

Protestant Christianity: Varieties of Experience in Modern Korea

Donald N. Clark

Trinity University

San Antonio, Texas USA

INTRODUCTION

Protestant Christianity sank roots in Korea during a most difficult period. The old order was collapsing and the nation was soon to fall under the colonial domination of imperial Japan. In their formative period (1884–1910), Korea's first Protestants and Protestant missionaries had to deal with the legacy of Christianity as an outlawed religion, suppressed, if no longer by the central government under the royal court, by local officials and members of the *yangban* class whose distaste for Christianity was manifested through the posing of bureaucratic obstacles to its spread. At the same time, Christianity acquired converts from among the "disaffected classes," the sort who would otherwise have joined the Tonghaks (in the southwest) or who were less disposed against foreign ideas (as in the northern P'yŏng'an and Hamgyŏng provinces which were closer to China, more used to foreign contact, and turned out to be the most fertile area of Christian propagation). Certain intellectuals were also drawn to Christianity, notably those who were part of the enlightenment stream, with Independence Club leaders Sŏ Chaep'il and Yun Ch'ihŏ as frequently-mentioned examples but including many others as well. The convergence of the enlightenment movement and Protestant Christianity was symbolized in the numerous Christian schools that became famous in Korea as centers of modern education and the independence movement, as well as religious institutions. The prestige of Christianity was much enhanced by the reputation of these schools as they directly addressed the political and social crises that confronted Korea as it was succumbing to Japanese colonial domination. Korean Christians also founded civic and patriotic organizations that stood for Korean self-strengthening during this period.

THE CHRISTIAN APPEAL TO KOREA'S SPIRITUAL CRISIS

The coincidence of religious crisis and political crisis is much noticed in the "Great Revival" that took place in Korea's Protestant churches around the year 1907. Beginning in Wŏnsan in the northeast, this spontaneous chain of ecstatic religious meetings is credited with having infused real fervor into the religious lives of Korean Christians generally. It consisted of meetings where waves of emotion swept the congregations of major churches in P'yŏngyang, Seoul, Taegu, and other centers. People—mainly men on their sides of the church halls, under their influence of their own pastors (e.g., Kil Sŏnju) as well as foreign missionaries, reportedly threw themselves on the floor in agonies of confession and were cleansed of guilt feelings through prayer and pledges of atonement for past wrongs. All descriptions of the events stress three things: that the occasion was a deeply dreadful time during which Koreans in general were deeply upset by their material and political circumstances; that the "spirit" took over the

congregations and created a kind of mass hysteria that appeared to be beyond normal human behavior or understanding; and that the life transformations that followed were radical in terms of renunciation of vices such as gambling, opium and alcohol, and customs such as ancestor worship (the *chesa*) and concubinage. Missionaries especially made much of these transformations since they involved the range of evils that they criticized most in Korean life and touted them as evidence of authentic conversion.

Whether or not we agree with them now, in retrospect we can stress two long-term facts: that a pattern was set for charismatic worship in much of Korean Protestantism, based on fervent prayer, confession, and outward manifestations of changed ways of life; and that this pattern of worship was related to older forms of Korean religious experience? I mean the shamanist tradition? in ways that we have yet to fully understand.

THE CHRISTIAN APPEAL TO KOREAN YOUTH

The years after the Ulsa Treaty (1905) subjected Korean Christians to several severe tests that brought them into conflict with the new Japanese regime. I will only mention them in passing, because they are much written-about elsewhere. The first was the “conspiracy case” in which Christians from the northwest were tried on trumped-up charges of plotting the assassination of Governor General Terauchi Masatake. The second was an attempt by the Japanese regime to close the schools being operated by foreign missionaries and the various Korean churches. And the third was the Christian involvement in the March 1, 1919 Independence Movement, including the conspicuous signatures of Christian leaders on the Independence Declaration itself and the function of churches and Christian schools as centers for resistance activity across the nation and in the Korean communities of Manchuria.

One of the most interesting and influential Christian institutions of this period was the YMCA, the Young Men’s Christian Association (*kidokkyo ch’ ŏngnyŏnhoe*). The YMCA is often overlooked in surveys of Korean Christianity because it was not a church as such, and therefore does not fall in line with the Presbyterians, Methodists, Catholics, and other main denominations. The Korean YMCA began, however, as early as 1888 with the arrival of the Canadian missionary James Scarth Gale. Gale and other missionaries based in Seoul founded the YMCA as an interdenominational youth arm and began to recruit Korean students to its ranks. Some of these early recruits are famous: Yun Ch’ iho, Yi Sŏngman, and Yi Sangjae to name a few.

The first permanent YMCA Secretary (meaning missionary) was Philip Gillett, who arrived in 1901 and oversaw the formal organization of the Korean YMCA as an affiliate of the International YMCA based in New York and a branch of the YMCA of China. The officers included Gale as president; Yun Ch’ iho as vice president; and Homer Hulbert, Philip Gillett and Kim Chŏngsik as board members and General Secretaries. The first YMCA offices were established in the Paejae Boys School in Chŏng-dong.

The YMCA was an instant success. Beginning in a rough shed on the Paejae grounds it soon had 1,800 Korean students taking classes in carpentry, printing, photography, metal work, weaving, and other industrial skills. In addition there were English classes, and of course opportunities to study Christianity and worship in services in the nearby Paejae chapel and Chŏng-dong First Methodist Church. Emperor Kojong pledged an annual donation to support the YMCA and the American industrialist John Wanamaker led a fund

drive that raised a million dollars for a permanent building on in the heart of town in the second block of Chongno.

Although the YMCA experienced its share of problems getting started in Korea, the popularity of its programs made it an early leader in civil society development despite the political crises of the time. The American management of the YMCA made it a point to widen the organization's appeal to the Japanese who were swarming into the city of Seoul, offering programs especially for them and cultivating Japanese Christians as potential supporters, and, after the annexation to Japan, changing over to become a branch of the Japanese YMCA in Tokyo. YMCA branches sprang up in P'yongyang, Hamhung, Taegu, Kwangju, Sunchon, and Sinju. The YMCA introduced camping to Korea. Philip Gillett is credited with having introduced basketball to Korea. And in fact, though the American YMCA secretaries tried to keep the YMCA politically neutral they failed: the YMCA always had a reputation among Koreans and Japanese, as "pro-Korean, anti-Japanese" organization, and this reputation lasted throughout the colonial period. The YMCA thus did much to advance the notion that Christianity was basically anti-Japanese in Korea. Perhaps the most interesting thing about the YMCA's politics during the colonial period is the fact that, unlike churches which were, strictly speaking, protected under the Meiji Constitution as purely religious bodies, the YMCA was a not-exactly-religious gathering point for political dissent and doubtless drew many members and participants on account of its perceived politics. This upset the Japanese community in Korea, which objected to the colonial government's classification of the YMCA as a religious, and therefore protected, organization. As a Japanese editorial writer wrote in 1907 when the new regime was deciding which organizations to permit and which to close down and allowed the YMCA to continue, "The YMCA has been engaged in a political propaganda under the mask of religion but this Association is only religious superficially. . . . The members assert that they will continue the anti-Japanese movement and try to win back their national rights with the help of America and other countries." The Americans with the YMCA tried to counter this criticism by trying variously to cooperate with the Japanese authorities, to cancel Yun Ch'ih'o's visit to Washington to attend an international YMCA conference, and repeated pledges of discipline for members who engaged in political activities. As Philip Gillett wrote, "At members business meetings there is frequently danger of a stampede in some unwise direction and were it not for the splendid guidance of Yun Chi Ho, Ye Sang Chai and a few other of these older and statesman-like men it would be impossible to conduct so large an organization."

THE CHRISTIAN APPEAL TO KOREAN WOMEN

Women have been the mainstay of Christianity since its beginnings in the earliest Catholic congregations. Protestant missionaries arrived with strategies directly aimed at converting women to Christianity by every means available. Mary F. Scranton founded the Ewha School for Girls as part of this; the Methodists started a women's hospital in the same vein, and evangelism for women, in Sunday schools and churches were a main thrust of the entire missionary effort.

Though Mary Scranton had to start her school with a single destitute Korean child because no one else would come to be taught by a foreign barbarian, the response that followed her small start was nothing short of phenomenal. The idea that girls could even *should* be schooled was new and exciting, if not to the men of Korea, certainly to the

women. As a result, women of all ages took advantage of every kind of opportunity to learn and develop their abilities as leaders in the church and ultimately in society.

Ewha stands as a shining success story, but there were other modes of communication, education, and empowerment for women as well. One mode was the medical training that began in the Kwanghyewŏn clinic, the forerunner of Severance Hospital, where Dr. Horace Allen began training low-ranking palace women in the rudiments of modern medicine in what would become the start of the nursing profession in Korea. Foreign mission organizations soon realized that there had to be women doctors to treat women patients, and Lillias Horton (later Mrs. Horace G. Underwood) was the first women's physician to arrive.

The interaction of the famous missionary "triad" of work?evangelistic, medical, and educational, is demonstrated in the story of the Sŏnch'ŏn territory in North P'yŏng'an Province. A hundred years ago, an American couple named Cyril and Susan Ross were sent to join the newly opened Presbyterian mission station in Sŏnch'ŏn Town. Cyril Ross started "itinerating" to nearby villages visiting the homes of students in the Sŏnch'ŏn Presbyterian boys' school, seeking out parents for possible conversion to Christianity. As the students' families became Christians and started little house churches, they invited relatives and neighbors to join, increasing the Christian community in the Sŏnch'ŏn territory from 677 in the year 1902, to 4,039 between in 1907. The boys' and girls' academies on the Sŏnch'ŏn mission compound became important regional institutions along with the Presbyterian clinic run there by Drs. Alfred Sharrocks and Susan Ross, the men's and women's physicians.

When Dr. Susan Ross was not seeing patients, she ran a class in her living room for women who wanted to join the church, taught hygiene at the girls' academy and paid visits of her own to women in homes throughout the city? dropping in unannounced to talk on the women's porches and invite them to church or to communicant classes. Like all other women missionaries, Susan Ross did not go calling alone: she was always accompanied by a Korean companion known as a *yoch'ŏndosa*, or "Biblewoman." Biblewomen were workers paid by the mission to act as assistants to missionary women doing evangelistic work. Some did double duty as the missionaries' language teachers, accompanying them whenever they went out on what amounted to language laboratory sessions in public. Some Biblewomen were students, or former students; others were deaconesses in the local church; others were simply Christian women who applied for positions as Biblewomen in an employment climate which otherwise offered them very little chance to earn an income. The foreign women depended on them and respected them both for their dedication as Christians and for their strength as women.

Biblewomen were major sources of cultural information for the missionaries and often spared them from embarrassing failures. Once, for example, Susan Ross wanted to do some calling on women in "unbelieving homes." "The Biblewoman told me the women in such homes would be so embarrassed by [my] coming upon them in the dishabille to which they let themselves down in August heat that I could do them no good. So we waited for cooler weather," she continued, and "We had some good times calling until the weather grew cold and the women went into their houses and shut their doors. After that we could still call where we knew the people but it was not so easy to approach perfect strangers as it had been when we would find the women in their yards or sitting in their open doorways.

Susan Ross and her Biblewomen conducted classes for village women in Sŏnch'ŏn, teaching them how to read and understand the Bible and encouraging them to develop leadership skills. The Biblewomen helped her attract local women to the "mothers clubs" ("*moni-hoe*") that she started in order to maternal and child health. Dr. Ross's concerns in this work reflected an interesting blend of Calvinism and modern science. "So many children are fed whatever they want whenever they want it," she wrote, echoing a common Western criticism. "No system at all, not only digestion suffers, but when such practices are carried to extreme, disobedience and lack of self-control are the result." She was not the first or the last Westerner to comment disapprovingly on the freedom permitted Korean toddlers, but she was just as quick to acknowledge the futility of many Western remedies for what ailed the local population. Once she returned from a trip Seoul full of ideas, charts, posters, recipes for a milk substitute made of beans, and a substitute for orange juice made from cabbage. "Some of the mothers know and put into practice already some of the modern ideas of child hygiene," she wrote. "Babies are very much better taken care of now than when we first came to town. Still the most willing mother has so little with which to do that it is small wonder if she sometimes grows tired of hearing foreigners who have all the milk, soap, clean clothes, orange juice, etc. . . tell her how to do things. She would be glad to do so also if only she could."

As younger missionaries arrived to staff the Sŏnch'ŏn clinic, Susan Ross devoted increasing amounts of time to teaching in the girls' academy and the Women's Bible Institute. The "BI" classes were short courses on the Bible aimed at non-Christians who were recruited by the Biblewomen who promoted them as chances to attend school—a rare privilege for ordinary Korean village women. Some classes were more advanced and aimed at leadership training for church women. Hundreds of women turned out for sessions of Sŏnch'ŏn's Bible Institute. Some failed the courses and simply returned to try again. Susan Ross sympathized with women who were ill prepared for school by life in rural Korea. As she once observed, "Minds that have not only been untrained but have been dulled by grief are slow in awakening."

In time, Cyril and Susan Ross' s Korean-born daughter Lilian returned to Korea as a missionary herself, following in her parents' footsteps. Lilian, who was sent to the town of Kanggye in the far north, did what she had watched her mother do when she was growing up. She gathered classes of women and children to learn the Bible through storytelling. In the United States she had studied teaching methods, including storytelling via simple visual media such as the flannel graph, a plain flannel-covered easel on which colored flannel cutouts of Bible story characters and all the other elements of scenery for storytelling could be stuck and moved around as the story continued.

Lilian Ross easily found women who needed her attention. Kanggye too had a Bible Institute that offered classes for men and women in the slack season for farming. Her women's Bible Institute alumnae formed her network of contacts in the surrounding villages and provided her with welcoming places to visit when she went out to conduct classes at village churches, welcomes that she reciprocated when they came calling in Kanggye. At home she also opened her living room to classes for the town's lone women, the castaways and runaways who worked in restaurants, bars and coffee shops and often engaged in prostitution. These were women who routinely endured degrading abuse, and on their rare days off Lilian Ross tried to give them a warm environment in which they could talk and sing and regain some dignity through study.

Tomorrow I am hoping to have a group of cafe girls. The Jap. keeper is not sending his girls (only 3 of 12 are Korean) but the [Korean] keeper said he would. He is reported to have said, 'And does the foreigner consider us as folks? Then invite us!' We shall see what happens. Then next I want to return to the *kisaeng* house where Ch'anghi was and where I have called several times, and see if I can have them come for a party. How else can one get on the inside? There is so much to be done and so little being tried for these neediest ones. I love to have more folks to love, with music, flowers, and books, but most of all our Savior to share with eager ones? His lambs and sheep for whom I too am responsible. Just how could I not be happy!"

One of her forays into social work with young working women was her class for "bus girls," the undereducated teenagers who operated the doors and collected the fares on public autos and buses. Bus girls worked cruel hours, often starting work in the freezing pre-dawn and staying on their vehicles with little time for rest or food, until the last run in the evening. They answered to several "bosses" at once: the drivers, their supervisors, and the customers, and they suffered considerable psychological and physical abuse. Lilian Ross considered them prime candidates for evangelism, and despite the hardships of their working days they were still endearing as teenagers:

Yesterday evening the bus girls came to play. Of the nine, three have had some church training. When I led in prayer one of the youngsters started giggling and that started one or two more. The others called them down. (One of the girls came today and said the one who started giggling said she was sorry and that she did badly and that she wanted to be a Christian after this.) While we ate I said each one of us should do a stunt. One girl had brought her hymnbook and so the stunts consisted of hymn singing. I told them the story of the boy who had to pay store price for the boat that he himself had made and lost and found on sale? and ended up "Ye are bought with a price." The girls asked one of their number to lead in prayer before they left. We had a good time getting acquainted and playing games. They seldom have time off to go to church working on Sunday. They are a responsive bunch well worth some effort and help. . . . The child who came back today said she was leaving the bus work, no future to it, unable to be a Christian. She hoped there would be some opening at our hospital which there isn't.

These of course are microcosms of only one kind of interaction in the story of Korean Christianity?that between the efforts of foreign women and Korean women. The spread of Christianity among Korean women, however, is in the aggregate a story of Korean women influencing each other. One prime example of this is the beginning of the Korean YWCA, which, unlike the YMCA, started without any foreign help. The YWCA began as an idea in the minds of two Korean students attending the World Christian Student Federation convention in Peking, Helen Kim and Kim Pilley, both of whom went on to distinguish themselves as pioneer educators of Korean women. After returning from Peking they traveled the country talking to church women and organizing support groups for their national YWCA. In 1924 Helen Kim went to the World YWCA conference in Washington, D.C. and obtained recognition for the Korean YWCA charter. Within two years the YWCA had chapters in Korea's major cities that were hard at work on many kinds of

projects, from funding Biblewomen by raising pigs, by holding temperance meetings to fight alcohol abuse and family violence, and by running classes from kindergartens all the way up to night schools for working women. The YWCA started hostels, safe places for women to stay when traveling or away from home attending school. The organization also ran leadership workshops for members all over the country.

Under the Japanese regime, the YWCA like the YMCA was a haven for independent thought and action, however constrained by the colonial police and *kempeitai*. The organization was democratic, idealistic, and forward-looking in the struggle to overcome illiteracy and poverty among many other social ills. In recent times the YWCA has enjoyed a high reputation in Korea as a bastion of civil society virtues, sometimes being a social center and sometimes being a rallying point for human rights, but always being associated with the cutting edge of advancement for women and their interests. In the dark days after the Korean War the YWCA ran widows' homes, orphanages, rural training centers, and job centers. During the years of military dictatorship it was frequently the scene of meetings promoting democracy. In short, it has been a prime example of the intersection of Christian theory and practice.

CHRISTIANITY AND ANTI-COMMUNISM

A somewhat different expression of the intersection of Christianity and society, or in this case politics, is the long association of Protestant Christianity, in particular, with the anti-Communist state in South Korea. Fueled by the horrors of the Korean War era and the burning anger of North Korean Christian refugees who lost everything to the leftist regime of Kim Il-sung in North Korea, the anti-Communist posture of the church in South Korea has often worked to make it a handmaiden of the military security state created by Syngman Rhee and his Liberal Party, and fortified by Park Chung Hee and his successor generals during the decades of military rule.

When the Americans occupied South Korea in 1945 and instituted what has been called their "interpreters' government," they sought to employ Koreans who could speak English and who knew something about American political and cultural ideals. They found many Korean Christians who had studied English in mission schools and could remember pre-war lessons in Western history and democratic ideals. The collaboration between the American Military Government and Koreans with Western orientation was immediately obvious to the general public, who saw affiliation with the Americans and knowledge of America including Christianity as an advantage in the new, post-war political system. When the exiled Korean nationalist leader Syngman Rhee ended his decades in the United States and was returned to Korea aboard General Douglas MacArthur's own airplane, it seemed clear that this American-educated Methodist was the embodiment of the future envisioned for South Korea. Notwithstanding the fact that the Americans who had to deal with Rhee found him dictatorial and undemocratic in many ways, Koreans took his leadership as an opportunity to test what it meant to live under a democratic government with a Christian (i.e., Protestant) leader.

As the emerging "American candidate" prior to 1948 and as President of the Republic of Korea from 1948 to 1960, Syngman Rhee played his American connection for all it was worth on the stage of Korean politics. American power after World War II seemed awesome to Koreans and the material and even spiritual qualities of American life seemed enviable. Without deprecating the authentic spiritual appeal of Christianity during that era

or diminishing the importance of faith and belief for individuals, Christianity had an undeniable appeal as an ideology opposed to Communism and the religious system, as Koreans saw it, of the richest, most powerful people on earth. This perception enhanced the position of Christianity in the South Korean ideological spectrum and contributed much to its rapid growth.

Historical circumstances? primarily the lack of a viable non-communist “Korean” alternative in the South in the early months of the Cold War? thus afforded Korean Christians a great social advantage. Rhee cultivated the “Christian government” aspect of his presidency by regularly attending the Ch?ng-dong First Methodist Church, by receiving Korean and foreign Christian leaders, and by gestures such as putting chaplains in the military, American-style. Even while Rhee’s Liberal Party sank deeper into corruption, railroaded legislation through the National Assembly, and used political violence against opponents, South Korea’s Protestants largely supported him personally until the very end, when he was overthrown by massive protests following a rigged election in 1960.

Though “Christian prestige” was hurt by Rhee’s disgrace and perhaps also by the fecklessness of Rhee’s successor, Prime Minister Chang My?n, a Catholic Christian, Korea’s Protestants continued to support the anti-Communist state. After the military coup of 1961 they continued to buy the state’s anti-Communist rhetoric to such an extent that they accepted repressive security laws and kept silent as center-left elements in society were suppressed, censored, purged, and even executed. The symbiosis of church and state was clear in the participation by leading Protestant clergy in presidential “prayer breakfasts” invoking divine guidance (and favor) for General-turned-President Park Chung-hee and the country’s ruling military apparatus. The symbiosis was nurtured in especially egregious ways by right-wing Christian leaders from United States who frequently turned up in Seoul to praise the South Korean regime as a fearless defender in the world-wide crusade against godless communism.

However, it was during the years of military rule that a significant part of Korea’s Christian community, both Protestant and Catholic, began to oppose the undemocratic tactics of the Park regime. They criticized the design that the government was creating for economic development, based as it was on a low-wage, export-driven development model that provided little for the human rights of workers and privileged the emerging business class. They were offended by the cynicism of the military junta that had promised a return to civilian rule but “retired” from the army and resumed ruling as civilians after government-dominated elections in 1963. The political opposition, consisting of a lineage of conservative politicians (some of them Catholics) who had opposed Syngman Rhee, supported the brief prime ministership of Chang My?n in 1960–61, and criticized the “civilianization” of the military junta, gave rise to the impression of an opposition stance among Catholics in general. The emergence of the Catholic politician Kim Dae-Jung and his run for the presidency against Park Chung-hee in 1971 further identified Catholicism with the opposition. The Catholic poet Kim Chi-ha became famous for his satirical attacks on the Park government and its cronies in the military and big business. Catholic clergymen like Bishop Daniel Chi Haksun and Cardinal Stephen Kim Suhwan helped protect demonstrators from the police and began to use their positions in society to speak openly against the government’s use of secret police methods to silence critics.

Certain Protestants likewise demanded an end to the government's betrayal of democracy. Their stand was in the finest tradition of civil society, articulating and insisting on limits for state power and using non-governmental organizations and fora to uphold civil rights. While most of Korea's Christians maintained their attitude of support for the anti-Communist state in South Korea and remained preoccupied with theological issues and controversies that dated back to the Korean War and the colonial period, a more progressive wing of the Protestant church focused on the contemporary Korean scene. At the center of this group was a liberal sub-denomination of Presbyterians known as *Kijang* (short for *Kidokkyo changnohoe*, "Christian Presbyterians," as opposed to the more conservative mainstream "Jesus Presbyterians"). The Kijang Presbyterians, led by the Rev. Kim Chejun and headquartered at the Han'guk Theological Seminary in Suwon, had a long liberal tradition of social activism going back to its regional origins in northeastern Korea and the ethnic Korean area of southeastern Manchuria called Kando (*Jiandao*), a cockpit of leftist opposition to Japanese colonial rule and the homeland of an important strain of Korean Communism. While the Kijang Presbyterians from that tradition had actually struggled to win converts from Communism and present the territory with alternatives to Communism as an ideology of liberation, in the South Korean context of the 1970s their message of social justice and criticism of the military regime was reinterpreted by many fellow Christians as woolly thinking and leftist fellow-traveling. Articulate Kijang spokesmen such as the brothers Mun Ikhwan and Mun Tonghwan, both of the Han'guk Seminary faculty, were viewed as politically unreliable and actually spent time in prison for violating some of the Seoul regime's national security laws, confined, in essence, for giving aid and comfort to the enemy. The Mun brothers and other Christian activists sacrificed much under the military regime but they also identified Christianity with the cause of social justice and kept alive the church's civil society function as an institution that was fighting to remain free from state dictation.

The confrontation between church and state became particularly acute in the 1970s, after Park Chung-hee declared a state of national emergency and began ruling by decree under what is known as the Yushin ("Revitalizing Reforms") constitution, a system that gave him dictatorial powers. The South Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) harassed church leaders and intimidated worshippers in congregations led by certain targeted pastors. Individuals like Pastor Pak Hyunggyu of the Che'il Presbyterian Church in Seoul were singled out for abuse because of their role in human rights demonstrations and public criticisms of the Park regime. The rationale for such harassment was always national security, the argument being that agitators like Reverend Pak were fomenting anti-state activity. It was useful for the regime to make examples of prominent dissidents, arresting them, holding them under house detention, and sometimes trying and sentencing them on charges of sedition and treason.

A particularly acute conflict between church and state concerned the low-wage driven industrial export model of economic development that had been adopted by the Park Chung Hee regime. In the 1960s and seventies, the National Christian Council set up a labor advocacy unit called Urban Industrial Mission (UIM) aimed at protecting workers from abuse in the workplace and helping them bargain effectively with their employers. UIM had a staff of Christians who went into factories and encouraged workers to band together to demand basic improvements including safer conditions, better pay, and humane treatment. At the time, any action that encouraged workers to organize was seen as a threat to the government's low-wage economic development strategy, and UIM was particularly troublesome because of its effectiveness and its international connections.

Active in the leadership of UIM, for example, were American missionaries trained in community development and labor issues. They made themselves conspicuous in the PRP protests, standing with family members outside the gate of Seoul's infamous West Gate Prison in vigils calling attention to the legal irregularities of the so-called People's Revolutionary Party Case of 1974, a celebrated instance of workers accused of communist connections. In the denouement of the PRP case the government prevailed and executed eight of the alleged PRP conspirators, and deported the two American missionaries most closely associated with labor advocacy.

The rise of Catholic human rights advocacy followed the Vatican II call to witness for the poor and oppressed of the world. In Korea, two further developments heightened the concern of the Catholic church for local issues: the transfer of church leadership from foreign to local control in 1962 and the KCIA kidnapping and near-murder of Kim Dae-Jung in 1973, in retribution for his vocal opposition to Park Chung-hee's "revitalizing reforms." Christian activism in Korea thereafter became a decidedly ecumenical affair, a rare convergence of Catholic and Protestant work. Though the bulk of Protestant membership remained pietistic and spiritually oriented, inclined to tolerate the government in the name of national security, strong minorities in both Christian traditions made human rights a special cause during the 1970s and 1980s. Leading members of the Protestant National Christian Council joined Catholic priests in issuing "declarations of conscience." A Catholic-Protestant coalition of clergymen, politicians, and intellectuals threw down the gauntlet at an illegal assembly in the Myong-dong Catholic Cathedral on March 1, 1976, with a manifesto on human rights recalling the spirit of the 1919 independence uprising against Japan and denouncing the Park regime for tarnishing that vision with political dictatorship and economic oppression. Its signers included Kim Dae-Jung, former President Yun Poson, former Foreign Minister Chong Ilhyong, National Council of Churches Secretary-General Kim Kwansuk, Christian human rights activist Yi Ujng, and the great Quaker leader Ham Sakhon. Some of the signers were jailed for a considerable time and all of them, including former President Yun, were harassed continually for years thereafter by the KCIA. Their words, however, inspired the entire South Korean democracy movement well into the 1980s. The rise of General Chun Doo-hwan in 1979 and the Kwangju massacre of May 1980 created an atmosphere of real terror in South Korea that silenced much of the opposition that had found ways to express itself in the 1970s. Christian publications were shut down, Christian broadcasting outlets were subjected to censorship and lost their reputation for independent news reporting, clergymen were ordered from their pulpits, and services were subjected to surveillance in a manner reminiscent of the worst years of Japanese thought control. Korea had changed, however, and even Chun Doo-hwan could not control the demand for democratic participation.

THE CHALLENGE OF PROSPERITY

Aggregate growth in the number of Christians has also brought with it a proliferation of sects and denominations. Before World War II, Korea had only a few varieties of Protestantism, mainly Presbyterian, Methodist, Anglican, Baptist, and the Salvation Army. Since Liberation, however, and especially since the involvement of large numbers of overseas religious groups in the reconstruction of Korea after 1953, many more denominations have taken root, planted by foreign missionaries but nurtured and now led by Korean pastors and laypeople. These include the Assemblies of God, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Mormons. There are also some Korean "new religions" that draw on

Protestant traditions but are actually cults. These include the famous Unification Church of Mun Sŏngmyŏng and the Olive Tree Church of the former Presbyterian elder Pak Taesŏn.

The division and subdivision of Korea's Protestant churches is a serious drain on the social potential of the overall movement. Most observers acknowledge this problem and the large church federations such as the National Christian Council represent attempts to reunite the factions on common ground.

Nevertheless, the official number of Protestant "denominations" was 96 in the mid-1990s, fifty-nine of them Presbyterian, while the Catholics continued to have only one, at least officially. Foreign missionaries who came to Korea representing varieties of Presbyterians, or Methodists, or Baptists in other countries often get the blame for setting factional precedents. However, this is only one reason. The Presbyterian Church in particular started splitting as soon as the missionaries began relinquishing control in the 1930s. In the beginning the issues concerned theological convictions and differences over Shintŏ worship. But the church continued to divide and divide again in the 1950s and '60s. This was in marked contrast to the ecclesiastical and organizational discipline made possible by the unified structure of the Korean Catholic Church under a single Archbishop (later Cardinal) appointed by the Vatican.

An analysis of the fifty-nine Presbyterian sub-denominations shows that although most Korean Presbyterians still belong to the five biggest groups, the tiny splinters that round out the list each consist of one or two churches that are associated with individual pastors who broke away from their parent denominations together with loyal followers to found their own groups. Establishing a new sub-denomination, however small, elevates the pastor to the status of "theologian," often enables him to found a "seminary" that employs "professors" and spawns graduates as "disciples" who go out and found "daughter churches" that recruit new members and raise new funds to help grow the denomination.

The Presbyterian Church traditionally is supposed to have strong organizational discipline and a corporate structure designed to maintain standards of theology and conduct. In Korea, however, the real tradition has always been congregational, with the pastor personally at the center of things. In the material world of contemporary Korea there are many incentives to have one's own congregational church and defy denominational discipline. One purely financial incentive is the sheer value of the land on which an urban church sits. Another is the fact that a congregational church can keep the contributions of its members without having to forward any to the central organization. No matter how mainline denominational leaders decry the splintering trend as prideful and selfish, the list of splinter churches is evidence of their powerlessness to reverse the trend.

Ironically, then, it is middle class prosperity and democracy that now poses the biggest threat to the future of South Korea's Protestant community. Many churches have grown rich and are even suspected of corruption, their budgets secret or lacking in transparency, their leaders exerting personal power far beyond their humble calling of service. Some of the biggest churches actually resemble empires, with business enterprises and newspapers and influence in areas outside the bounds of religion. This lack of accountability is a serious problem and sets the stage for scandals of the sort that already have done much damage to the integrity of the church.

