson dynasty with its sacrifices to the altar of land and grain (satik) and the cultural values symbolized by paired symbols – “father” and “king.” It extolled the twin virtues of filial piety and loyalty rooted in an inviolable nature that could not be challenged by human choice but which were only to be obeyed for social integration. As we have seen, deeply

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embedded in such "natural groups" as the family, village, schools, and the royal system of rule, Confucianism has predominantly supported the social status quo and encouraged harmonic adjustment to the world, rather than a prophetic challenge to change it. Buddhism, too, which had been bereft of its potential for universal transcendentalism under the Koryô state's patronage, further suffered a serious adulteration and ill-fated destiny during the Chosôn era by accommodating superstitious and this-worldly folk beliefs. The Buddhist karmic concepts of reward and punishment also ended up producing Buddhists who dutifully supported the priesthood and obeyed the powers-that-be. Shamanism has been at the core of popular religion for centuries, but like the two historical religions in decline, it was in no shape to give spiritual nourishment and social directive to the people who were caught in a difficult and confusing age of transition. With its predominantly this-worldly secular mentality, it became a helplessly blessings-bound religiosity reminiscent of the Korean proverb, "Eat the pheasant and have its eggs too," for no one can serve God and worldly goods together.

The religious situation thus characterized led Foreign Missions to conclude in 1923 that the Korean "ancient religions are moribund and form but feeble barriers to the progress of the Gospel."\(^58\) Yet the composite traditional religious culture made up of diverse elements of the inherited religions persisted and would eventually overshadow the nature and the pattern of Christian development in Korea.\(^59\)

The Christian progressives were a relatively few intellectuals out of touch with popular opinion who were painfully conscious of their self-assigned role to salvage their country from its sad plight. To them, the Christian concept of the free and responsible individual, its transcendental message, and creative energy seemed to promise a convincing theory and effective methods for social reform and the modernization of Korea. But their reasoned voices were almost drowned out by a general clamor of the masses for the mundane and habitual.

As time advanced, missionaries began to reach out to the non-literate peasant stock and women to increase members, who soon comprised the majority of the converts. One of the most important contributions missionaries made was the rejuvenation of the neglected vernacular han'gul so that all believers could read the Bible and hymns more easily rather than through difficult Chinese characters. This came from the missionaries' conviction that "genuine education lies with the many rather than with the few."\(^60\) Using the Bible as "the

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58 Foreign Missions, Chosen 1923, P.USA., p. 113. It is interesting that Yi Kwang-su's evaluation of the contemporary Korean religious situation coincided with the missionary's, see "Sin saenghwallon" [On New Life] in Yi Kwang-su chônjip, 17: 546-549.


60 "The Educational Needs of Korea," The Korea Review 6 (1904): 45; Yi Kwang-su, "The benefits which Christianity has conferred on Korea," p. 35; George Heber Jones, What Koreans Say about Our Use of Their Language (Seoul: The Trilingual Press,
text book,” the education of the whole Christian population was “undertaken systematically,” and the whole population was “saturated with a knowledge of the Bible.” Thus, Bible study and Bible training classes constituted “the most unique and most important factor in the development of the Korean Church.”

Thanks to this effort for common education, the level of literacy among Christians was incomparably higher than that of the non-Christian population.

Nevertheless, the Korean converts were usually lower class and very much used to superstitious propitiation of ubiquitous spirits out of fear and the worship of ancestors. While the Japanese traditional elite samurai became Christians, giving Christians status and prestige, in Korea this was not the case. In Korea many Christian converts were of peasant origin and many native clergy were relatively undereducated and unqualified with only crash courses in the Bible. The problem with Korean Protestantism and even Catholicism was that because of this particular social attribute the churches became a hotbed to perpetuate the religious cultural habits of the people – firmly embedded in folk religious tradition, which was a curious blend of shamanistic, Confucian, and Buddhist elements – in Christian disguise. To win the hearts of the commoners serving their needs and wants the church had begun to make Christianity more acceptable to them, accommodating various characteristics of popular religious beliefs and practices. The common folks found in exogenous Christianity an intriguing alternative to their inherited, old religions, but not at the expense of their traditions. Having been deeply immersed in traditional cultural ways, it was difficult for them to grasp the true meaning of Christianity with essentially different views of the world, human beings, and morality. Therefore, they basically continued to live according to the cultural codes of their society even when outwardly they learned to accept and follow in a perfunctory and Pharaic manner the tenets and rules laid down by the missionaries such as abstaining from smoking, drinking, adultery, and Sabbath breaking.

This led Yi Kwang-su to regret as early as 1917 that Korean churches’ over-subscription to the belief in heaven and hell, blessing oriented prayers, and the otherworldly belief in life after death were little different from the time-worn irrational and superstitious beliefs and practices of socially disinterested traditional religions. Missionaries tried to convert Koreans in their own image, but they would eventually discover, with some disillusionment, that the products of their conversion were much different. If we were to fail to notice the nature and extent of this tenacious symbiotic relationship between the traditional popular religious culture and Korean Christianity, especially

1894); S. A. Moffett, The Boys’ School Report, 1892-93, p. 4, P. USA.

61 The Korea Mission, 1910, p. 279, P. USA.


Protestantism, we would come short of grasping the essential characteristics of Korean Christianity.

One of the hallmarks of folk belief is its conspicuous edemonic character with its emphasis on right action to produce happiness or the satisfaction of human natural inclinations. Accordingly, virtue that obeys moral law becomes insignificant before nature. What folk belief seeks at all times and places is not such a thing as the universal salvation of the lone individual soul before the remote, single, high God with whom it seeks to be one – the kind of union that leads them to be ethically responsible and honest to God. Rather, what matters in folk religion are utilitarian ends such as happiness, health, prosperity, and security. Religion is good so long as it brings happiness, money, health, male children, and good harvests through such means as weather-magic, ancestral cults, and animistic magic. Popular religion is unabashedly “this-worldly” and utilitarian in orientation. Crude economic and calculating motives to manipulate spiritual powers to obtain practical ends are common to popular religion. In the world of popular religion “ethical rationalism” based upon the responsive action of the human person is a rarity.64

Deeply steeped in such tradition, the common folk were not as socially aware and politically conscious as the elitist progressives. Despite their warm acceptance of Christianity, the commoners as a whole found the reasoned ideals of the intellectual reformers who had mapped out a path for progress somewhat unfamiliar and implausible. Thus, under the overwhelming weight of the restrictive local cultural tradition, the transcendent call for creative cultural and social transformation in the fledgling church failed prematurely. As a result, the church has gradually learned to be content with supporting the status quo, simply to survive, primarily by catering to private needs of the people. This means that the church is itself now something of a this-worldly, folk-like institution. This set the stage for Korean Protestantism at large to become parochially self-absorbed and socially disinterested, as the Koryŏ Buddhist community had before it. The reformers had the will and capacity to commit themselves to the historical role of fundamentally reforming their society and their compatriots, but they were to remain through the ensuing decades only a small coterie of conscious minority set apart from the rapidly expanding rural and working class Christian population. The voice of the reformers was too weak against the clamor and scream of those who were guided by blind habits.

Christianity had already brought hope to those who had fallen victim to the chronic evils of early marriage, polygamy, the inequality of women, illiteracy, class segregation, and the trauma of the decline and fall of the nation. It also awakened Koreans to liberate themselves from drinking, smoking, superstitious practices, and other social ills. The dream of reforming Korea through Christianization,
however, went through another phase of growth. This was the rise of a peculiarly Korean form of revivalist movement marked by millenialistic faith, fervent dawn prayer meetings, and Bible study with a literal interpretation of the Scriptures. It is known as the Great Revival or "Save A Million Souls for Christ." This movement had begun in 1907 as a large Bible study conference in P'yŏngyang and lasted well over several years. It especially appealed to all of those who had been looking for a way out of their hopelessness on the eve of the loss of the nation, it spread through the country like wild fire. The Korean church, which by this time had become a self-supporting and self-governing community encouraged by what was called the "Nevius Method," came to develop its own indigenous form of revival movement. The leadership of native clergy (especially Kil Sŏn-ju) who by this time had been on "co-pastor relationship" with missionaries and were burning with an ardent patriotism geared to an eschatological hope, set the tone for the subsequent development of mainstream conservative Protestantism. Enamored by the explosive church growth, a Protestant missionary James S. Gale wrote: "The new Korea will be a Christian Korea and that within a comparatively short period of time. Churches are multiplying in all directions." 65

In time, however, what had a start in the early years as the mission of national regeneration drumming up enthusiasm for saving the country by turning to Christian faith had become something other than what the leaders had originally intended. To borrow the words of Max Weber, it had become more and more a movement that was characterized by "an increased tendency toward flight into the irrationalities of apolitical emotionalism," self-absorption, and "otherworldly withdrawal from a rational ethical concern for public affairs, dichotomizing the spiritual from the social-political. 66 This tendency to split the soul from the body in which it dwells comes from the primitive idea of spiritual beings. This in turn results from elementary religious reflections on such experiences as death, trances, visions, and dreams. The belief in the soul detachable from its "material home" develops into the beliefs in the gods or ghosts of remote ancestors, of superior persons becoming divinities, and the practice of offering foods and drink to them as sacrifices and libations to propitiate them. This kind of animism that is at the basis of ancestor-worship forms the roots of Korean religion. It has persisted for millennia and is still held dear by many Korean people even today. It is this primordial religious culture that accounts for the predominant Korean Christian tendency to separate the realm of faith and spirit neatly from the domain of everyday life fraught with ethical and social

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66 Weber, Economy and Society, 2, pp. 600-601.
responsibilities. In short, Christianity in Korea was privatized and de-politicized and lost its potential to act as a force for social change.

Interpreting the power relations in this world in a language of privatized personal devotion and millennial hope, initially the Korean Christian revivalists came to formulate the problem of salvation more in terms of either otherworldly redemption or a sudden chiliastic or millennialistic intervention of Christ in history to save them. Accordingly, most missionaries and conservative Korean church leaders interpreted the intent of Christ’s injunction “to render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s” as an encouragement of, if not indifference to, all the politico-social affairs of this world; thus they countenanced a passive apolitical endurance of Japanese colonial rule. As a result, the great imperative of being Christian by practicing the prophetic ministry of the church was displaced by privatized, ritualistic devotion and flight to an emotional, personal experience of one’s relationship to God passively enduring the oppressive rule of the Japanese.

About this, the following 1919 Annual Report of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. is revealing. Before the Japanese annexation in 1910, “the life of the Koreans was an isolated one” without any knowledge of the outside world and “the lives of the Christians were centered in their churches.” In addition, the “majority of the earlier missionaries represented a single type of theology and religious experiences,” and “the imitative Korean Christians naturally reproduced that type.” But with “the tides of modern life” sweeping through Korea, the church had come to “compete with many secular interests,” and the Korean Christians came to “freely recognize a wider variety of theological thought and Biblical interpretation than the simple-minded Koreans have ever known.” The Korean Christian church was “passing through a period of transition” which had “many promising characteristics but also many dangerous ones.” Especially, as the “rising revolutionary spirit” linked to the Wilsonian idea of “the right of self-determination” had begun to stir the imagination of young Koreans in the wake of World War I, the missionaries found themselves “in a position of peculiar difficulty and delicacy.” They faced a dire dilemma: “If they avow sympathy with the Koreans they incur the wrath of Japan and the danger of expulsion from the country. If, on the other hand, they avow sympathy with the Japanese they destroy their influence with the Koreans.” Consequently, whatever their individual inclinations might have been, the missionaries in general came to feel that “they should be careful not to identify the cause of missions with a political movement” for independence.


maintaining "strict neutrality on political subjects." This generalization, however, should not be reduced to simplistic notion that thanks to the missionary's position all the mainstream conservatives that included a wide spectrum of Christians, from lay people with evangelistic pietism to fundamentalist ministers, ended up tacitly collaborating with the Japanese authorities. On the contrary, an exceptional few of these conservatives with a single-hearted, Calvinistic, confessional faith dared to go to prison and even chose death before participating in compulsory Japanese Shinto rituals. The Presbyterian minister Chu Ki-ch’ol (1897-1944) who willingly died for his faith and patriotism was the best known martyr. But it is true that most Christians, however, had to conform, and even socially committed prominent Christians who had become the target of brutal Japanese persecution wound up collaborating with the Japanese. Under the harsh, Japanese colonial rule, most Christians in major denominations were forced to observe the Shinto rituals, rationalizing their compromise matter-of-factly that it was like following requisite social rituals.

In a way, we can understand the dynamics of the Protestant movement in Korea as an ongoing contest between a minority of socially conscious Christians and a variety of conservative majorities who held contrasting views of what Christianity was all about. Among those early, socially conscious Christian nationalist leaders were (besides Sŏ, Yun, and Rhee about whom we have already discussed) such men as Yi Sang-jae, Nam Kŭng-ŭk, and most of those Protestant leaders who assumed principal roles in the March First Independence Movement in 1919.

The increasing apolitical tendency among Korean Christians deeply bothered the intellectual reformers, who saw their conservative compatriots' turn to a personal and otherworldly pietism as an irresponsible escape from the principle of living up to the divine imperative to do God's work in the world. The critique by An Ch'ang-ho (1878-1938), a prominent nationalist leader who lived for the cause of the reconstruction of the Korean nation through education, was typical. An was a humanistic Christian who preached a kind of ethical civil religion broadly dedicated to the ideals of freedom, human rights, nonviolence, and altruistic love, but without being narrowly confined to a particular sect. To him, the renewal of his people for the cause of independence and freedom was what really mattered. Christianity and, for that matter, Gandhism and other religions and thoughts, might have been acceptable so long as they helped the cause of transforming the nation and people. He lamented the lapse of his contemporary Christians into what seemed to him age-old religious habits of the emotionalism of religious expressions, mystical quest for comfort, and egotistic self-absorption: "How in the world could

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70 Eighty-fourth Annual Report of the Presbyterian Church of the United States, 1921, p. 32.
we ever awake this stupid people!"73 For him, to be holy was nothing other than to experience the presence of God within by loving others and the nation in deed, not just in words alone.74

Another blistering critique of evangelist-fundamentalist stances was presented by Kim Kyo-sin (1901-1945), the leader of the so-called Non-Church Christian Movement (mugyohoe undong) that had begun in 1927 as an indigenous, voluntary religious movement to controvert the ways of the established Protestant denominational churches. Searching for an indigenous theology and authentic, informal Bible-centered faith community, the new movement severely criticized the narrow sacerdotal principle of extra ecclesiam nulla salus that held that salvation is not available apart from membership in a specific denominational church that controls the distribution of grace. It also criticized the fact that churchgoers had strayed from the authentic Christian way and that the hierarchically oriented and authoritarian clergy had sold out to American missionaries and their whitewashed ecclesiasticism to safeguard their vested interests. The original leaders of this movement were the disciples of Uchimura Kanzō (1861-1930), the founder of Japanese Non-Church Christianity. Like their Japanese mentor, they all emphasized the intensive study of the Bible rather than mindlessly following the ecclesiastical doctrines, rituals, and duties of the church. They were all well educated and skeptical of the uninhibited, Pentecostal, emotional expressions of religious feelings of the evangelist-fundamentalists. Unlike the blessings-bound religion of non-privileged classes, theirs was a religious movement of virtuosoi or intellectuals attempting to attain grace through autonomous and rational ethical achievement based on a particular belief in a transcendent God. Deliberately shunning the ecstasy and the emotional piety of the lower classes, they held on to an intellectual religious attitude that took the ethical and social requirements of everyday life more seriously.75

Kim and his associates such as Ham Sŏk-hŏn (1901-1989) and the Christian nationalists and liberals respectively pursued a different dream. Yet they shared a great vision and penetrating insight that Koreans were in dire need of awakening from centuries of ignorance, superstition, and selfish waywardness to the stark necessity of an independent, free, and just Korea. Ham, who succeeded Kim as the movement's leading figure, was a maverick who took a stance independent from his

73 Chu Yo-han, ed., An Tosen chŏnji [Complete works of An Ch'ang-ho], Seoul: Samjungdang, 1963), p. 28, see also pp. 26-28; for the idea of reconstruction, see pp. 102, 544-549; for the renewal of his people, see pp. 71-73; 828-839.
74 Ibid., pp. 549-552; For An's emphasis on activism that seems to have an affinity with the theory of the unity of knowledge and action emphasized by Wang Yang-ming, see p. 102.

75 No P'yŏng-gu, ed., Kim Kyo-sin chŏnji [The complete works of Kim Kyo-sin], 6 vols. (Taegu: Ilsimsa, 1981); Kye Hun-je et al., eds., Ham Sŏk-hŏn chŏnji [The complete works of Ham Sŏk-hŏn]. 20 vols. (Seoul: Han'gilsa, 1983-1988); see especially vol. 3, which covers Ham's views about Christianity and the task confronting Korean Christianity, and vol. 8 for Ham's view of istil. For a general introduction of this movement centering on Kim Kyo-sin, see Min Kyŏng-bae, Kyohoe undong minjok, pp. 310-332.
associates by developing the idea of ssial (literally ‘seeds’). The word ssial had originally been conceived by Ham’s associate, Yu Yong-mo, to render the Chinese expression chin-min (loving the people) in the Great Learning into Korean. Yu did not take chin-min in the sense of hsin-min (renewing the people), as the twelfth-century Neo-Confucian thinker Chu Hsi had. Rather, like Wang Yang-ming who had contended against Chu, Yu interpreted it to mean not only the ideas of educating but also feeding and caring for the people, fully identifying oneself with the underprivileged. It was Ham who developed this idea by spelling out the meaning of the native Korean word, ssial as one that meant the oppressed people who had long suffered tyrannous oppressions and yet were conscious of their rights and able to stand up against a tyrannical rule in the spirit of non-violence. With this Korean word which indicates the oppressed people, Ham meant to eradicate min, the more familiar word of Chinese origin that had a pejorative meaning. The idea of ssial had engendered seed, germinating into Minjung Theology, which for a while seemed to be a promising political theology for the underside emerging in the crucible of the struggles for human rights in the 1960s and 1970s.  

It is in the context of this historical origin of the ideological splits within Korean Protestantism that we should understand the later outgrowth of the rivalry between such liberals as Kim Chae-jun (1901-1987) and extreme conservatives like Pak Hyoong-nyong (Hyung Nong Park, 1897-1978) and his fellow travelers. Pak came under the influence of the American fundamentalist J. Gresham Machen under whom he had studied at Princeton Theological Seminary and became his representative in Korea. Upholding the idea of Scriptural infallibility, Pak took an adamant stance against any manifestations of liberal modernism such as the Social Gospel movement, Neo-orthodoxy, higher criticism in the study of the Bible, evolutionism, Marxist views of religion, mysticism, and non-Church Christianity. He had a calling to transmit what he thought was the correct teaching that he had received from the pioneer missionaries and his teacher Machen to his contemporary Christians.

In contrast, Kim Chae-jun, who also had studied at Princeton Theological Seminary, was more in line with the march of history. Claiming that Pak’s fundamentalism was out of touch with the times, Kim supported the ecumenical movement led by the World Council of Churches. For him, Christianity was a


77 Yu Tong-sik (Dong Shik Ryu), Han’guk sinhak ūi kwangmaek [The mineral vein of Korean theology] (Seoul: Chonmangsa, 1982), 186-199.
realities situated in real history and society; any religious experience of the holy that was not connected to a history-transforming, experience-based "redemptive ethic (songnyang yulli) or the spirit of prophetic social criticism committed to transforming his beloved country was pointless.\(^{78}\)

Despite the active engagement of the liberal wing of Korean Protestantism in reforming the conventional attitudes and practices of the popular church, the conservative evangelical and extremely fundamentalist faith orientations are still typical of the Korean church. In addition, the Japanese domination of Korea during the formative stage of growth, the division of the country since 1945, and the process of industrialization and urbanization had powerfully influenced the shaping of the particular characteristics of Korean Christianity. Particularly the confusion of values and social networks in the wake of these changes and the struggles for democracy and human rights since the 1960s forced upon the Christians a difficult task. It is not possible here for us to delineate even the outline of the more recent development of Korean Protestantism, but let us point out some of the basic forces that influenced the specific shape of the Protestant development during the rest of the century.

After the Japanese annexation of Korea, the nationalist movement developed along several discordant lines without any common ideology or leadership to provide a united front. The major division was between more extreme groups, such as militant nationalists, the nihilists, and revolutionary Marxists on one hand, and more moderate, gradualist nationalists on the other. The moderates wanted to raise the general standard of national consciousness, education, and economic strength in the society to develop a popular foundation. Of course, this was an outgrowth of earlier nationalist ideology that had originated from the Independence Club, the March First Independence Movement, and other similar cultural national movements. As new tides of Western thought such as socialism, anarchism, nationalism, and the home-grown Ch’ondogyo (The Teaching of the Heavenly Way) were claiming adherents from among the people, the Christian community was faced with a baffling choice between its ideological direction and "apologetic necessities." Despite its intramural ideological or doctrinal differences, Protestantism in general found its way out of this difficulty in the works that concern "the sphere of education," whether by way of academic or religious education. Thus, unwittingly Protestantism found itself at the center of the "cultural nationalism" movement.\(^{79}\)


\(^{79}\) For the usage of the term “cultural nationalism,” see Salo Wittmayer Baron, Modern Nationalism and Religion (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), pp. 4-5; for cultural nationalism in Korea, see Michael Edson Robinson, Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920-1925 (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1988); for the general ideological
The Government-General that was set to consolidate its rule over Korea (1910-1945) perceived Protestantism as a threat because it was prone to encourage the individual conscience, national consciousness, civic morality, and social consciousness of the people. Accordingly, while the Japanese authorities had found Korean Confucianism and Buddhism more or less innocuous, they were particularly suspicious of the Christian church, especially Protestantism, allied with the United States and Korean nationalist movement, eventually strangling it. The so-called Conspiracy Case (1911-1913), fabricated by the Japanese authorities to indict leading Korean Christians, especially Yun Ch'i-ho and his associate such as Yang Kí-t'ae and Yi Sŏng-hun in the alleged plot to assassinate Governor General Terauchi, was a good case in point. These Christian leaders involved in the New People's Society (Sinminhoe) — a secret society organized by Yun and An Ch'ang-ho for the cause of Korean independence through education and self-reform — were “active men in a passive race” and therefore they became “objects of suspicion to an over-zealous [Japanese] police.”

The Japanese attempts to contain Christianity became more vigorous especially after the March First Independence Movement (1919) in which Protestant leaders played a leading role. Since the 1930s, as Japan had consolidated its rule over Korea to use it as a frontier base for its expansion throughout East Asia, the Japanese control of Protestantism has become more severe.

During the darkest years as the Japanese assimilation and mobilization efforts for world conquest became more intense, “all liberal and international ideals and institutions came into disfavor.” By the end of 1940, Japanese pressure made evangelistic work by missionaries and their teaching in classes and Bible institutes impossible; Christians were forced to accept Japan’s emperor worship and Shinto rituals. By 1941, the Christian mission withdrew from the field of secular education, and the churches were at best holding their own; there were “very few signs of real spiritual life and growth.” During these difficult days, some Christians sought to sustain and revive their faith through eschatological, millennialistic hope or a mystic spirituality.

83 Foreign Missions, 1942, p. 60.
84 Ibid., pp. 60-63; Foreign Missions, 1941, pp. 57-58.
focused upon the salvation of individual souls and personal piety without any reference to a theology of incarnation and God’s work in history. A good case in point is the inward mystical revivalist movement with a tinge of shamanism led by the Methodist poet-mystic Yi Yong-do (1901-1933) that had a substantial following.85

This form of contemplative and world-fleeing mysticism continued even during the post-liberation years (1945-1961) that were marked by the division of the country, political upheaval, ideological confusion, and the war that was followed by great social dislocation. During this turbulent period many turned to evangelical revivalism as well as Pentecostalism and millennialism for an escape from the seemingly hopeless conditions of life; such movements offered the immediate experience of God’s help. This drift toward emotionally cathartic spirituality continued during the ensuing tumultuous decades (1961 to the present) of rapid social change marked by authoritarian military rule, industrialization, political and social protest, democratization, and globalization.

The vibrant feelings and emotional energies behind behaviors that one can easily observe in revival meetings, such as incantatory prayers, weeping, ecstatic raptures, and the fluttering of arms, are traceable to shamanistic as well as Christian spirituality. This kind of subterranean, primeval spiritual energy helped people not only to survive the hard times of the Japanese suppression of Christianity and to cope with the difficult realities of modernizing changes, but also helped fuel the explosive bursts in membership in the Korean church during the last several decades. We can also suspect that the fundamentalist and conservative mentality that impels people to argue rigidly and self-righteously about doctrinal orthodoxy and purity – a strain particularly marked in Korean Christian personality and ecclesiastical practices – can be associated with the particular legacy of Korean Neo-Confucianism. Thus, depending on one’s viewpoint, one could positively or negatively evaluate the way Korean Protestantism has drawn on the various resources from the deep recesses of indigenous religious tradition. Broadly speaking, however, by decisively turning toward charismatic Pentecostal revivalism, evangelical prayer movements, otherworldly millennialism, and doggedly conservative fundamentalism, Korean Protestantism has forsaken its earlier dreams of creatively transforming Korean society and culture.

Toward the Historical Struggles for Justice and Peace:

One could maintain that elitist, socially conscious, and humanistic Protestants with their preoccupations with abstract principles, idealistic values, and institutions have been timid to tread, for example, a real world of the downtrodden and the oppressed. On the other hand, what characterizes the evangelicals and Pentecostals is their down-to-earth affirmation of this world, tender

85 See Yu Tong-sik, Han’guk sinhak ui kwangmaek, pp. 120-132; Min Kyōng-bae, Kyohoe wa minjok, pp. 280-309.
Which Christianity?: The Gospel, Culture, and the Problem of Cultural Transformation in Korea  Chai-sik Chung

consideration of the real, diverse human needs of the parish, attention to intimate personal relationships and social networks, and exuberant initiative empowered by the spirit of positive thinking. These traits have led them to listen with sensitivity to the deep groans of the oppressed souls and the anguished cries of women. Giving vent to the sorrow of the troubled life experience through spontaneous and warm or even festive hymn-singing and fervent individual or group prayers so prominent in the pattern of worship of these groups also have helped the underside to easily relieve their wounded feelings and their injured hearts (hanp'uri). The depth, intensity, and rich imagination of popular religiosity, which attribute character to Korean religious culture in its own way, in part, account for the dynamism behind the phenomenal growth of Christianity in Korea. But this growth defies easy generalization.

What, then, are the problems overshadowing the evangelical-Pentecostal-fundamentalist Christian churches in Korea? In sum, the trouble is that the experience of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit often does not result in a transformation of life, a life consecrated to authentic Christian service. Instead of the Pentecostal gift of the Spirit producing a religion that really works in everyday life, it is too often confused as a quick and effective means to attain mainly individual religious consolation and such worldly goods as money, success, and healing. When mammoth churches predominantly emphasize legalistic tithing, growth in membership and income, and serving primarily the vested interests of their particular ecclesiastical enterprises, despite their token participation in alms-giving and social service, they quickly lose credibility and draw feelings of disappointment and a mockery toward the church. How can one account for the ill-reputed authoritarian leadership style of some ministers of mammoth churches that are geared to perpetuate their domination of them through the manipulation of creed, ritual, and organization? Worse, how could these leaders justify their nontransparent management of the church finances and the outrageously disreputable nepotism, which is so common?

The trouble with the Korean church is that it has largely forsaken its prophetic function and the public good for the cultural code of the capitalist marketplace. Everything is reckoned in terms of buying and selling, quantity rather than quality, and crude functional utility, giving priority to meeting the customer satisfaction rather than responding to the call of moral responsibility and obligations to society. The cult of big church (the philosophy that money is church’s supreme good), excessive emphasis on the Pharisaic duty of tithing, questionable motivations for sending large numbers of missionaries overseas beyond the call of need – these are

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86 Sŏ Kwang-sŏn, Ch'ŏng Chin-hong, Han Wansang, Kim Kwang-il, Han'guk kojohoe sŏngnyong undong 'i hyŏnsang kwa kuyo [The phenomena and structure of the Pentecostal movements in Korea] (Seoul: Korea Christian Academy, 1982); see also Ch'ŏng Chia-hong [Chia Heng Chung], “Changing Structural Characteristics of a Large Rapidly Growing Church in Korea: The Case of the Yoido Full Gospel Church,” paper read at an International Conference on “Korea: Toward an Industrial society, Part II,” held at the University of British Columbia, May 17-18, 1997.
some of the ills associated with the Korean preoccupations with the capitalist market mentality. What feeds this marked tendency in modern society toward privatism and entrepreneurial mentality is the indigenous cultural wellspring of this-worldly shamanistic folk religious mentality, a distorted notion of Confucian family values that forsakes public good for family egotism, and a global capitalist culture.

Against considerable odds, a relatively small minority of the well-intentioned church leaders, theologians, and lay people have brought issues of ethics, morality, and the public good to a level of visibility in the decades since Korea’s exposures to authoritarian political control, compressed industrialization, and urbanization. These are the leaven of reform working in an immoral and apathetic society for the causes of “justice, peace, and integrity of creation,” and they can be considered the latter-day followers of the pioneer Christian reformers in terms of their moral imagination and sense of responsibility. The great imperative for the Korean church in this new century is to rediscover the dreams of the earlier pioneer Christian leaders, learning to mobilize the rich resources of charismatics, evangelicals, and liberals for the authentic service of the living God of justice and peace. The Korean church, especially its conservative mainstream Protestantism, is in great need of the emancipating and transforming presence and work of the Holy Spirit as it faces a new millennium.87 The long march of the Korean people’s struggles for a better future depends to a great deal on the spiritual encounter of Korean Christians with the historical challenge of regenerating themselves, their faith community, and their society for a new order of life.

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COMMENTARY

BONNIE B. C. OH

I have known both presenters, Professors Don Baker and Chai-sik Chung at least for a few years now. The last time I saw them was three years ago at a conference on Christianity in Korea in New York, sponsored by the Korea Society, Theological Union, and the Luce Foundation. Both are well known as experts on the subjects they will discuss today. Both papers present a challenge to the commentator.

On Professor Baker’s Paper

Professor Baker’s paper is the more historical of the two. It appears that the author, in his wish to see something positive in the bloodiest history of the Roman Catholic Church in Korea, calls it civil society. Prof. Baker advances the rather novel proposition that the authoritarian Catholic Church begat the beginnings of a civil society in Korea and that the birth of the Korean Catholic church over 200 years ago as the first move toward democracy, laying the conceptual bricks out of which the edifice of democracy has been erected.

Prof. Baker contends that, when it first appeared, the Catholic Church in Korea demanded the right of sanctuary from government interference. After a long bloody struggle, the demand was granted, creating a zone of autonomy in which a Korean civil society could eventually sprout. He grants that the first Catholics did not know the concept of civil society. They inadvertently laid the foundation for its later emergence.

But he recognizes that: (1) The Catholic Church is seldom mentioned in relation to the rise of civil societies; (2) the concept of civil society is a rather recent phenomenon; (3) there exist many theories regarding the origins of civil society in Korea; and (4) there are varied hypotheses on the origin, nature and function of civil society.

These interpretations of civil society depend very much on how strictly you define the term. Don Baker defines it as ‘A society in which limits to the authority of the state vacate space for citizens to fill with voluntary organizations operating independently of, and sometimes against the government.’ Here the key words are “vacate space,” implying a voluntary move on the part of the government to retreat and allow room. This definition is not compatible with the views of those who see the forerunner of Korea’s civil society in the private academies of Confucian literati and in the early Catholic Church in Korea. The presence of such seeds in the soil of the Choson Dynasty accounts for the growth of a civil society in contemporary South Korea.
But, in Baker’s mind, it is the first Catholics who fought harder than the literati; it was the Catholics, more than the literati, who insisted that the power of the state was not absolute and limited to how much the state could interfere. They asked that the government recognize their right to practice their faith without interference or harassment, although they did not win such religious freedom right away. Korean Catholics suffered large-scale persecutions in 1801, 1839, 1846, and 1866-69. By simply stating publicly and repeatedly that the state does not have absolute authority over every aspect of its subjects’ lives, they introduced a defining characteristic of a civil society. When finally, in 1899, they were granted freedom of worship owing to a treaty with France, the cornerstone of a civil society gained new respectability.

I must respectfully disagree with Prof. Baker. These are overstatements of facts, as I know the history of the Catholic Church in Korea. The fact is that the Korean Catholics could not simply declare, let alone publicly and repeatedly, that the state did not have absolute authority over them. Even after they won the freedom to practice their religion at the turn of the last century, the church remained so timid that it participated little in the nationalist protests against Japanese encroachment or colonial rule. It did even less than the Protestant church, whose lack of activism Prof. Chung decries. But unlike Korean Protestantism, the Korean Catholic Church came out of a long hibernation and began to assert the rights not only of Catholics but also of other individuals, starting in the 1960s. And it placed its prestige behind the shift from a negative to a positive concept of a civil society; only then was the state forced to retreat farther and faster than it might otherwise have (p. 6). How did this come about?

Further, I would appreciate Prof. Baker clarifying the following passage on p. 7:

The Catholic church was able to play such an important role in fostering the growth of a civil society on Korean soil because, when Catholics first came to Korea, they brought with them an understanding of the nature of religion, and of the relationship between church and state, which challenged the traditional range of state authority.

Points that remain unclear to me are the time and route of the Catholics’ arrival. My questions are: Who were these Catholics and whence had they come? As I understand it—and I know that Prof. Baker knows this all too well—what is unique about the Korean Catholic Church was that it literally arose from among Koreans without proselytization by foreign missionaries. It was established by Korean Confucian scholars who were interested in Sirhak and in reforming what they thought was a Korea in decline. So, there were no such “Catholics” who came to Korea. Next, it is said that they brought with them an understanding of the nature of religion. When Korean Confucianists first became interested in Catholicism, they were not even able to distinguish sokak, Western studies, from soyog, Western religion. It took a while for them to see the difference between the two. Finally, Prof. Baker says, these Catholics also had an
understanding of the relationship between church and state. Once again, referring to the early Korean Catholic Confucian scholars, it appears that they endeavored to find compatibility between Confucian teaching and Christianity rather than to seek a wall of separation between their new religion and the state. They did so because they wished not to be accused of studying and belief in heterodox teaching.

It is true that they had to form "an unauthorized organization," gave unauthorized titles such as 'sinbu' (priest) and 'kyoju' (bishop), refused to perform chesa (ancestral worship ceremony)." The government did not give permission for the Catholics to organize, but they did so by stealth and in secrecy. I wonder if that really constitutes deliberate and conscious creation and refusal.

As an example of civil society, Prof. Baker cites a kyouch'on ('village of fellow believers') (p.15). Allow me to talk about how such a village was formed. There is only one such village of which any record exists. The story of a man named Shin Tae-ho illustrates it well. After the dust settled from the anti-Catholic persecution of 1801, he was determined to reestablish the lost Catholic communities. By traveling over 40 li in one night and entirely on foot, he found four families of women and children at Yong-in, all related by blood. They were living in extreme poverty and immobilized by fear of further persecution. He found that women had hidden sacred books and other religious relics. With about 40 believers who began to gather, he conducted religious services every seven or eight days. But they felt unsafe because they were surrounded by hostile non-Catholics. It was too dangerous for the newly gathered congregation to continue in the same place. Shin led the congregation of women and children deep into the mountains of Kangw'on province. He compared the move to Moses' Exodus from Egypt. Other Catholic villages were established in similar ways but they could not remain in one locale very long and had to move constantly. How can a village created to escape persecution to a location far removed from other human beings be called civil society? Is it any different from bandit villages and kwa-jon (slash-and-burn) villages?

The next point I would like to make is that too long an interval passed between the coming of Catholicism to Korea and the rise of civil society in Korea to render much credit to the Catholic Church—much as I would like to do so. If my math is correct, more than a century passed between the last great persecution of Catholics in Korea in 1866 and the rise of civil society in the country. Prof. Baker says the early Korean Catholic Church paved the way for contemporary civil society. But he also says that the Church did not fully exercise its hard-earned freedom of religion and remained passive throughout the last years of the Chosön Dynasty and the Japanese colonial period. Korean Catholics were even less involved in social and political matters than the Protestants, literally interpreting the injunction of "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

After the 1866 persecution, the Korean Catholic Church was driven underground. By the time Protestantism arrived in Korea in 1884, few Catholics remained visible. This is why, despite its
primacy of origin, the Korean Catholic flock numbers less than half of the Protestant and the church itself is less influential in Korea until recently.

If we are serious about the Church's contribution to the rise of civil society in Korea, we must pay our attention to the its struggle in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, rather than returning to the time of its birth.

**On Professor Chung's Paper**

I became acquainted also with Dr. Chai-sik Chung at the conference, “Christianity in Korea: An Exploration of Its Unique Development.” At that time I felt that Dr. Chung's paper alone almost entirely covered Korean Christianity's unique development, particularly the Protestant growth in Korea. Non-Christians in Korea and non-Protestant Christians such as Catholics and Latter-Day Saints have long felt that Korean Protestantism is different from those in Western countries but many could not quite articulate as succinctly as Dr. Chung has done, and why and how it had developed that way.

Looking at the phenomenal growth of Protestantism in South Korea, you would think a Korean Christian would be pleased. But here is one Korean-born social ethics scholar, an endowed professor in a school of theology of a major university, who is not at all that jubilant just because the church has grown phenomenally. He is concerned about a lack of moral direction in South Korea and uneasy over the failure of such growth of Christianity to help steer the Korean morality in the right direction.

This is an amazingly candid, creatively critical, and intellectually challenging critique of the Korean Protestant churches. I found myself agreeing with the author on so many points that I am concerned about maintaining objectivity in my commentary.

After reading Prof. Chung's paper, I am somewhat closer to understanding why and how the Korean Protestant church developed into what it is now. In the next few minutes, I will briefly summarize the paper as I understand it, make comments along the way, and end with a wish list.

I would like to start out by quoting a few passages from a book by Spencer J. Palmer that helped me understand why Christianity flourished in Korea while it met with less success in the neighboring China and Japan, the two countries with a similar philosophical background.

Palmer said in his 1986 book, *Korea and Christianity: Problem of Identification with Tradition*, that “the success of Christian missions in Asia is primarily dependent upon the forging of links between native culture and Christian ideology” (p. viii). He goes on to say “acceptance of Christianity in Asia is contingent on its capacity to establish parallel and connections with the indigenous traditions ...” (p. 3). And then he says, “The primitive ethos of the Korean people derives from Shamanism, a polytheistic and polydemonistic religion based on nature worship” (p. 5). In Korea's Shamanistic pantheon, there developed a concept of a hierarchy of the gods. Above all the spirits stood one supreme ruler named, bananim, who was acknowledged by all ... ”(p. 6). Korean faith in bananim was an integral part of Korean thought from primitive times. Conviction of belief
in him was strengthened, not reduced, by the introduction of the amorphous Confucian concept of ch'ŏn (heaven, hanul). From hanul came hanulnim, which in time came to be called, hananim. (p. 7). It appears that Prof. Chung thinks that the Korean Protestant church succeeded in Korea, in indigenization, contextualization, and inculturation (acculturation in Palmer), which are important.

But despite its success in indigenization, etc., and its massive growth, it failed to transform Korea and fulfill the dream of pioneer Korean Christian leaders. Unlike in Western countries, Christianity missed playing a crucial role in the historical evolution and fostering. Dr. Chung, I am sure, in pointing out missed opportunities, will acknowledge the vital role Christianity played in transformation and modernization. The author appears to imply that such changes have not occurred in proportion to the numerical and external growth of the church in South Korea. Protestant Christianity became indigenized and inculturated to a considerable degree — perhaps a little too much, too early in Korea. In other words, Korean Protestantism became localized and focused on private and personal interest even before the fledgling early church became viable and had an opportunity to send a message of its transcendental characteristics of reform, transformation, development and improvement of the resources found in local culture.

Prof. Chung is asking an important question: whether Korean Christianity has not developed along the line of manifesting the authentic principle of Christian transcendence, by looking at the character of Christianity as a force for cultural transformation and integration and looking at it from a long-range and holistic point of view. He notes the rapid expansion of Christianity in the second half of the 20th century is nothing short of remarkable. He reviews its development from its introduction in 1884 through the faith of the pioneer Christian leaders, such as So Chae-p'il, Yun Ch'i-ho, and Syngman Rhee. He points out that these pioneers were drawn to Christianity because of the nature of Christianity, its prophetic, transforming force, which was not fulfilled. The reason is the tenacious power of the indigenous belief system. Although Korea had no dominant religion by the late 19th century, it is the force of inherited cultural and social characteristics that impeded Protestant Christianity from becoming the catalyst for change. After the initial period, majority of converts came from peasant stock and women. The Korean Protestant churches in time became a hotbed of perpetuating the religious-cultural habits of the people in a Christian disguise. People continued to live according to their traditional cultural code and held onto the idea that religion is good so long as it brings happiness. The majority of people were common folks, not socially aware and political conscious. The church catered to private needs of people, parochially self-absorbed and socially uninterested. Early Korean Protestant Christians had the will but lacked the means to disseminate their ideas, for they remained a small minority, set apart from the majority of Koreans and their voice drowned out.
Then, the Korean Protestantism became a revivalist, millennialistic faith, with a literal interpretation of scripture. It began with the 1907 Bible Study Conference in Pyongyang, which appealed to those who had been seeking a way out of helplessness on the eve of the loss of national independence and spread throughout the country and extended into the following year. This movement was geared to an eschatological hope, setting the tone for the whole subsequent development of mainline conservative Protestantism. In time, instead of the church generating a mission of national regeneration, it became characterized by an increased tendency toward flight into the irrationality of apolitical emotionalism, self-absorption, other-worldly withdrawal from ethical concern for public affairs—dichotomizing the spiritual from the sociopolitical, sending a message of passive and apolitical endurance of Japanese colonial rule. Although there were a few courageous exceptions, for the most part, Korean Christians, Protestants and Catholics alike, remained private, emotionally and ritualistically devoted, concentrating on personal experiences of their relation to God.

Disturbed by these tendencies, intellectual and reform-minded Christians countered the external ritualistic emphasis of Korean Protestantism, with the Non-Church Christian movement of 1927. This movement emphasized Bible study. One of the most noted among them is Ham, who coined the term sssial (seed) people, which in time led to the idea of minjung theology, which in turn became the crucible for human rights struggle later—in the 1960s and 1970s. Basic forces that shaped the Protestant development in the latter half of the 20th century emerged in the last years of World War II (1941-45): the eschatological millennialistic hope or mystic spirituality focusing upon salvation of individual soul and personal piety.

After Korea’s liberation from Japan in 1945, Korean Protestantism became divided into liberal and fundamentalist wings. Despite liberal efforts, conservative evangelical and extremely fundamentalist orientations are still typical of the Korean Protestant churches. The latter tend to argue rigidly and self-righteously, just as Korean neo-Confucians had in traditional Korea.

What happened is that Korean Protestantism has drawn on the various resources from the deep recesses of indigenous religious tradition. The result is that the Korean Protestant church forsook its prophetic function, public good, and its earlier dreams of creatively transforming Korean society and culture. This led to a Korean preoccupation with the capitalist market mentality. We must rediscover the dreams of pioneering Christian leaders by making a radical rupture with inherited, sinful realities.

Dr. Chung asks many important questions and wrestles with the time-honored dilemma of balance between the values of the inherited past and of today, and the question of cultural continuity and liberation from it. But, I have the following wish list as well. First, I wish he had spent some time on what he meant by Christian transcendence. Second, I wish he had dwelt on a little more on why such Confucian literati as So, Yun, and Rhee, converted to Christianity. Such conversions were rare elsewhere in Asia. I
wish Dr. Chung had been clearer about whether it the catastrophe of imminent loss of the nation would have justified it; and, if so, what can Korean Christians do today? Finally I wish he had speculated on whether the very success of indigenization had inhibited Christianity in Korea from contributing to the transformation and development of resources found in local culture, which is also very important.
COMMENTARY

HARRY YEIDE, JR.

Let me begin by recalling two experiences. The first occurred when I was asked to review a manuscript for possible publication dealing with developments in Protestant Christianity in Korea. I recall few details of the manuscript, but remember commenting that I felt under informed regarding specifically Korean dimensions in this development. It read remarkably like the denominational history of a religious group in the United States might have read. The point of recalling this here is to suggest that Americans may overestimate the ease with which they can comprehend Korean Christianity because of the earlier involvement of missionaries from the United States, the presence of familiar denominational names, and undeniable parallels in the history of Christianity in both countries.

The other experience concerns my participation in hosting a group of Korean clergy some years ago. One of our programs consisted in visiting some local churches. At one of those churches, often regarded as one of the city’s more prestigious churches, we were given a guided tour by an affable member of the congregation who offered to answer any questions. One set of questions concerned the ministries of the congregation. He was asked why the tour had featured remembrance of visits of U.S. Presidents rather than their service to the community, why we heard so much about the duties of the staff and so little about the witness of the members by way of organized activities. Our tour guide was ill equipped to respond to these questions, which he correctly perceived as rather critical. But another question really baffled him. He was asked what percentage of Americans worshipped Greek and Roman gods? When he responded that few, if any Americans that he knew indulged in such worship, he was asked why there were so many statues of these gods throughout the city. For this he had no answer. The point of recalling this here is to remind us that however similar the practices of various forms of Christianity may be in the two countries, the context is in important ways dramatically different.

At least numerically, Christianity is more strongly represented in Korea than in any other East Asian nation other than the Philippines. A 1997 Gallup poll in South Korea reported 20.3% as Protestant Christian, 7.4% as Roman Catholic; 18.3% reported themselves as Buddhist. Thus, Christianity is powerfully present in South Korea, whatever the situation may be in North Korea.

Let me turn now to Prof. Baker’s paper, from which I learned so much. The "Unexpected Fruit" that he finds in the development of Korean Catholicism rests
on his portrayal of Roman Catholicism as "an authoritarian institution itself, [which] has been a supporter of monarchical and other authoritarian forms of government." Thus we are invited to be surprised at the way in which Catholicism in Korea contributes to Korea's "first step toward democracy" or "the rise of civil society in Korea." A number of later 20th century exceptions are noted including the Asian example of Cardinal Sin during the overthrow of the Marcos regime in the Philippines.

It is easy enough to find examples from many centuries and places that seem to justify the original characterization of Roman Catholicism. But that is not the whole story, either in theory or in practice.

On the one hand, prior to Vatican II, Catholic teaching about the relation between the Church and various governments was discussed in the language of thesis and hypothesis. The thesis represented the ideal. This would be fulfilled where a Catholic monarch ruled over a predominantly Catholic population. This was held to include the right to curtail the freedom of other religious groups to express themselves fully in those societies. A short hand way of justifying this arrangement was to maintain that error has no rights. Other situations were classified as hypothesis. This described situations in which Catholics were in the minority. Here they were urged to work out arrangements that would maximize the expression of Catholicism, and thereby to progress towards the thesis. That called for situational wisdom in working out the best possible hypothesis. Korean Catholics seem up to the present to be in the situation of the hypothesis rather than the thesis. Thus support of "monarchies and other authoritarian forms of government" is hardly inevitable, though possible.

On the other hand, there is the empirical experience of Catholics in non-monarchical countries. Most closely studied, so far as I know, is the political participation in England and in ex-English colonies. There monarchy and more authoritarian forms of government have typically been associated with right wing political parties; Catholic political support has more frequently gone to parties considered to be to the left. This has been the pattern in the United States for much of our history. To be sure, there are many reasons for this including Catholics as a later immigrant population, participation in and leadership of the American labor movement, &c. But it is simply not the case that Catholic participation in political life has always and everywhere been of the sort that Prof. Baker's thesis presupposes as the norm. In short, the pattern of Catholic politics in earlier Korean history seems better described as "hypothesis" than "thesis." And the changes portrayed in more recent decades fit well with changes in Catholic teaching introduced at Vatican II. (The actions of Cardinal Sin in the Philippines represent a similar response to the new social teaching of Vatican II, though in a situation that previously would be described by many as "thesis" rather than "hypothesis.") Thus, both before and after Vatican II, Korean Catholic participation in politics seems to fit the teaching of the World Church, and to have been influenced by it.

I very much appreciate Prof. Baker's grasp of the centrality of civil society in the development of what we call
democracy, and I applaud his understanding that civil society requires "voluntary private organizations" fully to flower. But I find myself unconvinced by his application of these insights to Korean Roman Catholicism.

On the one hand, it does not seem to me that the Catholicism he describes qualifies as a "voluntary private organization." Each congregation is subject to the hierarchy in Korea, and through that ultimately to the hierarchy that culminates in the Pope in Rome. At various times, the presence of Catholicism has been associated with French colonialism. I assume that in Korea as elsewhere, one is born into the Church; not all members are voluntary converts.

On the other hand, the relation of Catholic communities to "civil society" seems more ambiguous to me than to Prof. Baker. Is a group really a constituent of "civil society" when it is persecuted, or is it for that time period beyond the boundaries of civil society? Are there really no other candidates for early expressions of civil societies? Dr. Baker mentions, but dismisses the "literati-run private academies" as possible candidates. But they did not seem obviously "not truly autonomous" to a degree beyond what we might assert regarding the Catholic communities. And while my limited knowledge of Korean history forbids my naming other possible candidates, Prof. Chung's paper mentions a substantial number of nationalist and modernizing groups who were in tension with the traditional unified Confucian state. It was, I suspect, a wide variety of groups that slowly and haltingly contributed to the development of a civil society relatively free of the control of the central government.

There is another way to perceive the Catholic contribution to democracy in Korea. Rather than talking about civil society, one might instead look for the development of human rights. When viewed on the screen of world history, the first human right successfully asserted was the right to freedom of religion. All other human rights claims come after this one, at least chronologically. While it was in part due to exterior coercion from the French, the 1899 treaty that guaranteed Korean Catholics freedom of religion is a major milestone in this regard. The persecution suffered by the Catholic community was the occasion for facing and addressing this problem. To the extent that freedom of religion is not merely the earliest, but in some sense a basic human right, this is a major Catholic contribution to moving toward democratic ways in Korea. Now the surprise becomes making so major a step within the framework of the "hypothesis" instead of the "thesis," a step that contributed to what might be called the "new thesis" proclaimed at Vatican II.

Prof. Chung's paper is very different from Prof. Baker's. He is much more overtly involved in theological evaluation of Christian witness in Korea. I very much appreciate this frame of reference since it is often omitted at scholarly gatherings where strong worldviews are often concealed under descriptive analyses. And his theological approach seemed to me to be in the tradition of the person for whom his chair is named, Walter Muelder. I have learned a great deal from his paper; the following
His theological preferences are abundantly evident. His version of the Gospel calls followers to be a "force for cultural transformation and integration." He sees "Christianity as a reality situated in real history and society." Believers are called to perform "the authentic service of the living God of justice and peace." Prophetic criticism is a standard for theological work. And Korean Christianity, especially in its Protestant version, is regularly found wanting. In earlier years, it was coopted by various modernist and nationalist movements; in more recent years, it has been captured by "the cultural code of the capitalistic market place."

While I feel at home with many of these assertions, I feel obliged to point out that if this paper had been written by a Professor from, e.g. Gordon Seminary, there would probably have been a different assessment of the same data. He would share in Prof. Chung's critique of the huge congregations, probably also in the critique of widespread Pentecostal charismatic practices. But he would surely have evaluated more positively such things as: 1) the growth in bible study and biblical literacy; 2) the more fundamental, evangelical versions of theology; 3) continued approval of the idea that modern civilization rests on a Christian culture - albeit with a different list of the goods and ills of modern civilization; 4) great suspicion of Christian participation in certain political actions; 5) vigorous evangelization activities; and 6) higher regard for social service as compared to social action. Healing the injured was very consequential in earlier Korean perceptions of Christianity, especially in connection with the March 1st Independence Movement of 1919. My point is not to suggest that this theological assessment would be more correct than that of Prof. Chung, but only to remind us that other assessments are possible.

Prof. Chung suggests that the defects he discerns may relate to the survival of 2 religious histories that continue their lives in Christian garb. This theme is introduced in several places, and summarized near the end.

What fuels this marked tendency in modern society toward privatism and entrepreneurial mentality is the indigenous cultural wellspring of this-worldly shamanistic folk religious mentality, a distorted notion of Confucian family values that forsakes public good for family egotism, and a global capitalist culture.

To me, these assertions call for more: 1) description of "shamanistic folk religion" - said in Korea to give special prominence to female shamans - and 2) distorted Confucian values. One also wonders who and where they penetrate Protestant Christianity in Korea, and why one finds similar traits elsewhere with no past links to these two religious traditions.

I am further puzzled that there is such scant reference to another religious tradition that is strong in Korean history, Buddhism. Many versions of Buddhism are strongly individualistic in ways that fit with some of the patterns he discerns in Protestant Christianity in Korea more comfortably than is the case with either shamanism or Confucianism. Social reform advocated by many Buddhist groups,
including some based in Korea, is seen as possible only by transforming individuals.

Finally, I would have appreciated some mention of the ways in which Korean Christianity offers new understandings of Christianity that have been produced by the encounter with other religions. An example of what I mean is the intriguing book by Sung Bum Yun, ETHICS EAST AND WEST, in which he develops a correction to western ways of doing ethics, including Christian ethics, by introducing Confucian insights into his Christian perspective.

Let me close by again expressing my appreciation to both authors. I learned a great deal from both papers.
Your findings, East and West, to improve installation and operation of marine equipment, and to obtain free installation and operation of marine equipment, are hereby acknowledged. Your recommendations are hereby acknowledged. Your suggestions are hereby acknowledged. Your findings, East and West, to improve installation and operation of marine equipment, are hereby acknowledged.
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