

Christianity and modernization in twentieth-century Korea: perspectives on new religious movements and the revitalization of society

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1. Introduction: religions and development

In his recent book, *The global resurgence of religion and the transformation of international relations* (PalgraveMacmillan, 2005), Scott M. Thomas makes a compelling case for seeing religion as a partner in development. This suggestion runs contrary to much development theory, which has followed a secularist theory of modernization. That theory makes several assumptions. For example: first, it tends to equate religion with a static tradition, which is part of the old order but not of the new era of modernity. Second, it sees religions primarily as sets of concepts and beliefs supported by institutions, rather than as changing communities of people with contextually, as well as religiously, defined visions and motives. Third, and as a consequence of the other two, it disregards religions as players in public life and relegates them to the sphere of private inspiration. The result is that secular development agencies generally accept religious groups as partners in development only when they shed their explicitly religious dimensions. Thomas cogently argues that secularist assumptions tend to blind those involved in international development from seeing the extent to which religions, and their representatives, are players in social, national and international life, and recognising their potential as agents of change and deposits of social capital. Development is only lasting if it is authentic; that is, if it is rooted in the aspirations of those undergoing development and this means it must be related to the culture and religions of the people themselves (cf. Scott M. Thomas 2005: 42). As Thomas points out toward the end of his book, there is a dark side to religions: they may be bastions of conservatism or foster extremist reactionary groups. Nevertheless, it is also true that they offer hope for the revitalization of society.

In this paper, I will discuss the positive relationship between religion and development by looking at one particular historical example. Over a period of little more than a century Korea (or South Korea at least) has undergone spectacular development by any measure, and may be said to have modernized. In the late nineteenth century it was unstable and impoverished, without roads or railway, power or sewerage systems, with a mainly illiterate population and in the grip of conservative forces. Yet it is now the world's eleventh largest economy with a Human Development Index among the top thirty in the world, and one of its most educated populations. The same period witnessed another spectacular development in Korea: the growth of Christianity from a tiny persecuted minority to become the major religious group. Christianity took North Korea, but after 1945 the Communist leadership there suppressed all religions as well as other freedoms. After initial strides in development after 1945, its economy has all but collapsed. But within South Korea, the 2005 census indicates that Christianity has now reached nearly 30% (29.2%) of the population (Protestants 18.3%; Catholic 10.9%) and displaced Buddhism (22.8%) as the main religion (Korea National Statistical Office 2006). Confucianism – the civic religion until 1897 – and Shamanism – the vestige of the indigenous religion of Korea – are not included as religions in Korean understanding; although their beliefs and practices continue to be influential on

the Korean psyche and way of life; and their legacy affects the beliefs and practices of Buddhism and Christianity as well.

This paper seeks to probe the connection between these two spectacular examples of development – economic and religious – by discussing the constructive role that the growth of Christianity as a religion may have played in Korea’s development. My approach will be to highlight moments or episodes of Christian contribution to aspects of development in Korean history, and link these to relevant aspects of Christian theology. Internal interpretations of this history by Christian historians and theologians will be introduced. This investigation will be followed by some general observations about new religious movements and the revitalisation of society. I am less interested in the social processes of development than I am in the religious self-understanding that promotes (or resists) what is defined as ‘development’ and generates its own visions of a mature and well-living society. It is this insider – or theological – perspective that I would like to draw out to help understand, and initiate further discussion on, how religious movements and development initiatives can work together to create a better society and quality of life for all.

2. Christian contributions to Korean modernization

Secular and Christian histories of Korea suggest a number of different ways in which Christianity has influenced the revitalization of Korean society which has taken place from the end of the nineteenth century. In this section we will note these in roughly chronological order before looking at specifically Christian interpretations of Korean history.

2.1 Hoping for new creation: Christian visions of a better life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Korean society was under great strain. Although it claimed an independent history stretching back five thousand years, and had been a unified and unusually stable nation for the past 1,300 years, internal tensions weakened the monarchy and administration, and the country was threatened from outside by foreign powers. Pressure for modernization was intense at this juncture, but the traditional religions were not seen as holding out hope for a modern future. The official philosophy of Confucianism was in the hands of conservatives and was associated with China, which was weak (and even more so after its defeat by Japan in 1895); Buddhism, which had been ousted from power several hundred years before, was still suppressed by the government and practised only in the mountainous countryside, away from urban centres of power; shaman practices were regarded as superstitious by both the other religions, and it appeared primitive in the face of modernity (for further details see Wells 1990: 21-23). It was in this religious and ideological vacuum that Christianity presented itself as an alternative which provided a modernizing outlook, and established itself as the most influential religious movement in Korea in the twentieth century (Grayson 2002: 2).

With the Chosŏn dynasty in the process of collapse, various movements for reform emerged. In the eighteenth century some Korean scholars studied “Western learning” – or Jesuit teachings – they encountered in China to glean ideas to implement at home as part of an indigenous “rationalistic, critical, and positivistic” (Yi, Wŏn-sun 1996: 99) movement for “practical or realistic learning” (*Sirhak*). However, some of the elite engaged directly with Roman Catholicism as an alternative worldview, adopted it as their

faith and formed their own Catholic community in 1784. Because Catholics refused to practise the ancient rites of ancestor veneration, they were seen as a direct threat to the pre-modern Confucian social order, and furthermore, the links of aristocratic Catholics with European powers gave the impression they were disloyal to the nation and threatened to draw Korea away from its traditional alliance with China (Grayson 2002: 143). The result was a series of severe persecutions of Catholics up to and including the Great Persecution of 1866-71, when eight thousand people, or half of the church membership, were martyred (Grayson 2002: 146).

Protestantism found its way into this repressive and closed kingdom as a result of the circulation, from the mid-nineteenth century, of Korean translations of the Bible and the conversion of Koreans outside the country. Protestants chose to translate the name of God in the Bible by the term *Hanŭ(l)nim* (heavenly lord or ruler of the sky), which was used for the Great Spirit of Korean traditional religion, or the tribal God of Korea. This was in contrast to Catholics, who used a term derived from Chinese (*Chŏnju* – also meaning “heavenly lord”). The effect of the Protestant choice was to identify the God of Israel and of Jesus Christ with the Spirit of Korea, and therefore to link the Protestant faith immediately with the primal roots of Korean identity and with national aspirations. In his in-depth study of Protestants and self-reconstruction nationalism in Korea, 1896-1937, *New God, new nation* (1990), Kenneth Wells observes, “Korean nationalism, even in its modernising forms, was not a secularising force, but rather sanctified the nation, thus heightening the sense that the issues of a nation’s origins, cultural values and political content were inherently religious” (1990: 21). The pronunciation of *Hanŭnim* is virtually indistinguishable from *Hananim*, which can be construed to mean “one Lord”. The first missionaries decided on this second spelling, which both linked with Korean tradition and, at the same time, emphasised monotheism, the supremacy of the one God (for further discussion see David Suh 1991: 112). Thus the high God of Korean religion was transformed and universalized. Believing in the one God, Koreans were no longer isolated but connected to the whole world. And because this universal God was also their God, foundations were laid for later missionary outreach from Korea to the rest of the world.

Even today Korean society is distinguished by a highly corporate culture. In the nineteenth century, adopting a new religion – especially one which required discontinuation of ancestor veneration – was not a private affair and it had to be justified as benefiting the family and the nation. In addition to religious reasons, Christianity was adopted by progressives among the elite, who were “attempting to solve social and political problems” (Yi, Mahn-yŏl 2004: 41), and also by the masses who saw the benefits offered through Christian networks, and wished to protect their living standards (Yi, Mahn-yŏl 2004: 42). By both groups, “Christianity was considered to be not a purely theological doctrine of the salvation of the soul but rather a quasi-political doctrine” (Yi, Mahn-yŏl 2004: 43). Wells notes a kinship between nationalism and religion in the sense of meeting human needs and “directing the ego towards an objective larger than itself” (1990: 4). In contrast to the Korean Confucianism of the time, which emphasized self-cultivation or refinement, converts understood the Christian message to be one of transformation, and this was applied socially as well as individually (Kim, Yong-Bock 1981a: 113-116). In the late nineteenth century Protestants took a lead in criticising feudal society and opposing it, and contributed to the founding of a modern nation state.

2.2 Establishing the kingdom of God: initiatives of Christian missions toward development – education, health and industry, 1884-1910

The tendency of the West to overlook Korea and see only China and Japan, together with the resistance of the Confucian government to any foreign interference, meant Korea was placed on the missionary map rather later than most other nations. Both Catholicism and Protestantism were introduced first in the form of literature (cf. Djun Kil Kim 2005: 100), and in both cases it was the Korean Christians who called for the missionaries (Grayson 2002: 155-58; Yi, Mahn-yŏl 2004: 40). While Catholic missionaries continued to be *persona non grata* even after the persecutions ended, the growing links with the United States led to the entry of a number of Protestant missionaries from 1884 onwards. Because of uncertainty about government permission for evangelization of the population, the first missionaries concentrated on service to society (Grayson 2002: 157). Missionaries founded the first Western-style medical institution, the first modern schools – including the first ever school for girls, and began the first Western-style publishing house. So by 1900 “the young progressives looked to Christianity and the missionaries in particular as harbingers of progress and development” (Grayson 2002: 158) and many late nineteenth century Koreans were convinced that Christianity would help revitalize the nation.

The main interest of most of the missionaries was converting the population to Christianity, which they regarded as a prerequisite for all other progress. So as soon as they could, they made verbal proclamation of the gospel – or evangelism – the focus of their efforts. The adoption in 1893 by Protestant missionaries of all the different denominations of a self-help method for Korean evangelization (known in Korea as the Nevius method) put the responsibility for the establishment of the church on the Korean people – a role they readily assumed – and it also stimulated the emergence of Korean leadership. The first Korean clergy were ordained and the first Korean denomination was established as early as 1907, and Korean Christians were quick to imitate the missionary initiatives and multiply churches, schools and hospitals around the country. The contribution of the missionaries to Korean development is officially recognised (for example, Gateway to Korea 2007), but the greater emphasis should be given to the Korean people’s own initiatives (cf. Pratt 2006: 202). The achievement in education, for example, is outstanding with three of the top five universities today having Christian foundation (Grayson 2002: 169).

The most influential missionaries were products of Anglo-American revival movements that brought together “Puritan zeal and Wesleyan fervor” (Paik 1970 [1929]: 367). They shared a common “holiness” tradition that emphasised the perfecting work of the Holy Spirit in the believer, and a conservative faith for which the Bible, the inspired word of God, was the pre-eminent authority. Both dimensions seem to have meshed with aspects of Korean culture and contributed to the popularity of Protestant Christianity. The missionaries’ reverence for the written word and enthusiasm for Bible reading was appreciated by those whose Confucian upbringing had inculcated similar dedication to the Scriptures and scholarship. And the emotional and enthusiastic revival religion appealed to popular Korean religiosity, which was shamanistic. While there is a tendency to toward “the replication in Korean Christianity of the erstwhile division between folk and élite cultures” (Wells 1990: 23), the church can equally be regarded as a unifying

force in Korean society, helping to overcome class barriers. In Korean Christianity the Confucian approach to religion of the upper class scholars – formal and intellectual – and the shamanistic approach of the masses – spontaneous and emotional – were combined in a one new faith.

In 1907 religious revival broke out at a Bible conference of about 1,500 Korean men, organised by missionaries and Korean leaders in Pyongyang (now capital of North Korea). This was interpreted as an outpouring of the Spirit of God in power on the Korean people. Missionaries described how the whole congregation began to pray simultaneously out loud, and how this led to public confession of sin (see Clark 1971: 161-62). Those whose lives were changed testified in the wider community to what had happened, with the result that others were drawn in, and the revival spread. Through the revival, Christianity was revealed as not just an intellectual and social reform movement, but also a religious one (Min 2004: 130), and it also became a mass movement (Paik 1970: 367-78; Ryu 2000: 416). Missionaries and Korean workers spread the message to every corner of the country and numbers of Christians grew rapidly, until in 1910 they reached 1% of the population (Grayson 2002: 158). From this time onwards, revival meetings became a regular feature of Korean Christianity, and there were many more such movements.

The emotional outpouring of the 1907 revival could be attributed, at least partly, to the unstable political and cultural circumstances of the time (so Grayson 2002: 158). In 1905 the Japanese defeated Russia, who also had interests in Korea, and declared Korea a protectorate. Sporadic military action by the Korean “Righteous Army” against the Japanese was going on across the country. Japan eventually annexed Korea in 1910, defeating the rebels and completing the national humiliation. Following the wish of the imperial power, the missionaries argued for a separation of religion and politics and discouraged Koreans from resisting the Japanese. They consciously promoted revival activities in order for Koreans to internalize their faith, and even to make peace with their Japanese aggressors, and to prevent the church becoming a vehicle for political insurrection (Paik 1970 [1929]: 369, 416; Kim, Yong-Bock 1981a: 90; Yi, Mahn-yöl 2004: 64). But in their situation of national calamity, and oppression by hostile ruling powers, Kil Sŏn-chu and the other Korean leaders of the revival were particularly interested in the imagery of apocalyptic in the Bible, which encoded their feelings against the Japanese occupation. They saw themselves as living in the last age, and Kil himself spent much time reflecting on the book of Revelation (Kim, Yong-Bock 1981a: 110). Despite the apolitical message of the missionaries, and the hope of a life to come, what Korean believers read in their Bibles was a political message for the here and now: the coming of the kingdom of God to displace the Japanese Empire. The language of regeneration by the Holy Spirit was directly connected by Kil and others with the restoration of the nation (Kim, Yong-Bock 1981a: 113-116), with the result that they went on to engage in the independence movement (see below). So the appeal of Christianity cannot be explained only as a way of coping with instability and accepting the inevitable – as the missionaries had hoped it would be. It was also a revitalizing force that inspired Korean activity toward development – although it was a vision of development which differed from that held by the powers of the time.

2.3 Living in the Spirit: Christian influence on social relationships – age, gender, class

The evidence suggests that the dissemination of Christian ideas had a profound effect on Korean social relationships, and particularly on those relating to age and gender. Cho Kwang gives a measured assessment of “the meaning of Catholicism in Korean history” (1996: title). He argues that in the nineteenth century the Catholic Church posed a deliberate challenge to the Korean social order and through it several foundational aspects of modernity were introduced. The first was the propagation of the principle of equality: that all were brothers and sisters. Second, the Church promoted the rights of women by denouncing the practice of the husband ruling over the wife, stressing marital cooperation, forbidding the abandonment of wives, and prohibiting concubinage. Third, Cho notes the Church’s emphasis on the duty of parents to their children. In place of the Confucian father’s expectation of devotion from his son, the Church encouraged fathers to see their children as gifts from God and limited parental authority. Fourth, the Church accelerated the formation of modern culture. In particular the Church made use of the simple Korean script rather than complex Korean characters in its publications, which they taught ordinary believers to read. It introduced the papal system which, though criticised today as undemocratic, offered a method of leadership selection by election, which caused consternation in the Korean court. Catholics also insisted there was a natural law or a law of conscience that relativized the laws of the state, and believed firmly in the universal nature of culture or truth, thus arguing for the opening up of Korean culture to outside influences.

The Protestant church historian, Yi Mahn-yŏl summarizes the effect of Protestantism on feudal society (Yi, Mahn-yŏl 2004). In the first instance, he notes that Christians were reborn in their personal lives and encouraged to do good, take responsibility and make progress, rather than accept the status in life determined by their birth. Yi argues that Protestant establishment of schools for men and women and drives for literacy allowed the illiterate to know their own culture and history, and so contributed not only educationally but also by inspiring national pride. Christian publications “not only spread Christian doctrine and news but also elevated the social, natural, and historical consciousness and printed information about industry of all kinds” (: 46). Education, via churches and Christian hospitals, schools and newspapers led to the breaking down of superstitions and changes in traditional ceremonies. New ideas were raised and issues discussed. Christians also “helped the social spirit to progress” (: 48) by developing ideas of human freedom and universal rights on the basis that human life was given by God, and therefore the human body should not be oppressed. Yi concludes that a spirit of social justice founded on the Bible – such as the teaching that all human beings are created in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27) – led to the growth of a social conscience and a movement for the betterment of society. By no means all these innovations were explicitly or exclusively Christian in origin but they were mediated through the language and symbols of Christianity to a people who had a religious outlook on life that enabled them to appreciate it, and who were looking for new resources to help them meet the challenges of the modern world.

2.4 Looking forward to the Exodus: the association of Christianity with the independence movement, 1896-1919

In the late nineteenth century, many of the more radical reformers, who admired the United States and Britain particularly, saw Christianity as the foundation of Western civilization, and became Protestants. The Independence Club was founded in 1896 by a Christian leader, Seo Jae Pil (Philip Jaisohn), who, together with two other Christians, founded the first vernacular newspaper, the *Tongnip Shinmun* to apply Christian beliefs to national issues and generate popular support for reform (Wells 1990: 47-48). The activities of the independence movement were strongly supported by Christian churches. The self-help policy of the missionaries and the educational encouragement to better themselves “encouraged Christians to pursue an attitude favouring the independence not only of the Korean church but also of Korea” (Yi, Mahn-yŏl 2004: 52). It stimulated the development of national consciousness and a “patriotic and pro-independence attitude” (: 52). Through the movement, Christians began to understand their country’s predicament, developed their ideas for a democratic society, and raised questions as to how to achieve it.

In 1909 in Japanese-occupied Korea, the semi-underground New People’s Association was formed, again with Christian leadership, to “generate civic ethics and reconstruct a strong nation” (Wells 1990: 83). It became the leading nationalist movement, engaging in education and building up commerce and industry, and later organising armed resistance to the Japanese as well. In the context of national crisis, the biblical story of the Exodus, in which God led the people of Israel out of slavery into the promised land, was not spiritualized or applied only to individual salvation. It was understood as a literal event in the history of Israel and in the history of Korea (David Suh 1981: 22) and generated a language of national liberation and independence by God’s help (Kim, Yong-Bock 1981a: 96). Furthermore, Kil and others read the story of Israel as meaning that their own weakness was the cause of their slavery, and so repentance of personal sin in the revival meetings was an important part of national recovery (Park, Jong Chun 1998: 23), and not merely the easing of individual conscience (David Suh 1981: 20). Despite the dire political situation, Christians continued to hold out hope of national salvation: becoming “the signal fire of permanent hope” (Min 2004: 134).

The new Japanese government in Korea was not sympathetic to any organised religion and severely restricted Christian activities. It was particularly wary of Christianity, which was “the one well-organized group which could challenge their domination of Korea” and increasingly prominent in society (Grayson 2002: 160). The Christians resisted the Japanization of Christianity, and so, as Wells puts it, Protestants “found themselves locked in a struggle with the Japanese for the ‘soul’ of the nation and their own survival” (Wells 1990: 71). This struggle showed itself in several ways. One example was in the Christian schools, which provided the only complete network of modern education (Grayson 2002: 159-60). The colonisers insisted on the use of the Japanese language for education in all schools, and took other steps to clamp down on nationalism in education as part of their policy of assimilation. Another was Christian involvement in the independence struggle. Christians were implicated in several assassination attempts and organised campaigns against taxation. Through Christian organisations like the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), they organised for independence and tried to raise international support (see Yi, Mahn-yŏl 2004: 67-69). Efforts culminated in a declaration of Korean independence on 1 March 1919. The staging of this event was initiated by YMCA members, who cooperated with other religious groups. Fifteen

Christians (including Kil, the revival leader) and eighteen other religious leaders signed the declaration. They led widespread demonstrations, which were intended to be peaceful, and acts of civil disobedience. These were put down with great brutality, and Christians and churches suffered by far the greatest loss – official Japanese figures list the destruction of forty-seven churches and in at least one case the congregation were burned alive inside (Lee 1984[1967]: 344). This showed where the Japanese suspected the strength of the movement lay. Although unsuccessful, the March 1 movement became a defining moment of Korean national identity and it showed how the Korean church “had become linked in the minds of both Japanese and Koreans with Korean nationalism” (Grayson 2002: 161).

2.5 Praying for the fall of Babylon: Christian resistance to Japanese imperialism, 1920-1945

After the 1919 independence movement was suppressed, Japanese surveillance in Korea was tightened so that further organised political action in Korea was impossible. As the Japanese introduced their “cultural policy”, nationalist activities continued but the battle was increasingly fought on grounds of thought and religion. Christians found deep resources to resist this new imperialism. One way was through prayer. From 1905 onwards, Christians held mass prayer meetings for the nation, and those who attended were blacklisted by the authorities, who presumably recognised prayer as resistance to their attempts to colonise the mind (cf. Yi, Mahn-yŏl 2004: 66).

Another form of resistance was the periodic revival meetings. Between 1928 and 1933 the preaching of a young revivalist called Lee Yong Do swept across the nation, continuing the indigenization of the Christian faith among the masses (Choo 1998: 140). Lee was a political activist who had been imprisoned by the Japanese several times. His experience of imprisonment and torture had led him to the conclusion that there was no point in direct political action; any solution to the suffocating economic, social and cultural situation of Korea in this period would lie in an encounter with Christ in a mystical union. Evoking the vision of Ezekiel, of a valley of dry bones coming to life by the wind of God’s Spirit, Lee invited Jesus to find his cross in the sufferings of the Korean people. He preached that by identifying with Jesus’ sufferings, believers would experience his unlimited love, and in this way exchange the sin and materialism of earth for the life and holiness of heaven. He also advocated engagement in a spiritual struggle against the devil, calling on the name of Jesus in order to overcome evil. Lee was highly critical of church leaders, whom he felt were constrained by the conservative theology inherited from the missionaries, and he sought to revive Christian faith. However, it may be misleading to describe his approach as “other-worldly” – as some have done (for example, David Suh 1991: 51) because Lee’s challenge to the established church retained an intensely political motive: to bring about national revival (Park, Jong Chun 1998: 61, 64-72). Though this and other revivals became more mystical in nature and more individualistic, it can be argued (for example by David Suh 1991: 56) that they contributed to national survival as a vehicle for sustaining hope and for expressing visions of a better life. If the Korean Christians had become depoliticized, they had not become denationalized (David Suh 1981: 21).

Japanese repression of Korean culture and identity gradually intensified from the late 1920s until 1945 as the Japanese enforced their policy of Japanese-Korean unity through

the imposition of Japanese language, names, and enforced worship at Shinto shrines. It was this latter step particularly that some Christians felt unable to comply with because it contradicted the commandment to have “no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). Their refusal led to the outright persecution of Christianity. Korean Christians identified with the early Christians of the Roman Empire, who refused to participate in the Emperor cult. In the book of Revelation, the early Christians referred to the imperial power as “Babylon”, harking back to the earlier exile of Israel in Babylon, recorded in the book of Daniel. Like Roman Christians, some Korean Christians were willing to accept martyrdom rather than bow to another god. Despite the efforts of the Japanese government and Japanese theologians to portray Shinto worship as a civil rather than a religious ceremony, Korean Christian leaders saw it as a religious matter, compromising the command to worship only the one true God, *Hananim*, and therefore also contrary to the serving the national Spirit (Kim, Yang-sŏn 2004: 87-92).

The struggle intensified in 1932 when Shinto worship was made compulsory in schools. Faced with the threat of closure of schools or dismissal of staff, most Christian denominations eventually acquiesced – except for some Presbyterians, who let their schools be closed rather than comply. The authorities went on to enforce Shinto worship in the churches as well. Denominational leaders eventually gave in to the pressure but some groups of Christians defied both government and church leaders. It is estimated that 2,000 were imprisoned and 50 people died for their resistance. 200 churches were closed down (David Suh 1991: 55; Kim, Yang-sŏn 2004: 103-116). Although Christians resisted Shinto worship primarily for theological reasons, these were also nationalistic reasons. Although they could be labelled “conservatives” or even “fundamentalists”, those Christians who resisted also did so because their vision of development clashed with that of the Japanese. In popular Korean imagination this resistance did not discredit the church as backward-looking but further cemented the link between Christianity and the salvation of Korea. Furthermore, Kim Yong Bok (1981b) points out that the vicarious nature of Jesus’ suffering encouraged Christians to think that they were suffering on behalf of the whole Korean people. The biblical logic of the suffering led from the suffering messiah to the coming of the messianic kingdom, and in this way Christianity developed the characteristics of a messianic movement.

2.6 Bearing witness to Christ’s sufferings: Christian social service before, during and after the Korean War, 1950-53

Until 1945, economic development in Korea was imposed to suit Japanese interests, and during the Second World War Korean resources – material and human – were mobilized and exploited to meet the needs of the Japanese military. The nation welcomed the liberation in 1945 but was ill-prepared for independence. South Korea was liberated by the “Christian” nation of America, whereas North Korea was liberated by the Soviets and experienced “Christian” America as their enemy. The country was split by the superpowers into two ideologically opposing parts and the stage was set for confrontation. The Korean War was fought at terrific cost, especially to Koreans and their land. Three million Koreans (10% of the population) were killed, wounded or lost, and five million displaced (Pratt 2006: 260) – many never to be reunited with their loved ones again. Two Koreas were left, both among the poorest countries in Asia.

As Yi Mahn-yŏl observes, “the nationalism of the Korean Christian was directed against Japan while continuing to show a certain dependency on the West” (Yi, Mahn-yŏl 2004: 45). This Western orientation was advantageous to the Christians in South Korea in the aftermath of liberation (as it was disadvantageous to those in the North). The United States administration permitted (and perhaps even encouraged) Christians to use land previously occupied by Shinto shrines to build churches (cf. Rev. Kyung-Chik Han Memorial Foundation 2005: 126). During and after the War, Christians were involved in bringing humanitarian assistance to the injured, bereaved and destitute both through international organisations and also at the local level of Korean churches, and often by both working together. Han Kyung Chik, who founded Youngnak Presbyterian Church in Seoul (now 60,000 strong) in 1945 with other refugees from North Korea, built up a large following during the ensuing turmoil of the Korean War through his courage in helping refugees and orphans. In 1970 he was given the Rose of Sharon Award, South Korea’s highest civilian award, in recognition of this work. Though he served Korean society, Han’s priority was always the conversion of the country to Christianity. Being convinced that the answer to Korea’s problems lay in the obedience of the country to the will of God revealed in Jesus Christ, he declared he would “not rest until all of Korea is saved” and was the leader of many programmes of evangelization (Han 1966). Until his death in 2000 at the age of 99, Han was the leading statesman of the Korean Protestant Churches, and in 1992 he was awarded the prestigious Templeton Prize for progress in religion. The citation recognised both his “fervent work for refugees and the poor” as well as his status as “one of Korea’s most respected religious leaders” (Templeton Foundation Press 2007).

As well as offering religious comfort, Han and his team availed themselves of conventional methods of education and medicine to help the suffering people of post-War Korea.¹ His pattern of activity was replicated in many local churches across the country. However, some pastors either lacked the means to offer practical help or just preferred to lay greater influence “spiritual” methods of exorcism, healing and prayer as a means to transform people’s lives. Although these Christian pastors explicitly reject Korea’s traditional shamanistic religious beliefs, their approach more closely matches its expectations. The most famous example is Cho Yonggi, the founder of Yoido Full Gospel Church, the largest Pentecostal church in the world, which claims a congregation of more than 750,000.² In 1958 Cho also started a church among the slum-dwellers of Seoul. Cho’s conviction was that since the spiritual world includes, and is powerful over, the material world, solving human problems is a matter of exercising spiritual power (Cho 1989:70-76). Having established itself as a mainstream denomination, the Full Gospel Church also now supports many different social projects and has a significant political voice through its national daily newspaper (*Kukmin Ilbo*), and through Cho’s national and international stature.

¹ Han was the founder of the Korean branch of World Vision, a development agency.

² Rev. Dr Hong Young-Gi, President of the Institute for Church Growth, Hansei University and an ordained pastor of the Full Gospel Church, gave a figure of 260,000 at a press conference of the World Council of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, Athens, May 2005. Even though the church holds seven services on a Sunday, since its main worship hall only accommodates 10,000, it is only possible for a fraction of this number to attend regularly. Such a large membership is possible by including “satellite churches”, that is congregations that regard themselves as under the same senior pastor, and hear his sermons by internet broadcast, but meet in another locality and are ministered to by a junior pastor.

The Communists in North Korea began persecuting Christians, and even before the War many Christian men fled to avoid conscription into the North Korean army, leaving their families behind in the North (Han Kyung-Chik was one example). Many of these families were never reunited. Christians resisted Communism for the same reasons as they had resisted Shinto worship: because they saw it as another religion and a rival claim on their allegiance to the God of Jesus Christ (David Suh 1991: 57). Although nominally tolerated, in the North under communist rule, “meaningful organized religion, whether Buddhist, Confucian or Christian... ceased to exist” (Buzo 2002: 110) because the state philosophy of self-reliance (*juche*) “was supposed to cater for everybody’s spiritual as well as material needs” (Pratt 2006: 290). Although the North Korean leader Kim Il Sung came from a Christian family, he is on record as saying that “Christianity had ceased to exist in his country... when Christians lost their faith as a result of United States bombing during the Korean War” (Buzo 2002: 110). South Korean Christians knew otherwise. Christianity has survived, but underground, and both Youngnak Church and Yoido Full Gospel Church have maintained links with Christians in North Korea until today. Nowadays it is possible for them to offer humanitarian aid and develop business links as well. They also have plans and personnel in place for pastoral work and evangelism in North Korea as soon as it should open up. Han Kyung Chik donated all his Templeton Prize money for this cause (Rev. Kyung-Chik Han Memorial Foundation 2005: 196). South Korean missionary efforts mean that revival may even be underway in North Korea today (Lankov 2005).

2.7 Experiencing life in abundance: Church support for post-War reconstruction and industrialization, 1953-1987

After the War, the North Korean regime received massive aid from the Soviet Union and made great strides in industrialization in the first quarter century of its existence. Mobilization of the population was based on a unique ideology (*juche*) that combined elements of Marxist-Leninism with a leadership cult. South Korean rebuilding was much slower. After early experiments in democracy foundered, from 1961 South Korea had a series of military governments. The hard-line policies of Park Chung Hee (1963-79) and Chun Doo Hwan (1980-88) drove development forward so that standards of living rose rapidly, but they disregarded democracy and human rights. Although they aspired to democracy, most Koreans, including Christian pastors, put a higher value on national security. The logic of the situation was that of the survival of the fittest (cf. Djun Kil Kim 2005: 123): unless Korea became a powerful nation, it would once again be obliterated by outside powers. So church leaders were against the military regime but supported its anti-Communist stance and encouraged their congregations to meet the modernization goals set by the government (for a leading example see Rev. Kyung-Chik Han Memorial Foundation 2005: 178). Pastors knew that Jesus Christ came to bring “abundant life” (John 10:10); they could also see the value of money and encouraged their congregations to be disciplined and work hard for the sake of their family, clan and the whole nation (Rev. Kyung-Chik Han Memorial Foundation 2005: 179-81). As a result, the South Korean military governments were friendly to the churches, so long as they did not interfere in political affairs.

The mainstream churches contributed to poverty reduction, at least among their (growing) membership. Sociologist David Martin has argued that Pentecostal churches

tend to encourage upward mobility and engender attitudes consonant with success in the capitalist context of late or post modernity (Martin 2002: 14-16). The largest denominations in Korea were Presbyterian and Methodist but they had a similar revival-type spirituality. They mainly were mostly established in urban centres, where many had been displaced by the War or had recently migrated for work, and from a material point of view, they offered many means to get on in life. First, they provided a community and support network. Christians wished to be seen as respectable people; they encouraged education, placed a great deal of emphasis on discipline and hard work, and lived by a moral code forbidding drinking and stressing faithfulness in marriage. Churches were not run as charities or clubs but as businesses, and competed with one another to offer the best religious deals. Urban churches invested heavily in impressive buildings in a Western style and in the latest technology, conveying the impression that they were at the cutting edge of modernity. Churches ran groups for all ages and provided social facilities for all the family. They also encouraged business networking – and expected business people to generously support the church. Churches often had links with foreign missionaries, usually from North America and provided opportunities to learn English (even if only through Bible study). For some, becoming a Christian was a way to obtain a passport to emigrate, preferably to the United States. The Korean word for America translates as “beautiful country”, and it assumed something of the aura of the “promised land”. But the churches offered more than material inducements. They engendered a sense of togetherness in striving and suffering, especially through the prayer meetings at dawn and throughout the military curfew over a Friday night. The sermons often berated members for their sinfulness but more often pastors sought to encourage their weary congregations with new vision and inspiration. Through their sermon illustrations, many drawn from a Western context, they opened up new vistas and gave Koreans a sense of the world beyond national borders.³

Although the matter has been discussed for some time (e.g. Kim, Jim Young 1984), it is difficult to assess whether Christianity has had a direct effect on the growth of the Korean economy by its work ethic, in the way that Max Weber (1958) suggested Protestantism did on the development of capitalism in the West. Probably that argument presupposes a larger mass of practising Christians than were present at the start of the period of economic growth in about 1970, which was about 6% of the population (Grayson 2002: 164). Though there are considerable difficulties in establishing value-based claims to economic growth (Sen 2001), some studies have suggested, more persuasively, that Confucianism provides the work ethic and social framework to account for stability and economic growth in East Asia generally (sources given in Scott M. Thomas 2005: 288, n. 26). This is commonly held to be the case in South Korea too. Historian Adrian Buzo believes Confucianism provides what he calls “the moral cement” (Buzo 2002: 129) of Korean society, which has enabled it to retain a remarkable stability, despite the all the changes of the last century or so. Furthermore, Keith Pratt regards the “Confucian virtues” of self-sacrifice and determination as what set the country on the road to recovery after the economic crash of 1997-98 (Pratt 2006: 291). However, at the same time, the elitism and preference for the arts of Korean Neo-Confucianism is blamed for the lack of development prior to the twentieth century. So it cannot be said to be Confucianism as a total system aided economic growth but only

³ This description is derived from the author’s personal experience of Korean churches in 1987-92.

selected elements of it. Korean governments and mainstream Christianity have both gathered and preserved “Confucian elements”, while at the same time reordering and reintegrating them. So whether it is within Christianity or within civic religion, the Confucianism that has preserved society is not the traditional Confucianism but regenerated parts of it.

When it comes to Christianity, an important factor to consider is the strong element of prosperity teaching in Korean Protestant Christianity, in which success and wealth are believed to be indications of God’s blessing. This belief is more closely related to shamanism and traditional Buddhism than to Confucianism. In Yoido Full Gospel Church, for example, Cho Yonggi developed a spiritual version of positive thinking, or “putting your faith to work for a successful life” (Cho, Yonggi 1999: subtitle). On the English language website, the Church justifies belief that the gospel of Jesus Christ is one of blessing in two ways: first, because the material world was created for the enjoyment of human beings (Genesis 1) and secondly on the basis of teaching of the Apostle Paul that Jesus Christ, “though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9), and that therefore not to become rich is “wasting the life of poverty which Christ led while on earth” (Yoido Full Gospel Church 2007). On the Korean website, and in Cho’s writings (Cho, Yonggi 1989), 3 John 2 – a rather obscure verse – is the foundation of this theology of blessing. In Cho’s interpretation, this verse promises “spiritual well-being,” “general well-being,” and “bodily health”.

From the point of view of economic growth, Korean prosperity teaching is of benefit for wealth creation, and even more so because of its corporate emphasis. From the religious point of view, prosperity teaching runs the risk of being a travesty of the Christian gospel. If “the average churchgoer follows the fetishistic belief that Christianity is a mere religion for material success in this world and for spiritual success in the other world” (David Suh 1981: 21) then it is shamanism “in a more up-to-date format” (Pratt 2006: 291). Mainstream church leaders like Han Kyung-Chik counteracted prosperity theology by preaching that the creation of wealth was not for its own sake but as a means to an end: so that it can be shared (Rev. Kyung-Chik Han Memorial Foundation 2005: 180). Indeed all churches encourage giving and use at least some of the collection for missionary or outreach programmes. But undoubtedly many South Korean Christians see the growth of Christianity and the growth in material blessings as two sides of the same coin – and their historical experience lends weight to this argument. In Korea, business and faith are close bedfellows, and the mainstream churches do not criticise the capitalist system. It is very difficult to portray poverty as a virtue, as some other forms of Christianity have done.

2.8 Liberating the oppressed: Christian involvement in movements for democracy and human rights, 1972-1987

Under the Yushin emergency constitution, imposed from 1972, a minority of Christians actively opposed the military government in support of civil and workers’ rights. These aligned themselves with *minjung* (grassroots or peoples’) movements in Korea, and are known as *minjung* theologians. *Minjung* theology emerged in the 1970s as reflection on Christian struggle for human rights through the Urban Industrial Mission movement, Catholic Farmers’ Association, various student organisations, and other groups.

Christian writers and university teachers who identified with farmers, workers and the urban poor in their experience of oppression found themselves dismissed from their posts and even imprisoned and tortured by the government (David Suh 1991: 81). Through international Christian networks, especially the World Council of Churches, activists were able to raise international awareness of abuses of human rights in Korea. As a secular historian records, “they spoke out bravely against corruption and oppression” (Pratt 2006: 290) and these campaigns culminated in the nationwide protests that ended military rule in 1987.

Although Protestants were the most prominent in disseminating *minjung* theology, they drew inspiration from the emerging Catholic liberation theology. *Minjung* theologians combined the insights of the folk history movement of the 1960s with a re-reading of the Bible from economic and political perspectives. They saw themselves as standing in continuity with the leaders of the 1919 uprising and other popular movements and they criticised what they saw as the apolitical stance of the missionaries and the mainstream church. *Minjung* theologians also worked with some Buddhist leaders, and *minjung* groups were open to participation by anyone concerned for human rights. From *minjung* history they took the psychological concept of *han*, meaning a “just indignation” or “feeling of repression”, which also gives rise to the energy for life which breaks out in movements of liberation (see Suh Nam-dong 1981b). Inspired by Catholic activist Kim Chi-ha, they related *han* to Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant, whose passion on the cross identified him with the oppressed people, and who was also a “servant to the aspiration of the people for liberation” (David Suh 1981: 33; cf. Kim, Yong-Bock 1981a: 98). While the commitment of the *minjung* theologians to their cause was greatly respected, the theology they articulated was their own academic theology, and was not drawn from the beliefs of the *minjung* in the churches. Therefore it is not owned by the mainstream churches, which largely accepted the government’s labelling of *minjung* theologians as communists (see discussion in David Suh 1991: 58-59). The *minjung* portrayal of the suffering Christ did, however, pick up a deep theme of suffering in Korean spirituality (cf. Ham 1985), which has strong resonances with Buddhism as well (David Suh 1991: 141). *Minjung* theologians also pointed out to a new generation what the first Korean Christians had instinctively understood: that the Christian message is one of transformation in history and is intended for community action rather than merely personal piety.

Under the leadership of Cardinal Stephen Kim Sou-hwan in the 1970s and 80s, the Roman Catholic Church in Korea as a whole emerged from something of a ghetto mentality (Grayson 2002: 171; cf. O, Kwōng-hwan 1996: 164) to apply in the Korean context the Church’s new commitment to support human rights. In 1980 government troops killed hundreds of protestors in Kwangju, a part of the country where the Catholic Church is particularly strong, and where there is also a long history of resistance to government oppression. Myongdong Catholic Cathedral in Seoul became a centre of political protest at this and other abuses of civil and workers’ rights. Pratt records that Cardinal Kim “was unflinching in his defence of democracy” (Pratt 2006: 290), and the Catholic Church particularly made, what Korea expert Bruce Cumings refers to as an “indelible contribution to Korean democracy” (Cumings 2003:141).

2.9 Proclaiming the year of jubilee: Christian campaigns for North-South reconciliation, 1988-95

The strong theology of hope in Korean Christianity, now apparently justified by success after long years of suffering, encouraged Christians to articulate a hope for the reunification of the two Koreas, long before this was openly discussed. Reconciliation – with justice – is a central theme of Christian theology, as well the fervent prayer of Korean Christians. At a time when reunification was hardly discussed as a real possibility, in 1986, through the auspices of the World Council of Churches, representatives of the National Council of Churches and the official church in North Korea celebrated together a historic Eucharist or Holy Communion. Two years later, the Council of Churches (which is a radical group not representative of the mainstream) took the initiative to overcome the division, by declaring the mutual hatred of North and South and its justification to be sinful: “The Christians of both North and South have made absolute idols of the ideologies enforced by their respective systems” (National Council of Churches in Korea 1988). The Council made use of the Old Testament law of the year of jubilee, which laid down that every fifty years all debts should be cancelled and all land revert to its original owners. According to the gospel of Luke, by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ quoted this law and made it the manifesto for his ministry of liberation and reconciliation (Luke 4:18-19). The Council of Churches proclaimed 1995, the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation from Japan, a year of jubilee to express their “firm resolution to bring about the restoration of the covenanted community of peace” (1988).

However, Korean churches were divided on this issue (Sebastian Kim 2007). The suggestion of jubilee drew heavy criticism from the Evangelical churches because of their strongly anti-Communist stance (David Suh 1991: 185). For the Evangelical churches, reunification cannot be contemplated without regime change, and their main method to achieve this is evangelism, supported by humanitarian aid. Reunification is envisaged as a revival-type event of mutual repentance and brotherly and sisterly embrace across the borders. In political terms this seems to mean the collapse of the North and the absorption of the North by the South. Although they may be mistaken on the political front (see Cumings 2003:141-44; Samuel Kim 2006: 302-7), Evangelicals draw attention to the importance of the inter-personal dimension of reconciliation, and the need for repentance as part of the reconciliation process – and they also retain the hope that this is possible.

In 1997, Kim Dae Jung, a veteran opposition leader who was imprisoned by the government many times, tortured, and who suffered several assassination attempts, was eventually elected president in the first peaceful changeover of power to the opposition. Kim is a committed Catholic who testifies to his belief in the saving power of Jesus Christ in his personal life, and his conviction of the ultimate triumph of justice (Kim, Dae Jung 2000). On taking office Kim, who is known as “the Nelson Mandela of Korea”, took an attitude of “reconciliation and cooperation” inspired by Catholic social teaching (Cumings 2003:132), beginning with the pardoning of the surviving former presidents (Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo), who had been convicted for suppressing the Kwangju civilian uprising. Working closely with President Bill Clinton, Kim took bold but realistic steps toward reconciliation with North Korea. His “sunshine policy” changed the rhetoric completely by recognising the humanity and dignity of North Koreans and engaging with them, and it drew a positive response from the North. This policy aimed at peaceful coexistence of the two Koreas, in which the

South pledged neither to provoke North Korea nor to seek to absorb it. It resulted in the first ever North-South summit, which took place in the North Korea capital Pyongyang in June 2000, and for which Kim Dae Jung received the Nobel Peace Prize.

2.10 Going into all the world: the Christian diaspora and Korean world mission

Conversion to Christianity, or any world religion, leads to global connectedness. For early Catholic Christians, the fact that they had become part of an organisation with its headquarters outside Korea had been a major reason for government suspicion of Catholics and suppression of the movement. The kind of Protestant Christianity dominant in Korea (revivalist Evangelicalism) placed strong emphasis on world mission as following the command of Jesus to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28: 19). Koreans did not leave the evangelization of Korea to the missionaries, and they soon took responsibility for spreading the good news further afield; as early as 1913 Korean churches were supporting some of their number as missionaries to China (Institute of Korean Church History Studies 1990: 134). For most of the twentieth century, the circumstances of Korea were not conducive to maintaining an overseas missionary movement but since 1988, when passport and foreign exchange laws were relaxed, large numbers of missionaries have been sent overseas, mostly supported by local churches. Korea sends more missionaries overseas than any other country except the United States (Moll 2006⁴). Most missionaries are in other countries of Asia but many are in Africa, Europe and the Americas – their locations are proudly displayed on the websites of their home churches.

Many of those termed “missionary” are in fact pastoring diaspora Korean churches. During the twentieth century many Koreans migrated from their native home. Post-1945, particularly large numbers went to the United States, especially Christians. There are more than two million Koreans living in the United States, particularly in Hawai’i and on the West coast, and according to one estimate, Christians outnumber Buddhists by 10 to 1 there (Wikipedia: Korean American 2007). There are also many links between the two countries through the military, and there are very large numbers of Korean students in American institutions. As in Korea itself, the church and Korean businesses are closely linked and mutually supportive. It is well recognised that migrants provide a source of hard currency and expertise for development in their homeland; the presence of a large, and increasingly influential, Korean minority in the United States is also a lever of influence over its foreign policy toward the peninsula.

The Korean diaspora and missionary movements were pioneering movements in which Koreans explored and mapped the world from a Korean perspective after many centuries of relative isolation. Just as Korean Christianity is closely related to Korean identity, the missionary movement cannot be separated from Korean nationalism. Many aspects of Korean culture are exported by missionaries and stamped on the character of churches and institutions around the world. Korean models of development are now being put into effect by churches as well as business leaders. As at the beginning Christianity was instrumental in bringing Koreans into the global system, so it also encourages globalization from Korea.

⁴ According to the Korea World Missions Association (2004), there were more than 13,000 Korean overseas missionaries in 2004. Some sources quote 25,000.

Korean development from Christian perspectives: the movement of the Spirit

Christianity is rooted in the Korean context and has taken on distinctively Korean forms. Korean Christian theologians have attempted to understand the history of their nation from the perspective of Christian faith. As yet I have not been able to study Korean strands of Roman Catholic theology so this section is limited to Protestantism. In this perspective, Christianity took hold in a revival movement, which was understood to represent the outpouring of the Spirit of God or the Holy Spirit on the Korean people, in which the power of the Spirit transformed the people, reconciled them, and provided the energy for growth. Therefore, as I have shown at length elsewhere (Kirsteen Kim 2007a: Chapter 6), the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is central to Korean Christian theologies. In Christian theology in general, the Holy Spirit is a way of explaining the presence and activity of God in the world. In Korean theology the emphasis has been on the movement of the Spirit rather than on the Spirit's pervasive presence. The Spirit is represented as a wind, a flood, or a fire – giving a dynamic sense to Christian faith. I have identified several different Korean theologies of the Spirit, which I will briefly recap here as they relate to development.

Popular Evangelicals see the primary result of the outpouring of the Spirit as the growth of the church (Ro 1995: 26; Kim, Joon-Gon 1995: 45-49; Han, Chul-Ha 1995: 74-77; Kim, Sam-Hwan and Kim, Yoon-Su 1995: 97-98) but, as we have seen, this is inseparable in Christian thought from the growth of the nation. Pentecostal theologians like Cho Yonggi would agree with them but they would also stress the direct intervention of the Holy Spirit to solve problems, overcome the evil powers that hold back progress and bring about wealth creation. *Minjung* theologians are less concerned with church membership or wealth but measure Korean development in terms of the flowering of democracy, which they explain as a movement of the Holy Spirit. Using millennialist language, pioneer *minjung* theologian Suh Nam-dong described the present age as the age of the Spirit. And tracing the history of the *minjung* from the nineteenth century, he identified historic moments of the *minjung*'s growing realization of their liberty as the in-breaking of the Spirit (Suh Nam-dong 1983b). Working from an inter-religious perspective, leading scholar of religions Ryu Tong-Shik took a longer view of Korean history and culture. He identified the primordial Korean spirit, *öl*, and tried to show how it manifested itself over 5,000 years in the highest examples of Korean achievement in the religio-cultural life, the arts and the mass movements of the Korean people (Ryu 2000: 20-22). As a Christian, Ryu closely identified the Korean spirit with the Spirit of God and regarded the coming of authentic Christianity as the fulfilment of that spirit. In all these cases, there is a sense of the forward movement of the Spirit, who is dynamic and powerful, and this lends itself to theology of development. There are interesting parallels here with the way the European Enlightenment notion of progress was undergirded by philosophies of spirit.

The strongest criticism of these prevailing theologies of the forward movement of the Holy Spirit comes from Korean feminist theologians. They have a more therapeutic interpretation of the work of the Holy Spirit, which they have related to the traditional concerns of shamanism: the spirits. Leading feminist, Chung Hyun Kyung has described the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, as leading the suffering spirits of the oppressed people and land of Korea in a liberating dance. In her view the chief cause of this oppression is patriarchy, which puts male interests first and leads to human domination of the earth. In Chung's view, this aggressive spirit is what needs to be exorcised from Korea to create a compassionate society.

The liberation of the Spirit is yet to be realised, and its actualisation is ongoing in the struggle to bring fullness of life by overcoming the andro-centric structures of modernity (1991: 45).

New religious movements and the revitalization of society

Secular sources differ in the attention they give to religious factors in Korean development. In his short introduction Shin Hyong Shik (2005) does not refer to Christianity at all; Buzo (2002) and Djun Kil Kim (2005) describe the specific contribution of Christianity and other religions to the independence and resistance movements; whereas Pratt makes the role of religions and ideologies in the shaping of the nation one of main themes of his book (2005: 290). The short history on the South Korean government website mentions positive Christian contributions at a number of crucial points in Korean history, particularly during the Japanese period. However, the web article does not link the contribution to society with core religious activity; in fact it separates them. For example (referring to the syncretistic *Tonghak* movement, which we have not had space to deal with) it states: “Although its preaching had a religious aspect, the main concern was to realize national stability and security” (Gateway to Korea 2007), as if the concern for national stability and security cannot be classed as a religious concern. This paper calls into question such assumptions to show that new religious movements and the revitalization of society may be intimately linked.

We have seen that there is a constructive – although not always intentional – link between Korean Christianity and national development. This is seen at certain identifiable historical points or episodes: the search for a new vision, mission initiatives for human welfare, challenges to traditional society, the independence movement, resistance to Japanese imperialism, service to the suffering, post-War reconstruction, campaigns for democracy and human rights, calling for North-South reconciliation, and in mission and migration. The nature of the Christian contribution is mostly in the realm of aspirations (visions) of a new society and motivation (inspiration, empowerment) to put them into effect; although the social service and moral values promoted by Christianity also contribute to social welfare and stability.

From inside the Christian community, recent Korean history is understood as an example of how the outpouring of God’s Spirit brings revival and empowers people to grow. Christianity did not enter a religious vacuum in Korea, but interacted with the pre-existing traditions, absorbing or rejecting some aspects of them and transforming other aspects. In particular, the form of the faith that was accepted revived – consciously or (more often) unconsciously – certain values of Confucianism, beliefs of Buddhism and practices of shamanism. Not only the new content of Christianity, but the nature of the interaction of Christianity with the other traditions is significant here. The main contribution of Christianity was to stimulate new visions and inject a new energy that enabled Koreans to transform their existing situation and revitalise – or redeem – their society. Christianity was appealing not only because it was new but also because of its association with modernity – and this without the stigma of being the religion of the colonizing power. However, this still leaves open the question of whether another new faith (or revived form of a traditional religion) could make a similar contribution to national revival.

There is not space here to broaden this discussion to other contexts but a brief reference to India could be instructive. Christians have been present as a minority in Indian society at

least since the fourth century – and possibly from the first century, but new forms of Christianity were introduced with European colonialism. Although it remains the case that the Christian minority of 2.3% play a disproportionately large part in the humanitarian and educational aspects of development in India, on the whole Christianity has not led to widespread popular movements. Instead Christian thought and practice, along with modernity in general, has been a catalyst in the rise of new forms of Hinduism. Resurgent Hinduism was combined with nationalism in the struggle for Indian independence. It was argued by the Indian statesman and Christian theologian M.M. Thomas (1970) that Christianity stimulated historical awareness and social involvement on the part of Hindus. Furthermore, Thomas (1990) shows that Christianity sparked a new interpretation of Hindu “theology” of spirit. This recovery of a spiritual vision for the nation (explored more thoroughly in Kirsteen Kim 2003), and increased awareness of the historical implications of Hindu faith must surely be seen as contributing factors to the progress in development of India today.

A further important question for this paper is: What is the situation of the Korean churches now that modernization has been achieved? Are they now in decline? Is religion in general in decline? This raises another difficult issue about how the strength of religion is measured. From the point of view of numbers, the peak of the Korean church growth rate was in the early 1990s. Since then Protestant church membership figures have declined but the number of Roman Catholics is increasing so that the overall numbers defining themselves as Christians in the 2005 census (29.2%) is the highest ever. But patterns of religious practice are changing. One reason is that in the last decade or so modernity has led to changes in lifestyle that are less compatible with Sunday morning church attendance: such as the introduction of the two-day weekend and the inclusion of women in the workforce. However, in terms of religion contributing to development, numbers may not be very relevant. The early contributions of Christianity to Korean development during the independence movement, colonial period, Korean War, and the movement for human rights, were effected by minority groups – although they were able to gather popular support. Only in the case of Christianity’s possible contribution to a work ethic and social stability would large numbers of church-goers seem to be a requirement.

Today the older churches are criticised as “conservative”. However, this criticism of the church is not new – it was made by Lee Yong Do in the 1920s – and represents a general problem of institutionalization. Technologically the larger churches continue to keep pace with developments, as their sophisticated websites readily show (Kirsteen Kim 2007b), but morally they preserve traditional values of respect for elders, and they are slow to recognise the ministry of women. More important for the future may be that the mainstream Protestant churches’ pro-American stance is out of step with the prevailing mood of anti-globalization, and that prominent church leaders have been implicated in corruption. However, what we have seen in this paper is that it is not the mere existence of religious institutions that is significant for development but it is the renewal of religions, or the appearance of new religious movements, that has the potential to bring about social change. In the Bible, the Holy Spirit is described as a wind, which “blows where it chooses” so that “you do not know where it comes from or where it goes” (John 3:8). The past century or so of Korean history has been nothing if not surprising; religious movements are difficult to predict but they may be an important means by which a society receives new hope, guidance and energy.

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