

**Zeitschrift:** Theologische Zeitschrift  
**Herausgeber:** Theologische Fakultät der Universität Basel  
**Band:** 55 (1999)  
**Heft:** 2-3

**Artikel:** Asian Values and Church Growth in Korea  
**Autor:** Kim, Kwang Shik  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-878004>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 13.07.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**



# Asian Values and Church Growth in Korea

## *1. Rethinking of Asian Values*

Geographically speaking Asia covers a vast and almost boundless continent in which three big civilizations have been developed and are still dominating the people in the regions of East Asia, South Asia, the Middle East and so on. What is called Asian values here does not imply the whole aspects of various ethical and religious values that have been created in the continent as a whole but rather means exclusively the values related to and referred to as the so-called Yu-Bul-Seon, i.e. Confucianism, Buddhism and Shamanism. This is because the frequent mention of Asian values in recent discussions concerning the economic development in East Asia seems to suggest that the values have something to do with the development.

People who are interested in the economic growth in East Asia are convinced that the cohesiveness and assiduousness should be noticed for the right understanding of the economic growth in the region. The cohesiveness and assiduousness are considered to refer to Confucian ethics including the patriarchal system and desire for learning. The very core of the ethics consists in the virtues of loyalty to king and of filial piety toward parents and ancestors. Both the loyalty and the piety constituted the leading ideology of Confucianism in previous days. The ideology is considered to have helped people secure the cohesiveness of community.

The desire for learning as well as the will to work is often indicated to have contributed greatly to the success of individuals and prosperity of the community. Confucian ethics teaches people to work hard not only for family but also for nation. In fact Confucian literati worked very hard to pass the old state examinations so that they might lead a successful career. The wealth of the nation was at the disposal of those who succeeded in getting power by passing the state examinations, while most farmers worked very hard only to survive. Until the present, lots of people are studying diligently in order to pass modern state examinations so that they may rise in the world as lawyers, officials and technocrats. Owing to the eagerness of people to learn and study, the number of higher educational institutions including colleges and universities has been rapidly increasing although the quality of education is said to lack in progress worthy of high evaluation but for the cases in some Japanese universities. The assiduousness, one of the most important Confucian virtues, with which people work and study, seems to have contributed greatly to the development of the economy in East Asia.

Confronted with the foreign exchange crisis in recent days some East Asian countries are supported financially and advised politically by the IMF



that they should perform a proposed reengineering program of the economy. Moreover, the business recession in the region seems too serious even for an optimistic expert to expect an early recovery for the depressed economy. For some critics of hasty temper the cohesiveness of the people in the Confucian culture appears to be the main cause of the economic recession. Of course, it should be kept in mind that the Confucian virtue of cohesiveness has brought about many troubles in business developments. The exclusiveness of a family-centered company toward outsiders is often blamed for providing an obstacle to progress in business. The conventional mistrust of expert managers from outside is considered to make it difficult to create large scale enterprises for the purpose of strengthening international competitiveness. In fact, the proposed reengineering of businesses is urgently needed to enter into competition with large scale companies from abroad.

Recently the Confucian values of loyalty and filial piety are at stake especially because of the recent economic crisis in East Asia. In any case, the values should be considered to have both the positive and the negative aspects at the same time. As mentioned above, the cohesiveness and assiduousness certainly have contributed greatly to the development of the economy in terms of effective management by those who are relatives, alumni, persons from the same hometown and also in terms of self-sacrificial devotion of the workers to their work. On the other hand, the transmission of business by heredity is said to bring about troubles which might lead to failure. The cohesiveness consists not only in the ties of blood but also in regionalism and alumni relationship. This is valid especially for the Korean society. The cohesiveness by kinship, regionalism and alumni relationship is often indicated to present an obstacle to restructuring of the business for development.

As for the Korean society and economy the cohesiveness appears to be ambivalent. It does not seem to be possible for Koreans to remove the influences of consanguinity, regional and alumni relationship from business and bureaucracy. Nevertheless, rational management should be introduced for restructuring the economy and society. Suffering and pain are to follow any kind of reform. In order to meet the need of reengineering, people have to preserve and endure the cohesiveness on the one hand and to remove the exclusionism toward an open society on the other. It is indeed difficult to pursue the two opposite aims at the same time. But a strong leadership should be formed so that the two different lines may be possible with the least conflict. The patriarchalism in Confucian tradition is still preserved and even preferred by the people in pursuit of strong leadership, even though they are eager to realize democracy in their social life.

In addition to the Confucian virtues of cohesiveness and assiduousness, the Buddhist virtues of self-restraint and self-denial as well as the Shamanistic folklore belief of blessing seem to have contributed more or less to the development of the economy in Korea. The former keeps the people from fal-



ling into luxury and waste while the latter convinces them of future prosperity in spite of present poverty and suffering. Thus the Yu-Bul-Seon cults helped the people develop the economy.

## *2. Church Growth as compared with Economic Development*

One might well refer to an Orientalism in the face of the failure to notice some considerable contributions of Asian values to church growth in Korea. In a strange contrast to the frequent mention of the relationship between Asian values and economic development in real earnest people, are rather liable to overlook the impact of Asian values on church growth. This is because Western Orientalism makes it difficult for Western theologians to evaluate the successful mission in Korea in an apt criticism of the relationship between the old religions and cultures in the land and church growth in terms of indigenization of the Christian gospel on the ground of the Yu-Bul-Seon cultures.

It is striking that both the economic development and the church growth are considerably dependent on the revival of the old Asian values in the process of modernization and evangelization in the recent history of Korea. As for the failure to notice the real contribution of the Asian values to church growth one may scarcely find any convincing reason unless one should consider that the old religions and cultures have already exercised a great impact on the Christian mission especially in the unconscious level of religious experience of believers. Of course it does not belong to theological verification to say that the church growth depends entirely on the creative power of Asian values to activate the Christian mission just as the same power has revitalized the East Asian economy in terms of cohesiveness and assiduousness. A theologian who is interested in church growth is obliged to a sociologist for his analysis of the growth. However, the theologian has to seek to interpret the cause and the reality of the growth from a theological perspective which is to be differentiated from the sociological one. In order to find a possible theological interpretation the seeming parallelism of church growth to economic development in Korea should be discussed in some points.

First of all the leading ideology of the dictatorial economic development policy in the seventieth seems to correspond to the this-worldly oriented gospel of the rising church in the same period. The so-called «Saemaeul» Movement which literally means new village movement was driven by the Park regime first in the seventieth and then by the Jeon government in the eightieth in order to enhance labour productivity on the one hand and to solidify the foundation of the dictatorial system on the other. The political ideology of the Saemaeul Movement had three objectives: diligence, self-help and cooperation. These three virtues of labour are considered to have contributed greatly



to the heightening of economic efficiency. The catchphrase of the movement read like «Let's seek to live in prosperity».

One may find the counterpart of the Saemaeul gospel in the sermons of Cho Yong Ki (Divid Cho), the representative preacher of the Yeo Eui Do Full Gospel Church, who teaches the so-called «Three Beats of Christian Gospel»: the blessings for soul, health and wealth (John III 1:2). Of course the Saemaeul gospel does not have anything to do with the blessed life after death. The secular gospel is related only to the earthly blessings, namely success and prosperity in this life. The Saemaeul movement obviously does not promise any kind of healing but presupposes health and diligence. Rev. Cho preaches the gospel of health and wealth in terms of a healing ministry and mediatory prayers for success and prosperity. Thus the Pentecostal gospel as well as the Saemaeul philosophy is concerned with health and wealth for prosperity in this life responding to the capitalistic expectations of people since the seventieth.

Harvey Cox indicates in his book *Fire from Heaven* (1995) that the amazing growth of the Yeo Eui Do Full Gospel Church, with the largest membership in the world (supposedly counting 400,000 believers in one local church), is related to the Pentecostal reception of Shamanistic superstition in terms of faith seeking blessing as well as to successful application of capitalistic human resource management to church administration for the purpose of maintaining the unbelievably large body of the congregation. The American theologian is afraid of a possible deterioration of Christian faith by Shamanistic belief. He also mentions a probable tendency toward authoritarian church government. He blamed the Pentecostal reception of Shamanism for its wrong use of the cult. The theologian rather agrees with Dr. Hyun Kyung Chung, a Korean woman professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York, who seeks to evoke the spirits full of rancor from the other world in order to liberate the oppressed people from their suffering and agony.

Although most Korean pastors are readily convinced of some negative developments by the Pentecostal movement in Korea, they certainly would not agree to the argumentation by the two liberation theologians for they believe that the blessing-seeking faith belongs to Biblical tradition while they do not like to find any liberation motive in shaman rituals. In any event, it should be kept in mind that right evaluation of Shamanism depends on correct understanding of the cult in its real phenomena. Usually shaman rituals are practiced to eliminate disaster and to bring blessing. The elimination of disaster does not mean liberation of the oppressed people but rather preparation for bringing blessing. Of course evocation rituals as memorial services are believed to satisfy a grudge of those who are unjustly persecuted and killed. However this does not mean liberation of the oppressed but rather implies that the souls full of rancor are pacified so that they might not annoy or seek revenge on the people in this world any longer.



In spite of the wrong evaluation of Shamanistic impact on church growth in Korea, Harvey Cox is right when he evaluates the contribution of human resource management to the community organization for church growth. In fact, the capitalistic concept of competition as well as the administrative method of management was introduced for the purpose of expanding the Christian community. A certain parallelism can be found between church and business. It seems to be sometimes that a few pastors who are considered to be successful in gathering together believers for their local churches will stop at nothing to gain their idea of expansion even at the cost of losing Christian orientation. Competition might encourage some pastors to attempt immorality, and success is believed to justify their vice. The capitalistic meritocracy by which most of the leading pastors in this capitalistically-oriented pagan land are to be characterized partly refers to the ideology of competition and also partly to the misleading idea of the success-seeking philosophy of the Saemaeul movement.

In the second place, the prosperity or the wealth of the nation which results from the economic development also helps Christians make such a great amount of contributions to churches that some of these religious institutions become rich enough to support missionary work abroad as well as social welfare at home. It is said that more than eighty Korean missionaries are working for Russians in Moscow and a large number of Koreans were sent to main land China to support the so-called house churches as well as the Three-Self Church. Thousands of missionaries are said to work for the people all over the world with financial support from rich churches. Some of the richest churches have already contributed a great amount of donations even to American theological schools such as Princeton Theological Seminary, Fuller Theological Seminary, etc. It is well known that Somang Presbyterian Church in Seoul has established a college of science and technology at Yen Pyen, Manchuria, and still continues a great amount of financial support. The rich Presbyterian church has already begun a big project at the request of the North Korean government, which will provide with such a college of science and technology at the Rajin-Seonbong District as was established at Yen Pyen, China.

In the third place, Christianity has greatly contributed to the remarkable economic development in two different ways. Christian activism is considered to have succeeded in realizing democracy and justice in the field of industry and business by struggling against dictatorship and injustice and by awakening every worker to his rights and entitlements. The activist mission for urban and industrial problems was the first to pay attention to the miserable situation of workers and to make an appeal for help and reform. The activists are real peace makers in industry and business in spite of their radical movement. They remind us of the Confucian literati in history who presented a memorial to their king without caring about the danger of persecution or death. The Christian activists and the Confucian literati have the common basis of



conscience the voice of which led and encouraged them to the prophecy of reform. The voice of conscience is believed to come from God or Heaven. This same voice calls both Christian humanists and Confucian humanists into prophesying and memorializing.

The second way the church contributed to the economic development is to be found in those pastoral programs which are intended to increase happiness and stability of Christian families by helping the housewives struggle against the decadent cultures resulting from an affluent society. Churches are often considered to be strongholds which protect Christians from pleasure and corruption prevailing over the secular city of competitiveness and productivity. There are various programs for middle-class housewives. Bible class is the most popular of the church activities. People are eager to learn the truth of God and enthusiastic in attending Bible class one or two times in a week. The Bible study takes place usually in the daytime, while prayer meetings are held either in early morning or deep at night and sometimes continue with fervent prayers sitting all night.

In addition to the earnestness of study and the piety of prayer, fasting is often recommended for Christian spirituality, especially for those who regularly visit prayer retreats. The eagerness to study the Bible might well be affiliated upon the Confucian piety of studying Chinese Classics including Iking, the Analects of Confucius and so on. The fervent prayer and the ascetic fasting are rightly considered to be ascribed to the piety of Buddhist monks. The Confucian earnestness of learning and the Buddhist enthusiasm of practicing piety are to be evaluated as the religious archetypes of Christian spirituality in and through which the Holy Spirit works for the indigenization of the gospel.

### *3. Church Growth as Revival of Old Religions?*

As mentioned in the above discussion church growth is closely related with the indigenization of the gospel on the grounds of Yu-Bul-Seon cultures as well as with economic development, which in turn is influenced by some Asian values. It is from the perspective of Christian orientation that a serious question may be raised by those theologians who would like to take the redemptive event of indigenization for a dangerous syncretism: they may ask whether church growth means nothing but a revival of the old religions of Yu-Bul-Seon. Most conservative pastors and theologians are very anxious about the supposed danger of syncretism which they think results from the deterioration of Christian gospel into the old religions in the process of indigenization.

In fact Sung Bum Yun, a pioneer of indigenization theology, once wrote in his book *Korean Theology* (1972) that the indigenization of Christian gos-



pel means for him a syncretism of Christianity and old religions. Here the term seems to be used in a modified meaning of combination. He always seeks to find a possible point of contact in the old religions where Christianity encounters the old cults. The encounter between Christian faith and pagan beliefs is considered to be a syncretism. However, Yun emphasizes the importance of finding out the point of contact rather than the meaning of syncretism itself. Therefore the Methodist theologian tries to compare some of the seemingly equivalent concepts of Confucian philosophy with Christian doctrine. For example, «Sung» or «Sincerity» is considered to be the leading idea of metaphysics in the book of *Chung Yung*, one of the most important Chinese classics. The Chinese character Sung is composed of two basic vocabularies i.e. word and accomplishment. The literal meaning of Sung is proposed to be interpreted as «the word is accomplished». Thus the concept is compared with the doctrine of revelation. For the accomplishment of the word as the incarnate Logos can be understood to mean the revelation of God in history.

In contrast to the enthusiastic alignment of some followers, most conservative Presbyterian theologians as well as the whole body of clergymen and laymen are strongly opposed to the proposed syncretism of Christianity and pagan religions as the result of indigenization of Christian gospel. The main objection that made the people express a raging indignation and bitterness is based on the general conviction of Christians that the truth of orthodox faith should be kept in its pure form without being mingled with other religions. The tenacity of Koreans clinging excessively to orthodoxy and rationale seems to have come from the Neo-Confucianism that was adopted by the rigorous élite of the Yi Dynasty since the fifteenth century as the national ideology. The Confucian literati assuming authority over people were excessively fond of the Chu Hsi philosophy and they did not want to know any other thought than what they had learned from the Chinese Master of Neo-Confucianism. The literati always sought after rationale or moral justification for their life and thought. The philosophy was considered to teach them such justification. As a rule orthodoxy is valid for Koreans as a rationale for everyday life as well as for faith. Koreans can hardly endure heresy and distortion of orthodoxy.

In this connection neither syncretism nor religious pluralism is welcomed among Christians. Most conservative church leaders are still strongly opposed to syncretism and pluralism. The former is supposed to be dangerous because it threatens Christian faith with distortion of the gospel. The latter is considered to relativize Christian religion and to threaten the identity of the gospel. As a matter of fact none of the Korean theologians except for the «Sung» theologian are prepared to agree to the bold proposition that indigenization of Christian gospel can be understood to be syncretism of Christianity and pagan religions. This proposition is blamed for having made the concept of indi-



genization misunderstood, especially by those who are concerned about the identity of Christianity for the Sung theologian and afraid of distortion of the gospel into pagan cults. However, indigenization as a redemptive event should not be identified with an artificial syncretism by which a theologian may seek to combine some of the Christian doctrines with the equivalent teachings in pagan religions. The event of indigenization does not mean a conscious reflection of religious teachings by theologians but rather an unconscious process of redemptive work of the Holy Spirit. Neither the Sung theologian nor his critics can have a premonition of the redemptive work.

As for religious pluralism, most Protestant churches are not in sympathy with other religions, though some theologians are very much interested in the dialogue between Christianity and other religions. The dialogue with other religions is being led by Western theologians which are eager to see that Christian traditions can be verified by comparing them with those of other religions and vice versa, and that believe all the religious conflicts in the world could be settled by mutual understanding. In the Western World the dialogue between religions is being considered to make contribution to the increase of world peace. However, it is in East Asian churches that the dialogue seems somewhat strange to people. This is because it is superfluous and meaningless for people to lead dialogue with other religions in order to survive among the conventional cults without conflicts with them. The method of mutual illumination which is proposed for a successful and fruitful dialogue certainly deepens the understanding of Christianity as well as other religions by illuminating the dark sides of one religion with the help of the bright sides of another religion. The work of enlightening is performed by those who are engaged in conscious reflection upon the relationship between religions. Therefore the dialogue means a scholarly work. Here the scholarship never means a redemptive event.

In distinction from dialogue with other religions the event of indigenization belongs to the history of redemption which takes place as an unconscious process in terms of the work of the Holy Spirit. The event of indigenization as unconscious process of redemption should not be confused with the theology of indigenization as a conscious reflection upon the event. That is to say, the scholarly work of the theology belongs to the man who is indeed engaged in studying the history and phenomena of the event but still oriented by the work of the Holy Spirit. It is a pity that people often confuse the event with the theology not knowing that the redemptive event cannot be manipulated artificially by a theologian in the way the event should be taken for a syncretism. A theologian cannot be the subject of indigenization. He is working just for scholarly reflection upon the redemptive event. The Holy Spirit is the authentic subject of the event in which also the theologian as a Christian takes part and on which he reflects.



Indigenization neither as syncretism nor as pluralism means the redemptive event is the work of the Holy Spirit, which can be related both to church growth as externalization of the event and to the encounter of Christian spirituality and Korean piety as internalization of the event. It is believed that church growth is the highest goodness that can be attained by means of pastoral ministry. What is helpful for church growth is evaluated to be good, and what hinders the church from growing seems to be evil. Syncretism and pluralism are blamed for their evil, because they threaten pure and absolute Christianity. Conservatism seeks to preserve the pure teachings and the absolute values of Christianity as they were once established in history. Perhaps it may sound ironical to say that most conservative believers are the most indigenized Christians in Korea. The best thing they think they can do to preserve the pure and absolute Christianity is that they can resort to the old Korean piety. It is in this sense that the more authentic Christians they want to be, the more sincere Koreans they become. Thus Korean Christians are *simul Christianus et paganus* in its real sense. Conservatism is believed to enhance church growth and to preserve the pure teachings and the absolute values. The conservatism has to resort to Korean piety in order to perform its task, and necessarily becomes a warm nursery for indigenization.

The conservatives resort to Korean piety which consists in three values: orthodoxy in teaching, practice of ascetism and earnest devotion. Orthodoxy in teaching was taught by Neo-Confucian literati against all kinds of heresy in the world. Likewise, Christians are always warned of heresy. Ascetism is usually practiced by Buddhist monks. Christians are advised to practice ascetism if they wish and pray for health or success. Earnest devotion is the most important thing for shaman rituals. Christians are asked to do the same in worship. These three forms of Korean piety are preferred by conservative Protestants to keep the pure and absolute gospel from being secularized and relativized. The whole unconscious process of transforming Korean piety into Christian spirituality is considered to be ascribed to the work of the Holy Spirit for this does not belong to conscious theological work.

In any event, indigenization should not be understood to be a revival of old religions. If indigenization is supposed to mean syncretism, the indigenized Christianity would be considered to be a product of the revival of old religions. In other words, church growth could also be wrongly underestimated as the revival of old pagan religions only on the supposition that the indigenization of the Christian gospel means nothing but a revival of pagan religions. What differentiates indigenization from syncretism consists in the difference in the aims pursued through both religious processes. It is the aim of indigenization that the Christian gospel should be rightly received by pagans without losing its identity even in the radical changes of cultures that might threaten Christian orientation. Indigenization relates directly to the identity of the Christian gospel. On the other side, syncretism means for Sung Bum Yun an



amalgam of Christianity and pagan religions which is considered to be possible only under the condition that similarities between Christian doctrines and pagan teachings should be combined with each other. Here syncretism relates to similarities.

Those who are interested in studying the theology of religious pluralism that has been attempted in terms of interreligious dialogue are enthusiastic in seeking to find a common factor in all religions, from the perspective of which the diversities and the varieties of the religions could be interpreted into an absolute and abstract truth supposedly existing over and transcending all the relative and historical cults all over the world. Previously, the common factor was considered to consist in reconciliation between God and man. It was a comparative study on religions, as well as studies on the history of religions, that had made it possible for theologians to consider the idea of reconciliation to be the common factor of all religions when existentialism predominated the Western world. Recently, the theologians of religion take the ideology of liberation as the common factor of all religions since sociology as well as socialism has swayed the scepter of the sciences in the name of freedom and justice. But now the whole world is taken by the storm of capitalism. Post modern man cannot be saved either by reconciliation or by liberation, for meaning and freedom cannot meet the needs of a society of infinite competitiveness.

#### *4. Church Growth as an Explosion of Indigenization*

If indigenization is to be understood as a redemptive event in the church community as a socio-cultural phenomena, the meaning and history of indigenization should be discussed first, and the church growth in Korea can be explained as an explosion of indigenization of Christian gospel on the grounds of pagan cults: Confucianism, Buddhism and Shamanism. Neither the supposition of syncretism nor the hypothesis of pluralism seems to answer the question of the identity of Christian gospel that is raised by the indigenization theologian. In case indigenization is defined as syncretism of Christianity and pagan cults, there remains no room for a Christian identity of the indigenized church. Then this church becomes nothing more than an amalgam of religions. This kind of amalgam is not expected to keep the gospel from being assimilated, distorted and deteriorated into paganism with Christian orientation lost in the ocean of East Asian cultures. It is in the dialogue between religions that instead of the identity, either the ambiguous idea or the radical ideology is recommended as a common basis on which religions are expected to live in peace and to work together for the common good of human beings. Neither of the two theological assumptions is appropriate for a right understanding of indigenization.



The theologians who were concerned with the problem of indigenization usually started their inquiry with the keywords «seed» and «soil». Koreans usually associate rootage of seed with indigenization when they hear «Toch-akhwa», the Korean word for the term, which literally means «making rootage». The soil of culture should be cultivated to be fertile, if it is sterile, in order that the seed of the Christian gospel may root in it. Some of the theologians were convinced that the Yu-Bul-Seon cultures are fertile enough for the Christian gospel to be indigenized in. The fertility of the soil was considered to consist in the presumed similarities between Christianity and pagan cults. They counted the concept of Sung, the three-gods-belief of the Dan-Gun Myth, the triad of Shamanism, the eschatology of the prophetic book, «Chung-Gam-Rog», and so on. However, this kind of comparative study on religions usually led either to syncretism or to religious pluralism.

Even though the theologians thought it was fortunate that they found the fertility of the soil for the Christian mission, in the Yu-Bul-Seon cultures they had to make reservations for the sterility of the soil due to the way that the conventional religions were blamed for the dark side of Korean culture and society. The pagan cults are certainly underestimated because of their sterility which resulted in the isolation and underdevelopment of the nation in the nineteenth century on the one hand, but are still highly regarded because of their fertility for Christianity which later enabled the modernization and development of the nation. The theologians came to the conclusion that the cultures and the religions were not sufficient for the salvation of the people without being amalgamated with and illuminated by the Christian gospel in terms of indigenization either in the sense of syncretism or religious pluralism. Thus, indigenization is understood to be the most important method of the mission for Christianizing the pagan country. However, the most dangerous aspect is that the amalgamation of the gospel with paganism as well as the mutual illumination of religions by each other threatens the Christian orientation of the mission.

It was Tong Shik Ryu who proposed to analogize the concept of indigenization with the doctrine of the Incarnation for the first time. It was through self-negation that the divine Logos became the incarnate Logos. Likewise, the seed of the Christian gospel dies first in order to be indigenized in pagan cultures. The death of the seed means the first negation and refers to the Western culture, while indigenization implies the second negation which is related to the Asian culture. Thus, he mentioned the double negation or sometimes double transcendence, which he thought could be applied also to the doctrines of the Cross and the Resurrection in a way that the Cross depicts the first and the Resurrection the second. The idea of double negation seems to have been borrowed from the philosophy of Zen-Buddhism. Ryu sought to find similarity of double negation between the Incarnation and indigenization in order to make an analogy between them. However, the two redemptive events



can not be analogized without securing the identity of Christ for each of the events.

It is regrettable that the theologian of indigenization did not give attention to the ontological identity instead of the epistemological identity based on the creaturely similarity of double negation. The ontological identity implies that the same Christ is both the subject of the Incarnation and that of indigenization. This event can never be artificially performed any more than that event could be recreated in history. It is in this sense that indigenization cannot be either made or used as a method of the mission. The redemptive event cannot be produced by a human genius in theology. Nor can it be manipulated artificially by a person who would like to contribute to amalgamation of the gospel with pagan cultures, as is often shown on some Christmas cards where Mary and the Holy Infant are drawn in conventional Korean clothes. This sort of amalgamation is considered to belong to the syncretism proposed by those who willingly support the theology of «Pungryu» as well as that of «Sung». One is created by Tong Shik Ryu in terms of a Shamanistic interpretation of Christianity while the other is insisted by Sung Bum Yun as a part of Christianizing Confucian philosophy for the purpose of providing Christians with a possible point of contact for evangelism and mission work.

It is the one and the same Jesus Christ who came as a Jew in the Incarnation and then has been coming since the historical event as a pagan in every indigenization in history and today. Of course, the Christians of tomorrow will expect him to still come as a Jew and as a pagan at the same time. The Biblical witness and the doctrine of the Incarnation that the divine Logos became flesh can be understood to mean no more than that Christ is the subject of the Incarnation. There is the false teaching that Jesus was a mere historical person who has been risen as a deity to symbolize an absolute value such as the idea of reconciliation and the ideology of liberation in order to meet the need of salvation for man from meaninglessness of life, poverty and oppression, as well as from the future catastrophe of total pollution.

The so-called salvation of today seems to force Christ to resign his Lordship over the world and to be satisfied with being a symbol of an idol which provides the help that most contemporary theologians are seeking to secure either meaningfulness of life or freedom from suffering and agony. In the mean time, capitalism is laying siege to the strongholds of socialism which has overcome existentialism. Now the idea and the ideology appear to be useless for fighting against the powerful weapon of capitalism: infinite competitiveness. The gospel of reconciliation is meaningless, while liberation theology is helpless. It seems that democracy serves capitalism, and this works toward selfishness. This vice obviously will lead to death and destruction. To the contrary, the gospel of Christ teaches the competitiveness of non-competition and the productivity of non-production: love and service.



The ontological identity on the basis of which the Incarnation and indigenization can be analogized should only be Christologically constituted by the redemptive event of Christ bringing us salvation. The Christological identity ascribed both to the Incarnation and indigenization represents the inalienable truth of Christian gospel in spite of the ceaseless efforts to amalgamate and relativize the Christian gospel with paganism. The criterion of truth for indigenization theology means simply this: Christ comes to save us. The coming of Christ means both his presence and his promise in the event of indigenization as the sign of eschatological redemption. The parusia of Christ implies not only the first and the second Advents, but also the presence of the Saviour in the redemptive event of indigenization as the sign of the eschatological consummation. Jesus Christ who is eternally the same Saviour for yesterday, today and tomorrow is the ontological ground on which the event of indigenization takes place and from the perspective of which this event can be illuminated and made understood. The Christ of yesterday, today and tomorrow is also the Lord and the subject of indigenization in the past, the present and the future. Thus the event is historical and eschatological.

The Incarnation as the primary indigenization means that Jesus came as a Jew but lived also as a Gentile for all the people's sake. The theological motive of the doctrines of the Trinity and Christ is considered to be found in the idea of deification of man which necessarily is founded on the Incarnation. The doctrines were formulated in the categories and concepts of Greek metaphysics. The Roman Catholic doctrines of sacraments and hierarchy were made by those who were good at Roman law. These ecclesiastical doctrines were intended to control the destiny of life after death while the metaphysical ones were to overcome the finitude of man. The Reformers' doctrines of justification and predestination was an attempt to secure the certainty of salvation through the immediate relationship between God and man. German mysticism is supposed to have influenced upon Christian experience of the relationship. Greek philosophy, Roman law and German mysticism might well be indicated to be the soils on which Christian gospel was indigenized to create Greek orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism respectively.

It is in these three models that the Incarnation of Christ coming in flesh has been repeated as the event of indigenization of Christ coming in cultures. This event is eschatological because Christ as the preacher of the Kingdom of God is coming as the Lord of accomplishment. The promise of the Kingdom has been interpreted to mean overcoming of finitude for the Orthodox Church, controlling of destiny after death for the Roman Catholic Church and securing of certainty of salvation for the Reformation Church in the three models of indigenization respectively. It was a narrowing of the promise. In the nineteenth century the promise was understood to mean progress of human beings. Recently the Kingdom was considered to imply reconciliation and liberation. Indigenization is also historical insofar as the coming Christ is rela-



ted to the history of cultures. Christ does not come into a vacant space. He rather comes into the history of cultures. Cultures are historical because they have histories and traditions on the one hand, and because they are the space into and from which human beings are living as historical participants and for which they are responsible in terms of hope for the future on the other.

Church growth in Korea is often characterized by the notorious concept of numerical growth. However, the Christian mission has not been so successful in India or in the Islamic world, as is the case with the Yu-Bul-Seon cultures in the land of morning calm. Church growth as a successful mission rather belongs to the miracles of church history which could be understood to be an explosion of indigenization. This redemptive event comes from the promise of Christ that he will come and be with us (Mt 28:20) and also from the work of the Holy Spirit that God opens the door of faith to pagans (Acts 14:27). Church growth as an explosion of indigenization belongs to the mission of God for His Kingdom, not to the ambiguous programs of political theology.

### *5. Church Growth as an Ecumenical Issue*

The proposition that church growth is an eschatological event of an explosion of indigenization may appear very strange to those who are accustomed to the constant decline of churches in Europe and North America under the hard attack of secularism, harbour prejudices against numerical growth deep in their heart, and also have an attachment to modernity and scholarship cherished in their mind. Of course, the dark side of numerical growth is rightly indicated to have caused churches to be misunderstood. The increase in membership signifies the competitiveness, while that of collection, the productivity. But the Christian mission would be meaningless and even impossible if there were no church and no Christians. It is an inalienable responsibility of theologians that they should advocate and apologize for church growth in its positive aspect, and that they should examine and control the negative effect resulting from the growth so as to contribute to church reform. The criterion of truth in doing theology seems to come from the conviction that church growth is an eschatological explosion of indigenization.

It is in the event of indigenization that the promise of the Kingdom of God is preached and accomplished in some way as a part of the socio-cultural redemption of paganism in spite of the condemnation of pagan culture by those who harbour prejudice against other religions. The redemption of paganism does not mean that other religions are equally as true as Christianity, but rather depict that the indigenized Christian church is as equally true as the church witnessed about in the Bible. The first apostolic council at Jerusalem decided and proclaimed that pagan Christians were equally recognized and



accepted just as were Jewish Christians (Acts 15:21). Here the qualification of the indigenized church is legitimately equalized with that of the first church at Jerusalem in sharing the redemption as the eschatological presence of the Kingdom of God. It is rather that pagan Christians belong to the Kingdom of God as His people in the same way that the Kingdom itself is present in the event of indigenization which justifies the paganism in Christianity. The justifying grace of indigenization comes from Christ who comes in the flesh.

The socio-cultural justification which takes place in the event of indigenization is related not only to individual Christians and churches but also to the Christian mission of Christianizing the pagan society. Besides, church growth as an explosion of indigenization should also be accomplished in the person and family of individual Christians, in the faith and life of indigenized churches and in the work of the Christian mission. The eschatological explosion drives Koreans into churches, where they in turn experience intensive indigenization as the work of the Holy Spirit. The redemptive event of indigenization means that Christ comes to pagans to make them Christians and to justify pagan Christians for sanctification and perfection. Because this event is eschatological the problem of church growth belongs in the topics of ecumenical dialogue.

The ecumenical dialogue concerning church growth should begin with the question: What are the differences and the common factors between the indigenized church in Korea and a conventional church in the West? The cultural differences between the two churches are considered to come from the otherness of East versus West in cultural apriority. The Eastern way of thinking seems to flow constantly from the origin, through the structure and to the form of humanity. This is characterized by the thought pattern of harmony and unfolding in terms of the unconscious process of the Yu-Bul-Seon cultures in history where the past, the present and the future constitute the sequence of tense for eschatological orientation. Taoism, as well as Shamanism, waits for blessing from the nothingness as the origin of humanity. Buddhism dreams of awakening for the somethingness as the structure of humanity. Confucianism teaches edifying by everythingness as the form of humanity.

The Western wisdom of thought is supposed to consist in the cultural apriority of the Western tradition of philosophy which is characterized by the thought pattern of analysis and synthesis. The Western philosophy has ever developed four types of thinking method: induction, deduction, dialectics and paradox. These four methods have been applied to all the fields of science since Aristotle. Moreover, the methods have been applied not only to the sciences but also to the arts and religions. The theological reception of the methods resulted in the Western tradition of doctrines and theology. It is from the perspective of this tradition that the otherness of the indigenized church appears too ambivalent in the way that it is recognized as Christian on the one hand and condemned as pagan on the other. However, the event of indigeni-



zation as socio-cultural justification means that the indigenized church is an equally true church just as was the primitive church in the New Testament, though with the qualification of being Christian and pagan at the same time.

The common factors between the indigenized church and the conventional church should be found in the confession of faith in the same God, the same Christ and the same Holy Spirit. It is by this faith alone that the indigenized church is justified. Church growth as an explosion of indigenization is an ecumenical issue which is concerned with the reception of Asian values. An elaborate painstaking inquiry of the issue concerned should be made in order to attain the common goal of ecumenical dialogue between the two churches. As might be expected of ecumenism, the dialogue should lead to advancing Christian love and service, and to preparing for the coming of Christ as the real presence and the eschatological promise of the Kingdom of God, whether in the indigenized church or in the conventional church as a part of the whole people of God. It is from this point of view that Asian values and church growth in Korea should be evaluated theologically in a positive way to contribute properly to the Christian mission in the world and at the same time in a critical way be reconsidered for future reform of both indigenized and conventional churches with the hope for the third millennium.

*Kwang Shik Kim, Yonsei*