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CHURCH, *MINJUNG* AND STATE: THE REVIVAL OF PROTESTANT CHRISTIANITY IN NORTH KOREA

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ABSTRACT. The issue of church and state takes us to the heart of mission because the Gospel is the good news in every part of human life and society. Throughout the history of the Church in Korea, the issues of church and state, religion and society have been deeply connected to the development of the Korean churches. Indeed, an important factor in Christianity's success in Korea has been its frequent identification with political movements promoting Korean nationalism, independence, democracy, and Korean reunification. Especially in Northern Korea before the division of the peninsula in 1945, and in North Korea after it,[1] the church-state relationship has been one of the crucial issues determining the fate of the churches. It is the purpose of this article to introduce the revival of Protestant Christianity in North Korea in the Communist context, with special reference to issues of church and state.

Keywords: Church and State, Protestant Christianity, North Korea, Gospel

Historical Paradigms of Church and State Relations in North Korea before 1972

The *Minjung*-Centered Oppositional Paradigm

Protestant Christianity was introduced to the Korean peninsula through Manchuria in the late 19 century. It arrived in a northern Korean society that suffered from economic, social and political discrimination, in relation to Southern

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[1] The terms 'Northern Korea' and 'Southern Korea' will be used as shortened names for 'the northern region of the Korean peninsula' and 'the southern region of the Korean peninsula' before the partition in 1945. The terms 'North Korea' and 'South Korea' will be used where appropriate in place of the official names, 'Democratic People's Republic of Korea' and 'Republic of Korea,' for the period after 1945.

Korea, at the end of the Chosun Dynasty. Against the traditional caste system of the south-centered Confucianism, northern Protestantism engaged in the enlightenment of social equality among the northern *minjung*.[2] Northern Protestantism developed the idea of social reformation, which emphasized a republican polity, emphasizing the role of the people against that of the monarch. Translation of the Bible into *Hangul*, the language of *minjung*, gave the *minjung* a new vision of the Kingdom of God, where every human being is equal.

When Korea was colonized by Japan, the exploitation by the Japanese colonial government concentrated on Northern Korea because of its mining industry, and in order to prepare the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. Under these conditions, Protestant Christianity in Northern Korea developed as an important focus of the independence movement, in particular through leading the March First Independence Movement in 1919. Korean nationalism thus became an important characteristic of northern Protestantism. When the Japanese imposed *Shinto* shrine worship[3] to suppress the rise of Christian nationalism, the northern Christians strongly resisted, on the grounds that it was an issue of *status confessionis*. By leading the independence movement, northern Protestantism was recognized as a patriotic religion by the northern *minjung*.

Therefore, the church-state relationship in Northern Korea before independence modeled a paradigm of Christian opposition to the state, aimed against both the south-centered Chsun Dynasty and Japanese colonial rule. In the development of this oppositional paradigm, the notion of being the church of the *minjung* was important in Northern Korean Christian self-identity. Northern Protestantism understood both the Chosun monarchy and the Japanese colonial state as tyrannies that oppressed the *minjung*. Therefore, resistance against the state was justified on the grounds of the liberation of the *minjung*. Protestant Christianity in Northern Korea was highly respected by the *minjung* as a patriotic and, indeed, a *minjung* religion. This oppositional paradigm of church-state relations was a major cause of Protestant Christianity's original success in Northern Korea.

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[2] The word "*minjung*" is a Korean pronunciation of two Chinese characters: "*min*" and "*jung.*" "*Min*" literally means "the people"; "*jung*" means "the mass." Combining these two words, we get the idea of "the mass of people." Yet "*minjung*" is a more inclusive word than the mass. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that there is no single agreed meaning of *minjung* even among the *minjung* theologians themselves, because *minjung* movements broke out spontaneously in diverse fields. Nevertheless, it is also true that when one looks at its historical origins, a rough, "rule of thumb" definition of the term emerges as follows: "the *minjung* are those who are oppressed politically, exploited economically, alienated socially, and kept uneducated in cultural and intellectual matters."

[3] For a general understanding of *Shintoism*, see, W. G. Aston, *Shinto: The Way of the Gods* (London: Longmans, 1905); "The Shinto Shrines: A Problem Confronting the Church", *IRM* 29, (1940): 161-188; *CTC Bulletin* 3, No. 3 (Hong Kong: CCA, 1982).

The Competitive Oppositional Paradigm

During Japanese rule, both Protestant Christianity and the Communist movement, especially Kim Il-sung's anti-Japanese guerillas, were centers of the independence struggle in Northern Korea. With liberation in 1945, a new phase began. Northern Protestantism and Communism now encountered each other as ideological rivals in the task of nation building. The Christian attempt to take political hegemony through organizing the first modern political party in Korean history, the Christian Social Democratic Party, was offset by Kim Il-sung and his followers, who established a Communist regime with the support of the Soviet Army. Kim Il-sung invited the Christians to cooperate in national construction through joining a united front. However, the Five Provinces Joint Presbytery (FPJP), which acted provisionally in place of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Korea in the North, rejected this option, and fell back on the oppositional paradigm of church and state that had prevailed during Japanese rule. The northern Christians argued that Christianity could not co-exist with atheistic Communism. Therefore, the Christians competed for political power through organizing Christian parties and clashed with the Communists over several political issues, and most notably that of the boycott of the general election.[4]

In this process of political competition and conflict with the Communists, the northern Protestant Christians lost the support of the *minjung*. One of the main reasons behind the competition and conflict was the issue of land reform. The northern Christians rejected the Communist land reform in order to maintain their recently upgraded social status, in which they had risen out of the *minjung* to become part of the elite. As a consequence, the northern *minjung* welcomed the Communist policy of social reform, but did not favor of the northern Christians' attempt to gain political power. Because of the Communist suppression and the disapproval of the *minjung*, the political initiatives of the FPJP finally collapsed. With the outbreak of the Korean War (1950-1953), the majority of northern Protestant Christians evacuated to the South to avoid the discrimination and persecution they expected to experience under Communist rule.

The above oppositional paradigm between the church and the Communist state succeeded the traditional paradigm of opposition between church and state before liberation. However, the position of the church altered after liberation, by the fact that it lost the support of the *minjung*-axis. From this we can conclude that in the development of an opposition paradigm against state, the support of the *minjung* is a crucial factor. Without it, Christianity could not succeed in North Korea.

[4] See, Jooseop Keum, "Remnants and Renewal: A History of Protestant Christianity in North Korea, with Special Reference to Issues of Church and State, 1945-1994", PhD Thesis (University of Edinburgh, 1992), 116-128.

The Diplomatic Cooperative Paradigm

With the establishment of the North Korean state in 1945, a cooperative paradigm developed between the leaders of the North Korean Christian Association (NKCA)[5] and the new Communist government emerged. The NKCA recognized that the Communist social reform was necessary in North Korea. Therefore, they supported the Kim Il-sung regime, and participated in the United Front of North Korea. The NKCA and the Communist regime thus developed a cooperative paradigm of church-state relations.

Although this Christian group was a minority within the northern churches, it held ecclesiastical power with and through Communist support. The NKCA leaders introduced a radical renewal program to root northern Protestantism in the Communist soil. However, this process of renewal was largely dependent on the support they received from the Communist state, and was carried out through a top-down method. The theological justification or basis for this approach was very weak, and in any case deficient. When the Korean War broke out, the NKCA leaders continued their cooperative paradigm by supporting the Communist cause against the UN "Police Action,"[6] which carried the support of the WCC and western churches. However, their cooperation resulted in failure because the majority of northern Christians, including many leaders of NKCA, fled to the South during the war.

Thus, just as the FPJP's opposition to the Communist government lost the support of the northern *minjung*, so too the cooperation paradigm of the NKCA failed to find support among the grassroots Christians in North Korea. Although the NKCA supported the land reform, and declared its intention to work for the *minjung*, most of its activities were actually concentrated on securing ecclesiastical power through a bureaucratic approach to the Communist state. While the FPJP aimed at obtaining the secular political power through competing with the Communists, the NKCA aimed at the same thing through diplomatic cooperation with the Communist leaders. Both eventually failed.

The original intention of the NKCA was to renew the church-state relationship through rooting northern Protestantism in the Communist soil.

[5] Concerning the NKCA, see, ibid., 140-149.

[6] The UN's intervention in the Korean War was the first military action in her history. From the beginning of the War, the US had participated. However, President Truman sent American air and naval power to Korea "without congressional approval." The lack of such approval meant that Truman could not call for general mobilization. Therefore, he brought the issue to the UN, to cover the shortage of ground soldiers. Truman called his intervention in Korea a "police action" so that he would not have to get a declaration of war. According to B. Cumings, this "police action" inaugurated the pattern for subsequent conflicts in Vietnam and Persian Gulf, in which wars were declared by executive decision rather than through proper constitutional procedure. B. Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 265.

Although the NKCA aimed to be a church for the *minjung* in theory, in practice, its activity was focused on diplomatic cooperation with the Communists. The NKCA failed to achieve an authentic renewal of the northern churches because it attempted to achieve the renewal simply through bureaucratic changes.

Although by 1949 the NKCA had become the only representative Protestant organization in North Korea, it paid the price for its uncritical cooperation with the government. The NKCA became a sort of religious spokesman for the Kim Il-sung regime. The diplomatic cooperative paradigm of the NKCA resulted in a dependency of the church-axis on the state-axis at the expense of the *minjung*-axis. Its uncritical cooperation with the secular state also brought about an identity crisis in the NKCA in regard to public issues.

The Paradigm of Catacomb

After the Korean War, only one fourth of Protestant Christians and a few NKCA pastors remained in North Korea. However, they were not able to reconstruct their churches because of the social antipathy toward the Christians, the great majority of whom had supported the enemy during the war. In this context, the remnant Christians (who were not part of the NKCA) again collectively boycotted the general election, as an action aimed against the Kim Il-sung regime in 1958. This boycott brought about a severe "Anti-Religious Campaign" by the Communists. The Communist state legalized a policy of social discrimination against the Christians. Anti-Communist underground Christian leaders were executed, and anti-Christian propaganda and slogans were displayed across North Korea. Because of the NKCA's concentration on a bureaucratic approach, it was not able to provide a theological justification for the continued existence of Christianity in North Korean Communist society.

Consequently, the remnant Christians were in difficulty to openly enjoy religious life after 1958. The state-axis absolutely overwhelmed the church-axis, and did not allow any religious freedom. This paradigm of church-state relations was similar to the paradigm of the Catacombs in Rome during the Neronian persecution.

The discrimination and persecution practiced against Christians in North Korea from 1958-1972 points to the failure of the former church-state relationships, developed by the NKCA and the FPJP. Both the competitive oppositional paradigm of the FPJP and the diplomatic cooperative paradigm of the NKCA had ignored the axis of the *minjung*. Therefore, when the Communist state introduced its hostile ideological attack on northern Protestantism, the remnant Christians were neither able to justify their Christian existence in the North Korean Communist society, nor able to receive any support and sympathy from the *minjung*. This taught northern Protestantism an important lesson: a diplomatic rapprochement

with the state was clearly not enough to secure the survival of the church; rather it had to be a church "with" and "for" the *minjung*. Furthermore, it would have to articulate a theological understanding of the significance of Christian churches in a Communist society.

The Revival of Christianity in North Korea since 1972

The Context of Revival

The post-1972 period can be characterized as a politically stabilized, or static era in North Korea. During the 1950s, Kim had faced serious internal political challenges from his Communist rivals. In the 1960s, there was an external crisis, the Sino-Soviet Dispute, which threatened his leadership. In this context, the year of 1972 was a very important turning point in not only the ecclesiastical but also the political history of North Korea. In that year, Kim Il-sung succeeded in rewriting the constitution and was elected president of the republic. [7] In contrast to previous general elections, there was neither a Christian boycott, nor factionary resistance nor foreign influence. The political stability which then followed in North Korea was an important aspect of the context in which Protestant Christianity revived. In this atmosphere, the Communists no longer regarded the Christians as a possible political threat.

In the 1970s, there began to be definite signs of a realignment in the old East-West confrontation. There was a Sino-American rapprochement and the Soviet-Japanese and Sino-Japanese peace treaties were concluded. It was in 1972 that all these dramatic changes became historical realities. The Cold War climate that had created the division of the Korean peninsula was changing. Both North and South Korea were forced to readjust their position to cope with the new developments. A series of reunification talks between two Koreas undertaken and lasted until 1975.[8]

For the northern churches, the North-South dialogue, while it lasted, created a new opportunity for revival. On account of it, North Korean society was exposed to the South and outside. Often, during the dialogue, North Korea was questioned as to whether there was religious freedom. This question was posed in such a way that it focused on the presence of Christians and existence of churches in North Korea. It must have caused some embarrassment to North Korean Communist officials, who claimed the superiority of their political

[7] Kim was the premier of the cabinet before 1972. Concerning the political development in North Korea in this period, see, V. Mikheev, "Politics and Ideology in the Post-Cold War Era", in Han S. Park, ed., *North Korea: Ideology, Politics, Economy* (Simon & Schuster, 1996), 87-104.

[8] See, Republic of Korea, National Unification Board, *South-North Dialogue in Korea*, No. 54 (Seoul, 1992).

system over that of the South. Through the dialogue the North Korean Communists also began to learn about the Christian struggle for democracy and support for the *minjung* in the South. Until then, for the Communists in the North, the image they had of Christianity was only as an "American imperialistic religion." However, the *minjung* theology of the southern churches gave them a different picture. It was an extraordinary experience for them, which forced them to reconsider their understanding of Christianity. Consequently, for the first time, Kim Il-sung made an open address in 1973, in which he recognized that "Christianity has some resources for the liberation of *minjung*."[9]

The New Platform

In this context, in 1972, the central committee of the Korean Christian Federation (KCF, the former NKCA) gathered together to discuss the revival of the churches in North Korea, and adopted what it called a "new platform" for this purpose. Firstly, the KCF the declared that Christianity is a patriotic religion of North Korea. The KCF declared that the Christians fully supported their government, and would cooperate with its policy:

> With patriotism, we will make efforts for the prosperity of the country upholding the constitution and policy of the Republic government. [10]

It is understandable that the new platform thus starts by expressing strong support for the state. The KCF needed to reassure the government because of the history of opposition between the church and the state in North Korea. The revival of the churches was not aimed against the government, and would not threaten its authority. This was not merely political lip service paid to the Communist government. Rather, Protestant Christianity was genuinely trying to root itself among the North Korean people as a patriotic religion, and shed its image of being a tool of "American imperialism."

Secondly, the KCF explained further some of the ways in which the revival would benefit North Korean society:

> We will strive to eliminate all sorts of discrimination based on gender, nation, religion, property and class, and to establish a free, equal society founded on the spirit of Christian Charity. [11]

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[9] KWP, *Chosun Joongang Nyungam*, The Yearbook of North Korea, (Pyongyang: KWP Press, 1974), 261.
[10] *The Platform of the Korean Christian Federation*, 1972, Article 1.
[11] Ibid., Article 2.

The second article indicated that the revived church would not work only for the Christians. Rather, it promised that the Christians would contribute to the wider community.

Then thirdly, the KCF expressed its ecclesiastical concerns:

> The KCF will work to defend the freedom of faith and religious life for the development of Christianity in North Korea, including work for evangelism, and the rights and demands of the Christians.[12]

Although the internal concerns of the KCF, the actual revival and spread of Christianity comes thirdly, this was nevertheless a powerful declaration, demanding religious freedom in North Korea. It also shows great confidence in the solid faith of the remnant Christians.

As a matter of fact, the revised constitution ensured the freedom of religion, in its article 54. However, at the same time, it also guaranteed what it called "the freedom of anti-religious propaganda." [13] Article three of the platform of the KCF was a strong request to the government to realize the spirit of the constitution, and not to apply it only one-sidedly. The KCF tried to confirm that the freedom of faith in the new constitution specially included the freedom of evangelism. This can even be interpreted as an indirect criticism of the "freedom of anti-religious propaganda," which was a left-over from the Anti-Religious Campaign, which had been used to restrict and suppress evangelism. The KCF understood the freedom to evangelize as an essential aspect of the freedom of religion.

The House Churches

In addition to the new platform, in the same year (1972) the revived central committee of the KCF decided to reopen the seminary, register individual Christians and reconstruct the ecclesiastical order of the KCF. This was to be an institutional revival of the northern Protestantism. However, behind it, there was also the revival of the house churches, which is most significant from the perspective of *minjung* because the grassroots Christians were the people who originally developed the house church tradition in North Korea. They preserved their faith communities underground, in spite of persecution, from 1958-1972. Even after 1972, they have revived and strengthened their communities by their own initiative. This characteristic allows us to define the house churches as the *minjung* Christian community in North Korea.

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[12] Ibid., Article 3.

[13] *The Socialist Constitution*, Article 54.

In 1972, when the Anti-Religious Campaign finally disappeared, the KCF did not have exact statistics of how many Christians remained in North Korea. Therefore, surveying the remnant Christians, and registering them with the KCF, was an important task for the KCF to undertake, as they set about reconstructing ecclesiastical order.

Table) Distribution of Membership of the KCF, 1984-2002[14]

Year	1984	1988	1996	2000	2002
Membership	5,000	10,000	12,000	12,343	13,043

The statistics given above for 1984, 1988, and 1996 are approximate number for the membership of the KCF. Only more recently, did the KCF announce the exact numbers of its membership. Although the figures were approximate, it seems that the membership was doubled in the four years from 1984-1988, and increased by about 300 members annually from 1988-1996.

By 1984, the KCF had finished surveying the situation of house churches across North Korea. There were about 500 house churches, and each church had about ten members. The average age of the Christians was fifty-five years old, and 70% of them were women.[15] It is certain that the majority of the churches had joined the KCF by 1984. In other words, by 1984, the house churches and the KCF seem to have reached a situation of mutual trust. Recently, in 2002, the KCF has launched an evangelism campaign, aiming to increase membership to 14,000 by 2004.[16] It is certain that one of the characteristics of Protestant Christianity in North Korea is its strong interest in evangelism, in accordance with the evangelistic tradition of Korean Christianity.

The house church is a unique ecclesiological form of Protestant Christianity in North Korea. It may be described as a small congregational community under lay leadership. At first, the remnant Christians started to organize house groups in the disaster of the Korean War. The Christians met in the houses of lay leaders to carry on their religious life because their pastors

[14] The statistics of 1984 are from J. Moyer et al., "Visit of a Delegation to the D.P.R.K. from May 24 to June 10, 1984", *Lutheran World Federation*, 4; 1988 from T. M. Brown, "Trip Report: East Asia, October 27-November 28, 1988", *Asia/Pacific Desk, Anglican Church of Canada*, 20th February 1989, 7; 1996 from K. Park, "North Korea-Background of the Churches" *WCC Memorandum*, 25th June 1996, 1; 2000 from Y. Kang, "Keynote Speech", *The Seventh Korean Christian Conference for Peaceful Reunification of Fatherland*, 13th December 2000, *Fukuoka, Manuscript*, 4; 2002 from Young-sup Kang, "Keynote Speech", *The Eighth Korean Christian Conference for Peaceful Reunification of Fatherland*, 23rd June 2002, Tozanso, Unpublished Paper, 3.

[15] NCCCUSA, *op. cit.*, 9.

[16] Young-sup Kang, *op. cit*.

had evacuated to the South. During the Anti-Religious Campaign period, the state officially abolished the house communities, but many continued to exist underground. In this context, the church had to be organized as a small and lay-centered secret faith community for survival. This small and secret lay-centered congregational model of house church, under persecution, is similar to the ecclesiastical form of the First Church, during the early centuries.

However, in 1988, there was a new phenomenon in the house church tradition in North Korea. From 1972 onwards, the underground house groups had been coming out into the open, and registering with the KCF. With the reopening of the seminary, the house groups began to be developed as house churches, where ordained ministers would proclaim the Word of God and celebrate the sacraments. Remarkably, in 1988, the Bongsu Church was built in Pyongyang, and has now 450 members. The Chilgol Church was built in 1991 in memory of deacon Kang Ban-suk, the mother of Kim Il-sung, and has now 150 members. The two churches absorbed more than half of the 50 house churches in Pyongyang. From 1988, a new congregational model began to emerge in North Korea, and was evident in the Bongsu Church and the Chilgol Church. As in the South Korean Church, senior and associate pastors were appointed, elders were elected, choirs were organized, and the church buildings were beautifully decorated by the Christians of the two churches who belonged to the urban elite.

The KCF, which took the initiative in constructing these two churches, said them as a symbol of the revival of Protestant Christianity in North Korea. Indeed, it was an historic event in the history of the North Korean church. The Christians were proud of what they had finally achieved. However, when the KCF encouraged by these successes, tried to build another church in Hamhung, the house churches there rejected it. Although the establishment of two organized churches in the capital city was highly impressive for the grassroots Christians in Hamhung, they preferred the atmosphere and fellowship of their house churches. As a matter of fact, this rejection was predicted when some former house church Christians criticized the atmosphere of the Bongsu Church. E. Weingartner notes that during his days in the Bongsu Church, about twenty former Nakrang House Church members returned to their house church:[17]

> They soon found that it felt uncomfortable in such a large setting. There were many people in the congregation whom they did not know. It seemed impersonal. After the service people simply returned to their homes. They did not have any chance to stay and mingle. They missed the quiet of their meetings, the comfort of communing with those whom they trusted. They missed having snacks and drinks and visiting with each other after worship. Eventually, they left Bongsu and reassembled their small house church.[18]

[17] Interview with Erich Weingartner, 12th April 2001, North Bay, Canada.
[18] E. Weingartner, "God Leaves No One Without Hope", Unpublished Paper, 25th March 2001, 4-5.

This indicates the reason why the house churches do not hurry to construct church buildings and big congregations. Indeed, the 511 house churches[19] which overcame "the fire-kiln of suffering" have mostly developed as a distinct ecclesiological structure in North Korea, which preserves close fellowship between believers.

The Reopening of Pyongyang Theological Seminary

The revival of Protestant Christianity in North Korea began with the restarting of theological education. From the Korean War until 1972, there had been no theological education in North Korea. Therefore, for the KCF, the training of new pastors was the most urgent priority for the revival. Just as the Anti-Religious Campaign was an external challenge for the Christians, so too the lack of pastors was a serious internal crisis for the KCF. Although there were lay leaders, preaching and sacraments were rare and very restricted in house churches. Communion was usually held only twice a year, at Easter and Christmas, conducted by circulating pastors. On these occasions several local congregations would come together.[20] However, even this was limited to the house churches in larger cities. In this context, the priority of the reopened the Pyongyang Theological Seminary[21] was to train pastors. The seminary offers a three-years course of Bachelor of Divinity. Most students have degrees in other subjects before entering their theological training.[22] In every three-year, from ten to fifteen new students are enrolled, a new group of students entering when the previous group graduates.[23]

The reopening of the seminary fundamentally changed the life of the house churches in North Korea. With the appointment of ordained pastors, the house churches became more stable and active. When the seminary reopened, only ten pastors were left, but as a result of restarting theological education, house churches had more opportunity of having ordained pastors to minister to them. By 1989, thirty-seven graduates from the seminary had been ordained, and served in house churches.[24] By 1995, seventy students had graduated from

[19] The statistics are taken from Young-sup Kang, *op. cit.*, 3.

[20] NCCUSA, "Confidential Report of the NCCCUSA Official Delegation Visit to North Korea", 19th June-2nd July 1987, 8.

[21] The Pyongyang Theological Seminary was opened in 1901 by Samuel Moffet. It was abolished by the Japanese in 1938 because the professors and students opposed *Shinto* shrine worship. With liberation, it reopened in 1945. However, with the outbreak of the Korean War, it was closed again.

[22] For example, according to Bong-il Paik, all but two of his ten classmates, who graduated in 1995, had university degrees before getting into theological education. Interview with Bong-il Paik, 5th April 2001, Pyongyang.

[23] Kyung-seo Park, "North Korea-Background of the Churches," WCC Memorandum, 25th June 1996.

[24] Ibid.

the seminary. According to the report from the KCF to the WCC, fifty-two had been ordained and the others were having pastoral training in their placement in 1997.[25] In this period, the number of Protestant Christians in North Korea doubled. According to Bong-il Paik, the graduates prefer to work in house churches rather than KCF offices because of the "atmosphere of fellowship in house churches, and their evangelistic zeal."[26]

It seems that the training is similar to what used to be given in the old seminary in missionary times as well, sometimes without much change. For example, according to Insik Kim, Rev. Deuk-ryong Kim, who taught Homiletics, used his notes, which he had taken in the class of Homiletics given by Allen Clark by the end of the 1930s.[27] When E. Weingartner asked about the textbooks, Ki-jun Koh, answered, "We use old books that have survived from old seminaries."

The KCF has often expressed strong political opinions against "US imperialism" and the "military dictatorship of South Korea." In this respect, it sounds as if the theology of the seminary could be radical and political. However, although the KCF has an interest in political issues, that does not mean that the theology of the seminary is radical. On the contrary, most specialists on Christianity in North Korea agree that the theological education of the seminary is quite conservative.[28] According to Dong-kun Hong, who was a part-time lecturer at the seminary, "theological education of the Pyongyang Theological Seminary preserves the conservative Korean Presbyterian tradition, which was influenced by the American missionaries."[29]

Indeed, the theological development of the seminary had been held back, ever since its abolition in 1938. After eight years of non-existence (1938-1945), the seminary reopened for five years (1945-1950), but it closed its doors again for another twenty-two years (1950-1972). In this circumstance, it was difficult for the seminary to develop its own theology. Furthermore, the staff members of the reopened seminary were drawn from among ten surviving pastors, who were educated before 1950. What they taught was based on their own conservative theology, in which they had been trained by the American missionaries. The theological education in North Korea is still fairly basic. It is

[25] "From the Central Committee of KCF to the Asia Desk of WCC", June 1997.

[26] Interview with Bong-il Paik, 5th April 2001, Pyongyang.

[27] Interview with Rev. Dr. Insik Kim, 13th December 2000, Fukuoka, Japan.

[28] The author asked same question on the theological characteristics of the seminary to eight specialists, Prof. Kyung-seo Park, Rev. Young-il Kang, Rev. Dr. Insik Kim, Prof. Syngman Rhee, Rev. Dwain Epps, Rev. Dr. Seong-won Park, Mr. Eric Weingartner and Rev. Dr. Dong-kun Hong. All interviewees point out the conservative nature of its theology.

[29] Interview with Rev. Dr. Dong-kun Hong, 13th April 2001, Los Angeles. Hong visited North Korea for six months every year from 1989-2001 from USA to lecture at the Kim Il Sung University and Pyongyang Theological Seminary. He passed away on 11th November 2001 in Pyongyang during his visit for the lectureship.

not yet equipped to train people as independent researchers. Rather, its main target is ministerial formation, the training of pastors. For the development of North Korean theology, the KCF must consider how to upgrade the quality of its seminary. However, since the reopening, the Pyongyang Theological Seminary has been the backbone of the revival of Protestant Christianity, by training and providing pastors.

Publication of Bible and Hymnbook

When the KCF was studying the situation of house churches, it discovered another urgent demand of the remnant Christians. The Christians were eager to have a new Bible and hymnbook. The Bible and hymnbook had not been printed since the liberation in North Korea. Therefore, the language used was not appropriate in modern Korean. Moreover, even this old version of Bible was not sufficient for the Christians because only a few copies had survived during the Anti-Religious Campaign. Suk-jung Song states his experience in 1982 as follows:

> During the worship, we carefully watched the Bible and hymnbook of the members. The covers of most of them were worn out…Some had hand-copied Bibles. However, there were colorful underlinings. They might read several times whole pages of Bible. After the worship, I heard that some hid their Bible in a vat (for *Kimchi*), and used to read it only in the night. [30]

In response to this, the KCF prepared the publication of a new Korean Bible and hymnbook, from the mid-1970s on. The New Testament was published in 1983 and the Old Testament in 1984. In 1984, the complete Bible was brought out and the KCF printed 10,000 copies of it. They also printed 10,000 copies of the new hymnbooks. However, by 1987, none of them were left. The number of Protestant Christians had already reached 10,000. The KCF therefore reprinted the Bible and the hymnbook in 1990.[31]

At first, the KCF had intended to bring out an entirely new translation, but the leaders soon realized that this would be over ambitious. Therefore, the written Korean of the Bible was modernized, and partly revised through a comparative reading with Hebrew and English Bibles. However, Ki-jun Koh frankly said that many preferred the United Korean Bible, which was jointly translated and published by the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches in South Korea, in 1977.[32] In the preface to the hymnbook, the KCF said the "hymns

[30] Suk-jung Song, "What I Saw and What I Heard", in *Bundaneul Tuieonumeo*, edited by Eun-sik Yang, Across the Division (Seoul: Jungwonmunhwa, 1988), 222.

[31] Jung-hyun Paik, *Bukhanedo Kyohoega Itnayo?* Are There Christian Churches in North Korea? (Seoul: Kookminilbosa, 1998), 121.

[32] Ibid., 120.

are taken from the *New Hymnbook*, Department of Education, PCK, 1939, with modernized words."[33] The hymnbooks in 1990 were printed at the Amity Printing Company in Nanjing, with the support of the United Bible Society.[34]

In addition to the reopening of the seminary, the publication of the new Bible and hymnbook were events of symbolic importance for the revival. The Christians donated 2% of their monthly income to the KCF for the publication, during this period.[35] Now, the Christians, who had hidden the Bible in *Kimchi* pots, were free to read the Bible and sing hymns openly. Every Christians was at last able to have a copy of the Bible and hymnbook for themselves. On every Sunday, they rejoiced and worshiped in house churches with their new Bible and hymnbook.

International Ecumenical Relationships

As J. Hormadka predicted when the WCC Toronto Statement, which supported the UN Police Action in Korea, was issued, the ecumenical relationship between the North Korean church and the WCC had been closed since the Korean War.[36] The international ecumenical relationships of the KCF were frustrated by the policies of the Cold War. Especially during the Anti-Religious Campaign period, the North Korean church was completely isolated from the world Christian community. However, the revival of Protestant Christianity in North Korea brought the revival of its international ecumenical fellowship as well.

During the 1970s, the KCF still did not have full confidence in the WCC because of the WCC's earlier support for the police action during the Korean War. Instead, the KCF preferred to participate actively in an organization called the Christian Peace Conference (CPC). However, the CPC played a role of reconciliation between the KCF and the WCC. The CPC leaders informed the KCF of the changes that had taken place in the WCC after the rise of the notion of the social gospel at the 1968 Uppsala Assembly, and encouraged the KCF to take more interest in the WCC.

In 1981, the KCF then sent a letter to the WCC, and asked for information on membership of the WCC.[37] Heung-soo Kim claims that this application was rejected by the central committee of the WCC because the WCC had no confidence in the existence of Christians in North Korea, and also had some doubts about

[33] *Chasongga*, Hymnbook (Pyongyang: KCF, 1984), 2.
[34] Jung-hyun Paik, *Bukhanedo Kyohoega Itnayo?*, 123-124.
[35] NCCCUSA, "Confidential Report of the NCCCUSA Official Delegation Visit to North and South Korea, 19 June - 2July 1987," 21.
[36] "From Hromàdka to Visser't Hooft", 30th November 1950.
[37] "From Sung-ryul Kim to WCC", January 1981.

the political purpose of the application.[38] However, WCC did not reject the KCF, but explored new possibilities of establishing a relationship. Two executive secretaries of the International Affairs (CCIA), E. Weingartner and V. Hsu, secretly visited the KCF, and suggested a direct meeting between the northern and southern Christians for reconciliation. They came back with news of active Christian life in house churches in North Korea. Furthermore, the KCF accepted the WCC's invitation to meet the church leaders from South Korea at the CCIA conference on Peace and Justice in North-East Asia, 29th October-3rd November, Tozanso, Japan, which was especially organized to discuss the issue of Korean reunification.[39]

The Tozanso conference made a historic resolution on Korea, the so-called Tozanso Process, which it recommended to the global ecumenical family:

> 8.2.1. The WCC be asked to explore, in collaboration with CCA, the possibility of developing relationships with churches, Christians and others in North Korea, through visits and forms of contact.
> 8.2.2. The WCC, in collaboration with CCA, should seek to facilitate opportunities where it would be possible for Christians from both North and South Korea to meet in dialogue.
> 8.2.3. The churches be encouraged to share with the WCC and the CCA plans for contacts with and results of visit to North Korea.[40]

An official resolution had now been established allowing and encouraging the WCC to develop its relationship with the KCF. In 1985, the first official visit from the WCC to North Korea was carried on from 10th-19th November.[41] Since the Tozanso conference, North Korean church has participated in the global ecumenical movement. On the other hand, the international ecumenical fellowship also contributed to the revival of the KCF.

The Christian-*Juchean* Dialogue

Juche is the word that sums up the political thought of Kim Il-sung. As a system of values, *Juche* is commonly translated as "self-reliance." This notion has become the blueprint of North Korean society and the central guidance for

[38] Heung-soo Kim, *A History of the Churches in North Korea After Liberation*, 6.
[39] Concerning the Tozanso meeting, see, CCIA ed, *Peace and Justice in North East Asia: Prospects for Peaceful Resolution of Conflict* (Geneva: WCC-CCIA, 1985); E. Weingartner, "The Tozanso Process: An Ecumenical contribution to the Struggle for Peace and Justice in North-East Asia", Peace And Reunification of Korea (Geneva: WCC-CCIA, 1990), 12-28.
[40] "Findings and Recommendations", CCIA/WCC Consultation on Peace and Justice in North East Asia, 29th October-2nd November 1984, Tozanso, Japan.
[41] E. Weingrtner, "The Tozanso Process", 17.

policies. It has evolved through various phases ranging from a mere political slogan to a comprehensive *Weltanschauung*. In his own explanation of the idea, Kim Il-sung said that the basis of *Juche* is "man is master of nature and society, and the main factor that decides all matters.'[42] The master of socialist construction is the masses, and the power to effect revolution and construction rests with the people. The master of one's fate is oneself, and power to control one's fate rests with oneself.[43] As such, man should not be subjected to enslavement of any kind, whether it is caused by economic poverty, political subjugation, or military domination on the part of other human beings. Therefore, *Juche*'s self-reliance has been interpreted as meaning a human-centered world-view.

While being an ideology that proclaimed itself to be essentially socialist and Marxist, *Juche* in fact stands in defiance of material determinism of history. The Marxist premise of economic or material structure as the substructure upon which all superstructures are founded is unequivocally rejected. Instead, in the *Juche* ideology, it is the spiritual consciousness that determines the course of history and it alone underlies all other structures.[44] In fact, *Juche*'s fundamental deviation from Marxism begins at this point.[45]

The *Juche* Idea also suggests the practical guiding principles to be taken in regard to revolution and construction: *Juche* (self-relience) in ideology, *Chaju* (self-independence) in politics, *Charip* (self-sustenance) in economy, and *Chawi* (self-defense) in military matters.[46] These four slogans which North Korea used for developing an indigenous Communism was a remarkable attempt at self-reliance within the Communist bloc. In Marx's *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, "workers have no nation of their own." However, in the *Juche* Idea, the concept of nationalism was given a positive interpretation, and integrated into the process of the socialist revolution then presumed to be taking place in the third world countries. The *Juche* idea critically states that imperialism is possible even within the Communist bloc, and can be practiced by the Communist super powers. In the *Juche* idea, national independence is not a sub-task of the Communist revolution, but it has an equal importance with the Communist revolution, especially in the Third World context. This is a crucial difference compared to orthodox Marxism.[47]

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[42] *Kim Il-sung Works*, vol. 27 (Pyongyang: Foreign languages Publishing House), 491.

[43] Concerning the *Juche* Idea, see, Kim Il-sung, *Juche sasang e daehayeo*, On the Idea of Juche (Pyongyang: KWP Press, 1977); Kim Il-sung, *Uri hyukmyung eseoeui Juche e daehayeo*, On the *Juche* in Our Revolution (Pyongyang: KWP Press, 1970); Academy of Social Sciences ed, *Hyukmyung kwa kunsule kwanhan Kim Il Sung Donjieui Sasang kwa keu widaehan seanghwallyuk*, The Thought of Comrade Kim Il-sung on Revolution and Construction and Its Great Strength (Pyongyang: Sahoe Kwahakwon Chulpansa, 1969); Kim Jong-il, *On the Juche Idea* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1982).

[44] Kim Jong-il, *op. cit.*, 9-10.

[45] See, J. Keum, *op. cit.*, 293-291.

[46] See, *Exposition of the Juche Idea*, 99-124.

[47] In the European context, nationalism has been considered as a negative ideology. However, in

The nationalistic characteristic of the *Juche* Idea rooted well in the soil of North Korea, because of the northerners' historical experience of being subjected to discrimination.

Rev. Ki-jun Koh was the first to suggest a Christian-*Juchean* dialogue, in his paper "Socialism and Christianity in North Korea."[48] As soon as he was elected as the general secretary of KCF in 1981, he proposed the dialogue as a new policy of the KCF. Koh examined why and how the Christians and the socialists were now able to live together without a conflict between the two belief-systems, a situation that was very different from previous experience. He believed that the answer of this question would clarify the theological identity of revived Christianity in North Korea. He also asked: "Is it possible for the Christians and the *Jucheans* to cooperate together in the construction of socialist country, and for the reunification of fatherland?" and on the presumption that the answer to this question would be affirmative, "Where is the rationale for this cooperation?"[49] These were the theological questions that revived North Korean Christianity needed to answer, yet they were remarkable. While the churches had reopened since 1972, nobody had tried to interpret their experiences before Koh. Responding to the Koh's proposal, the Institute for the *Juche* Idea in Pyongyang and some Korean theologians living abroad decided to open a dialogue with the KCF. A consultation process of the Christian-*Juchean* dialogue was launched and consultations were held annually from 1981-1991 and a number of scholars participated.

Throughout the dialogue, the issue of *juche* and *minjung* was one of the most important agenda for discussion. Although one of these systems is a theology, which developed within the climate of the suffering *minjung* during the military dictatorships in South Korea in the 1970s, while the other is a political ideology, which developed within the circumstance of the reconstruction of North Korea after the Korean War and emphasized political independence against China and the Soviet Union during the 1950s, both begin their theological and philosophical argument with the issue of historical subjectivity. The first principle of the *Juche* idea is that "man is the subject of history."[50] On the other hand, the first theological theme of *minjung* theology is "the *minjug* as subject of history."[51]

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the Asian context, where most countries experienced colonialism, nationalism has been positively interpreted in relation to national liberation movements.

48 Later, this paper was published in South Korea. Dong-kun Hong ed., *Vienna eso Frankfurt kkaji: Buk kwa Haewoi Dongpo, Kidokja kaneui Tongil Daehwa 10 Nyun Hoego*, From Vienna to Frankfurt: A Memory of Ten Years of Reunification Talks between the North Korean Christians and the Korean Christian Diaspora, (Seoul: Hyungsangsa, 1994), 135-143.

49 Ibid., 140.

50 *Kim Il-sung Works*, vol 27 (Pyongyang: Foreign languages Publishing House), 491.

51 Yong-bock Kim, *Messiah and Minjung: Christ's Solidarity with the People for New Life*, 5.

This is not a coincidental conjunction but, in both instances, the result of indigenization of foreign ideas. The *Juche* idea should be seen as indigenous Korean Communism, and *minjung* theology as indigenous Korean liberation theology. Both are strongly rooted in traditional Korean philosophies. One of the characteristics of traditional religion and philosophy in Korea is humanism. The two influential modern Korean beliefs, the *Juche* idea and *minjung* theology, do not stand apart from this strong, humanistic tradition of the Korean ethos. Both have links with the traditional humanism of Korean thought through declaring that "man," or the "*minjung*" are the subject of history. This is a highly important reference point for the dialogue between the *Juche* idea and *minjung* theology, because both have a similarity in their methodology of indigenization as well in their as human-centered approach to history. Both beliefs link up with the traditional Korean concern for the people who suffer. This "common ground" is a remarkable basis for the Christian-*Juchean* dialogue and for working together for the suffering *minjung.*

As a result of the ten years consultation process, the most dramatic change in the official *Juchean* understanding of Christianity was in the amendment of the article on religion in the constitution. Article 54 of *The Socialist Constitution* in 1972 had said: "Citizens have freedom of religious belief and freedom of anti-religious propaganda." However, the reference to the "freedom of anti-religious propaganda" was completely deleted in the *Kim Il Sung Constitution* in 1992. Compared the still existing Article 46 of the Chinese Constitution, which talks about "the citizen's right to enjoy freedom not to believe in religion,"[52] the complete deletion of the "freedom of anti-religious propaganda" in North Korea was a remarkable change of religious policy. It is certain that the Christian-*Juchean* dialogue had influenced the above changes.

The *Minjung*-Centered Cooperative Paradigm

While the former cooperation paradigm practiced by the NKCA and the KWP had merely been a diplomatic one, the new revived cooperative paradigm was based on mutual understanding through theological and ethical dialogue. The point of convergence between the two different systems of thought was the similarity of their understanding of the *minjung* as the subject of history. This similarity has served as a theological justification of the KCF's cooperation with the Communist state. Consequently, the article of "anti-religious propaganda," which had been the legal foundation of the Communists' discrimination towards

[52] Concerning criticisms on this article, see, T. Lambert, *The Resurrection of the Chinese Church* (Illinois: SHAW, 1991), 37; with W. Rees-Mogg, "Religious Policy of China," Interview with Jian Zemin, *The Times*, 18th October 1999.

the Christians, was deleted from the constitution. The dialogue brought about a positive change in the North Korean understanding of Christianity. In this meaningful renewal, the *minjung*-centered cooperative approach emerged as a new paradigm of church-state relations in North Korea. Northern Protestantism introduced the *minjung* as the dynamic element in a revived understanding of church-state relations.

Conclusion: The *Minjung*-Centered Approach in Church-State Relations

Through the above research, we can conclude that northern Protestantism has developed diverse historical paradigms of church-state relations, and that each paradigm decisively influenced the fate of the northern Protestant churches. The issue has not been merely a legal and institutional debate on specific issues like religious education, religious tax, state church or free church etc. Rather, has been a response to the whole modern history of North Korea, with its major themes of colonization, national construction, partition, war etc.

Protestant Christianity in North Korea has experimented with a wide range of historical paradigms of church-state relations, from opposition to cooperation, and each paradigm influenced Protestant Christianity's success or failure in North Korea in different ways. In this experience of success and failure, the notion of a *minjung*-centered approach was a key issue, which decided the appropriateness of each paradigm. Through our examination of the various historical paradigms, we have identified that the concept of the *minjung* has to be included in the bilateral relationship between church and state for establishing a proper relationship. In the North Korean context, the notion of the *minjung* has to be the criterion for determining whether the northern church should oppose the state or cooperate with it. If the state developed policies in favor of the *minjung*, and the *minjung* support their government, the church can cooperate with the state. However, if a government is tyrannical and oppresses the *minjung*, the church cannot allow the legitimacy of the government, and must oppose the state. Therefore, the triangular approach of church, *minjung* and state is a highly relevant analytical methodology for the northern churches in critically assessing their church-state relations.

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